

**AUSTIN SQUARE  
BAPTIST CHURCH**

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# **Membership Class**

**Guide Booklet**

*Reformed and Baptist*

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## Introduction

The four-week Membership class is designed to give a broad overview of the nature, benefits, and obligations of membership at Austin Square, as well as to answer any questions prospective new members might have. Article III, Section 1 of the Bylaws outlines the qualifications and procedure for joining with this assembly:

“Candidates for baptism and membership shall meet with the Elders to satisfactorily relate their Christian experience. The Elders shall present fit candidates before the assembly to give public declaration of faith. Candidates desiring membership shall subscribe to the Confession and have been baptized as a believer. Baptism by immersion is the only method we find endorsed by Scripture — signifying our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:4) — and is the sole form administered at Austin Square (except in cases where health or time prohibit, to be determined by the Elders). The assembly shall vote on membership candidates in order to wed the assembly together.”

By the completion of these four sessions, prospective members should be able to provide satisfactory answers to the following standard questions asked by the Elders:

1. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?
2. Do you now have evidence and assurance of the Holy Spirit within you as a guarantee of salvation?
3. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and do you promise, in reliance on the grace of God, to serve him with all that is in you, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?
4. Have you been baptized — by immersion — following your confession of having come to saving faith?
5. Can you in good conscience subscribe to the Austin Square Confession and “Articles of Faith”, particularly regarding those dealing with 1) the authority of and fullness of Scripture, 2) the need for and sufficiency of Christ’s atonement for the elect, and 3) the recognition that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper are for believers only?
6. Do you agree to submit in the Lord to the government of this church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life, to heed its discipline?
7. Will you subscribe to the church Covenant and agree to faithfully abide by it as the Spirit enables you?

## 4 Week Study

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# 1. Salvation and Declaration

Our salvation begins and is accomplished according to the eternal decrees of God, but is evidenced first by our experiencing conviction of sin — resulting in repentance — then conversion as we embrace God’s promises by faith, and finally in the way we naturally exhibit it in our confession of belief to the world.

*Now when they heard this they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” — Acts 2:37-38*

## A. How Are We Reconciled to God?

On account of the sinfulness and rebellion of mankind, inherited from the first sinner, our father Adam, God’s wrath hangs over us. However, Jesus Christ has provided the means for our reconciliation to and a restored relationship with God, and secured it both by the payment of his own blood and the deposit of the Holy Spirit.

### ■ The Need for Salvation

- **Rom. 3:10-11:** ...as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;
- **Rom. 5:8-10:** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
- **Col. 1:21-23:** And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

### ■ The Role of God's Word in Salvation

- **Isa. 55:11:** So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.
- **Heb. 4:12:** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- **Rom. 10:17:** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

## ■ The Invisible Components in Salvation

### *Election: Designated for Adoption*

- **Eph. 1:3-4:** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who... chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him...

### *Justification: Pardon (leading to Forgiveness)*

- **Rom. 3:24-26:** ...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- **Rom. 5:1-2:** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (COMPARE WITH *Titus 3:5-7.*)

### *Regeneration: Brought to New Life through the Holy Spirit*

- **Titus 3:4-7:** But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

### *Preservation: Eternal Security and Personal Assurance*

- **Eph. 1:13-14:** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.
- **Rom. 8:29-30:** For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

## ■ The Visible Components: Conviction, Repentance, Faith

- **Rom. 10:8-10:** But what does it say? "The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
- **John 16:7-8:** "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment..."

### ■ Trusting in Christ Alone Rather than in Our Good Works

No matter how good we try to be, or how greatly we contribute to the cause of the Kingdom, our works can never measure up to God's perfection. Therefore, we trust in Christ's righteousness and sacrifice alone to speak for us before the throne of God. And because the price of our salvation has already been purchased by the blood and obedience of Christ, even our good works after coming to faith earn us nothing toward procuring or securing our salvation. But we do devote our lives to the Lord out of thankfulness for all he has accomplished and out of love for him, through the Spirit.

- **Gal 2:16:** ...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
- **Eph. 2:8-10:** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- **Rom. 3:28:** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

## B. What Should Our Response to God Be?

As recipients of such amazing grace, we do not want to take such a great sacrifice on God's part so lightly nor neglect so great a salvation (*Heb. 2:3*). Out of gratitude and devotion, we also desire to tell the world of God's great gift.

### ■ The Proper Response to Salvation: Humility, Trust, and Obedience

- **James 1:21:** Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- **Phil. 2:12-13:** So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
- **2 Thes. 2:13:** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

### ■ Transformation and Trusting Jesus as Lord of our Lives

- **2 Cor. 5:17:** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
- **1 Pet. 1:14-15:** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;
- **Mark 16:15:** And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

## C. How Can We Demonstrate this Change?

When the elders submit the name of a candidate before the assembly for membership, they are asked to relate a personal testimony of how they came to the faith. It is necessary we demonstrate to the world we are new creatures in Christ through declaration.

### ■ Declaring the Faith

- **2 Tim. 1:7-8:** For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord....
- **Matt. 10:32-33:** "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

### ■ Corporate Demonstrations of Faith: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

See Appendix A for more detail about these holy ordinances.

- **Acts 2:38:** Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- **Eph. 4:4-6:** There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
- **1 Pet. 3:21:** Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
- **1 Cor. 11:23-26:** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

## Questions

1. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?
2. Do you now have evidence and assurance of the Holy Spirit within you as a guarantee of salvation?
4. Have you been baptized — by immersion — following your confession of having come to saving faith?

# 2. Daily Devotions and Holy Living

Trusting he has already provided for our salvation, we need to devote ourselves to learn more about God by making use of the means of grace and to commit our lives more fully to him in changing our old sinful habits and desires.

## A. Personal Study of the Word of God

### ■ The Need for Regular Bible Reading

Our Church Covenant directs us to maintain family and secret devotions. Just as some begin their day with an exercise regimen or read the morning paper, time must be set aside to become thoroughly acquainted with the Word of God. Scripture contains the words of life which through recollection and memorization are necessary to effectively combat the temptations of the world. While some read a chapter or more, and others consult their *Daily Bread's*, the barest minimum should be a paragraph or "sense unit" to meditate on.

- **2 Tim. 3:14-17:** You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- **Rom. 15:4:** For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

### ■ Bible Translations

⊕ King James Version	(KJV)	<i>Beloved standard with an eloquent style, but contains uninformed translations, antiquated language. Good for bible memorization and reading.</i>	
✓ New King James Version	(NKJ)	<i>Updated version with familiar wording, but with corrected translations; still holds to the MT.</i>	
▶ [New] Revised Standard	(N/RSV)	<i>Clear reading, but marred by liberal translators.</i>	
✓ New American Standard	(NASB)	<i>Most accurate translation, but contains awkward sentences and phrases; the NASB Update does away with archaic pronouns (thou, etc.).</i>	
✓ New International Version	(NIV)	<i>Strong, readable translation, but words not as accurately translated as the NASB.</i>	
⊕ Living/Good News Translation		<i>Modern language, loose translation for personal enrichment only, never to be used as a study bible.</i>	
▶ New Living Translation	(NLT)	<i>Closer translation in modern language.</i>	
✓ English Standard Version	(ESV)	<i>Fine translation, readable; not as close as NASB.</i>	
✗ TheMessage	(MSG)	<i>Reworded, non-literal, recent translation.</i>	
✓ Recommended	▶ Weak but Valid	⊕ Enrichment only	✗ Invalid

## ■ Personal and Family Devotions

- **Ps. 119:15-16:** I will meditate on your precepts and regard your ways. I shall delight in your statutes; I shall not forget your word.
- **Josh. 1:8:** This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.
- **Deut. 11:18-19:** You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.
- **Ps. 78:4-5:** We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children...

## B. Prayer Devotions

### ■ All Things Should Be Done Through Prayer

- **1 Tim. 4:4-5:** For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.
- **1 Thes. 5:16-18:** Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

### ■ What Should We Pray For?

- **1 Jn. 1:9:** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- **James 1:5:** But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
- **Eph. 6:18-19:** With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel....

### ■ Prayer and Bible Devotions Will Prepare Us to Face Opposition

- **Eph. 6:13-16:** Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

## C. Maintaining a Holy Walk before the Lord

According to our Church Covenant, we are to “walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, malicious gossip, and excessive anger.” This means striving to maintain a lifestyle that is pleasing to God and which conforms to his will.

### ■ **Maintaining Holiness and Purity**

- **1 Pet. 1:14-16:** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy for I am holy."
- **Rom. 12:1-2:** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but 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.

### ■ **Abstaining from our Former Worldly Behavior**

- **1 Pet. 4:3-5:** For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
- **Rom. 13:12-14:** The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.
- **1 Jn. 2:15-17:** Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

### ■ **We Are to Be in the World, but Not of It (not Fundamentalist)**

- **John 17:15-16:** “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”
- **2 Cor. 6:14-15:** Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?
- **1 Cor. 6:12:** All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. (READ *Col. 2:20-23.*)

### ■ Examples of Worldly Snares: Money and Sexual Indulgence

- **1 Tim. 6:9-10:** But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
- **1 Cor. 6:9:** Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,
- **1 Cor. 6:16-20:** Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (COMPARE WITH **2 Cor. 6:14-15** PROHIBITING ENTERING INTO MARRIAGE WITH AN UNBELIEVER.)

### ■ So the Name of God Will not Be Blasphemed Because of Our Behavior

- **Titus 2:5:** ...to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.
- **1 Pet. 2:11-12:** Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them glorify God in the day of visitation.

### ■ Purification, Persecution, and the Perfecting of Our Faith

- **2 Tim. 2:21-22:** Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
- **2 Tim. 3:12:** Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
- **Phil. 1:29:** For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,
- **1 Pet. 5:10:** After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

3. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and do you promise, in reliance on the grace of God, to serve him with all that is in you, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

# 3. Obligations of Church Members

Church membership is not expressly defined in the New Testament, but it is clear that the commands of the Apostles were more than generic exhortations to maintain unity and love within the universal Church. Their letters were to particular congregations, such as the Corinthians and Thessalonians, and commands to build up the body of Christ are understood to pertain to local assemblies wherever believers gathered. For this purpose, God has appointed gifted leaders to guard the flock with regard to the truth, and empowered congregation members as the priesthood of believers to minister, encourage, and hold each other accountable to their calling in Christ. Therefore it is valuable to maintain a close, dedicated commitment to the local assembly, and to join in a covenant to love and support each other.

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. — Eph. 4:11-13*

## A. Submission, Discipline, and Accountability

As God is the one who has appointed leaders (as meeting the qualifications of *1 Tim. 3:1-13* and confirmed in their recognition and election by his people), it is important to render those men a measure both of respect and trust. Elders and Deacons are not guaranteed to always be right, but their motives and means should be viewed as having godly intentions and they should at least be given the benefit of the doubt as they seek to rule in the church. Discipline in the church is not meant to punish but rather to restore church members so they may serve God more fully and acceptably.

### ■ Obligations to Leaders (Elders)

- **Heb. 13:17:** Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.
- **1 Tim. 5:17:** The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
- **1 Thes. 5:12-13:** But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

### ■ Obligations to the Congregation

- **Phil. 2:3-4:** Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look

out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

- **Rom. 13:7-8:** Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

### ■ The Need for Discipline in the Church

- **1 Cor. 5:11-13:** But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.
- **Matt. 18:15-17:** "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. "But if he does not listen to you take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

### ■ Members of the Congregation Are to Be Accountable to One Another

- **Gal. 6:1-2:** Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.
- **James 5:16:** Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

## B. Dedication of Our Time and Wealth

Everything we have — our time, money, talents, and gifts — is a gift from God and it is proper that we return a portion of these blessings back to him. We do not lose anything by putting the kingdom first (*Matt. 6:33*); instead God more than compensates us for any sacrifice when we make the ministry of the church a priority.

### ■ Regular Attendance in Worship

- **Acts 2:42-44:** They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;
- **Heb. 10:24-25:** ...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

### ■ Donation of Our Tithes and Offerings

- **Mal. 3:8-10:** "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "How have we robbed You?" In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."
- **2 Cor. 9:6-7:** Now this I say he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

### ■ How Much Should We Give?

- **Lev. 27:30:** "Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD."
- **1 Cor. 16:2:** On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.
- **2 Cor. 8:12:** For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

## C. Serving the Local Body by Using Spiritual Gifts

Use the texts from *Romans 12:7-8*, *1 Corinthians 12:8-10*, and *Ephesians 4:11* as handy lists of the gifts God has given and the offices he employs them in. Spiritual gifts are separate from the offices believers are called to. There is no gift of pastoring listed, but 1 Tim. 3 lists several gifts which are necessary for that position such as teaching and exhortation. The lists in Scripture may not include all the possible gifts, but you can consider them a guideline from which to draw your own interpretation of the talents and calling God has given you. In order for the local church body to work effectively, all those God has placed in that assembly need to employ their gifts and serve one another so that the ministry will be complete. The reason we need to employ our spiritual gifts rather than our own natural-born talents or acquired skills is that we will wear out and become embittered when we work in the flesh; the proper employment of our spiritual gifts instead produces joy and a satisfaction that no matter the result we have labored for God.

### ■ Identifying and Using our Spiritual Gifts

- **1 Cor. 12:4-7:** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- **1 Cor. 12:28-29:** And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not

prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

- **Rom. 12:6-8:** Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

### ■ Our Commitment to Build the Body of Christ at the Local Church

- **Eph. 4:15-16:** ...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.
- **1 Pet. 4:10-11:** As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### ■ Measuring up to Our Church Covenant

Read through the church covenant on the back page of this booklet. Here you will find the spirit of all these commands brought together in a single declaration so we can each recognize our obligations to one another. It is a serious vow before God to commit our lives to living up to these high standards and to assist others in the assembly to do so as well.

- **Phil. 2:1-2:** Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.
- **Rom. 12:10-11:** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

## Questions

6. Do you agree to submit in the Lord to the government of this church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life, to heed its discipline?
7. Will you subscribe to the church Covenant and agree to faithfully abide by it as the Spirit enables you?

# 4. Doctrine and Worship

A church can often be defined by the doctrines it holds and how it prosecutes worship. These are some of the most obvious distinctives at Austin Square as all our ministries begin with a right understanding of God in worship.

*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. — 2 Tim. 4:2*

## A. The Need for Sound Doctrine

### ■ Truth Is the Only Way to Properly Understand God

Because God has revealed truth through His holy Word, the bible, it is the duty of every Christian to take hold of what that truth has to teach, especially as believers seek to overcome the world and become more like the blessed Savior, Jesus Christ. The Calvinistic doctrines, also known as the Doctrines of Grace, constitute clear biblical teaching on the nature and manifestation of God in the universe. Therefore, the only way to properly understand who God really is, is to study reality through an understanding of God's sovereign power and unsolicited grace. This approach is, in effect, approaching truth through God's omniscient viewpoint, rather than man's limited one.

- **2 Tim. 3:14-15:** You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
- **2 Tim. 1:13-14:** Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

### ■ There Is Opposition to Truth

Failure to take God at His word as revealed in the Scriptures and to trust the leading of His Holy Spirit has always produced error, even among believers who have been led astray by "godless myths" and others "who will not put up with sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Heresy has always plagued the church and must be combatted by those who maintain the biblical standard and hold to its core teachings. The teachings concerning man's ability to choose his own eternal destiny, known as Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and the theological position of Free Will, all deny the efficacious power of God and fail to take into account the plentiful scriptures that define His sovereign power. Full understanding and acceptance of the Doctrines of Grace will help believers remain firmly rooted in God's truth, as well as instruct and encourage others to do the same.

- **2 Tim. 4:3-4:** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

- **1 Tim. 4:6:** In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

## B. Key Doctrines

### ■ The Doctrines of Grace

See Appendix B.

### ■ Teaching and Confessing the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity can be found in scripture, but it requires an understanding of the whole of God's Word rather than reliance on only a few prooftexts. When all the references to God's working are taken together, it becomes clear that each member of the Trinity has been operating both interactively and cooperatively, having the same substance, but demonstrated as each divine "person" plays his own part. The Second London Confession explains the way we must address our Triune God in prayer (Article 22:3): "Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one part of natural worship, is by God required of all men. But that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to his will." Human beings really do not possess the language to describe the mystery of the Trinity, so we rather confess and rely on the power of this wonderful truth.

- **Gen. 1:1-2:** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [by the Word]... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- **1 Pet. 1:2:** ...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...
- **Matt. 28:19-20:** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
- **2 Cor. 13:14:** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

## C. Corporate Worship

Although we can worship God at any time and in all aspects of our lives, we are also particularly commanded to assemble together on the Lord's day to offer acceptable praise, petitions, and meditations on the truth of who God is. In so doing, we desire to accurately represent our God in worship and to follow the scriptural model.

### ■ The Need to Gather in Corporate Worship

- **John 4:23-24:** "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

- **Matt. 18:19-20:** "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven  
"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."
- **Heb. 10:24-25:** ...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

### ■ Employment of the Regulative Principle

Worship must both accurately represent God as he is, in all his characteristics, and be prosecuted in a manner consistent with that described in scripture. It is not for man to tell God how he is to be worshipped, but rather to follow the prescriptions of God himself so that we may have confidence that our worship and praise will be accepted. In Article 22:1, the Second London Confession explains it this way: "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures."

- **Lev. 10:1-2:** Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.
- **2 Sam. 6:6-7:** But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.
- **Deut. 12:32:** Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.
- **Heb. 9:1:** Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

### ■ Prescribed Elements of Corporate Worship

Our confession (22:5) also lists the prescribed elements of worship as, "The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner."

- **1 Tim. 2:1:** First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,
- **1 Tim. 4:13:** Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

- **Matt. 26:30:** After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
- **Ps. 95:2:** Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

### ■ Our Attitude in Worship

- **Heb. 12:28-29:** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.
- **Ps. 95:6:** Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our maker.
- **James 4:8-10:** Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

### ■ Charismatic Expressions

In worship, we rely fully on the sufficiency of the Word of God rather than any claims to an extra-biblical experience. We believe we have already been indwelt by the Holy Spirit and do not need to receive a “second blessing” or a baptism in order to exhibit the gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to the scriptural record, the more ecstatic expressions — particularly tongues and prophecy — accompanied the initial spread of the gospel under the administration of the original apostles. But today we neither have apostles nor a need to authenticate scripture with miraculous signs now that we have the full canon. Proclamation of any message from God must always remain consistent with those in scripture and never seek to add to the perfect record we find therein. We believe tongues were exhibited in authentic languages and never in babble or a secret prayer utterance. Also, it is necessary to avoid the confusion that has often gripped the expression of worship in charismatic and Pentecostal churches as well as those things which do not edify or equip the assembly for service. The Word of God itself is all we need to know and worship God quite apart from any ecstatic experience.

- **1 Cor. 14:10-11:** There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts seek to abound for the edification of the church.
- **1 Cor. 14:40:** But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

5. Can you in good conscience subscribe to the Austin Square Confession and “Articles of Faith”, particularly regarding those dealing with 1) the authority of and fullness of Scripture, 2) the need for and sufficiency of Christ’s atonement for the elect, and 3) the recognition that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper are for believers only?

# A. Baptism and Lord's Supper

God has instituted in the church two blessed and holy ordinances for the strengthening and preservation of his Church here on earth — believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is therefore both valuable and necessary to give further consideration to their role and meaning in our faith experience.

## A. We Recognize Two Ordinances

The two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper do not serve the sacramental role claimed by Roman Catholic teaching, but are rather signs for the authentic church. They must always be accompanied by the right proclamation of the Word of God, so that those who participate in these memorial institutions will recognize them as signs ordained by God for confirmation of their faith. The reformers defined the ordinances as the visible presentation of the promises of God so that the Word of God would both be seen and heard. John Calvin believed that the ordinances (sacraments) only exist because of the sure testimony of God, given to confirm that promise in us because of the weakness of our faith.

## B. Baptism

Baptism is our initiation into the faith and life of the church. It is both a sign of repentance (*Acts 2:38*), and obedience (*Acts 2:41*); and also serves as a mirror of Christ's obedience unto death in *Phil. 2:8*. It signifies the washing away of our past sins and the cleansing of our consciences (*1 Pet. 3:21*), and through it, we identify both with the death of our Lord and with his resurrection. The manner of baptism is to be by immersion (*John 3:23; Acts 8:38-39*), and it is an ordinance delivered by Jesus as part of the commission of the church to baptize new disciples.

Many churches with a Reformed background baptize infants and children in order to signify their inclusion in the church and as a covenantal act. The Presbyterian theologian Louis Berkhof contends that baptism is both a sign and seal of the new covenant of grace — as a replacement for circumcision — and although infants are not guaranteed the promise of salvation, they do become “the appointed heirs of promised blessings,” having received the “seed of faith.” He further believes that participation in the sacraments by faith not only strengthens us but increases grace in us, and therefore baptized children of covenant believers may indeed receive a mysterious blessing which may build their faith in the future. This contradicts much of scripture that points to all unbelievers — even the children of believers — as being under the full wrath of God and all in need of the same saving grace. The Baptist theologian Augustus Strong also finds the method of sprinkling for baptism inherently defective because it fails to point to Christ's death as the true cause of our cleansing and purification. A further objection to infant baptism is that it prevents the local church from admitting only those whom it finds worthy according to their testimony of faith, and therefore invalidates the holy character of the church.

There appears to be a contradiction in John Calvin's view that ordinances (sacraments) are to be correctly administered but that the form of baptism (sprinkling) he settled on fails to signify a moment of faith. Immersion, through the elements both of covering, and the manner of going and being raised up, best conveys the meaning of baptism. Sprinklers present a "watered down" version in their symbolism. If the sign is to convey the meaning of the thing signified, those who practice infant baptism rob both themselves and their children of the fuller significance of the event. We do not choose how to become associated with a local church; rather through our obedience in baptism, Christ adds us to the assembly (*Acts 2:47*) through his own work.

Although we prescribe believer's baptism by immersion only, it is less necessary that the form be entirely correct so long as faith was present in a previous water baptism (see article III, section 1 of the By-laws). If obedience in baptism manifests itself as a result of faith and conscience, no compulsion for rebaptism according to the biblical form should be applied to damage such a conviction. However, this does not apply to those who have only undergone baptism as infants. It is entirely necessary that those who have come to true repentance and faith participate in the ordinance in order to testify of the saving work of God and to identify with the local assembly.

### ■ Baptism: An Outward Sign of Inward Repentance

- **Matt. 28:19-20:** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
- **Acts 2:38:** Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

### ■ As a Sign of our Regeneration

- **Rom. 6:3-5:** ...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.
- **1 Pet. 3:21:** ...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

### ■ The Conditions and Form of Baptism (Immersion)

- **John 3:23:** Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.
- **Acts 8:36-38:** ...they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ...Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.
- **Acts 10:47-48:** "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They

have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ....

### ■ Baptism Serves as an Initiation into the Family of God

- **Acts 2:41:** So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
- **Acts 8:12:** But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

### ■ Baptism Does not Save — It Is a Sign that We Are Saved

- **1 Cor. 1:17:** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.
- **Gal. 5:6:** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
- **Luke 23:42-43:** *The example of the Thief on the cross.*

## C. The Lord's Supper

At the last supper, Christ ordained for his disciples to celebrate together both his sacrifice and the eschatological implication of his return in the breaking of bread and sharing of wine. The key element in the eucharistic commemoration is that it be conducted in remembrance of the Lord, and to “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” The Second London Confession (30:1) includes the following description: “The supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice of himself in his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.”

Although John 6:51-8 does imply that the symbolic eating of Christ’s flesh and blood are related to salvation, there is no infused grace in the cup or the loaf which either blesses or judges us. The Holy Spirit is the only active agent in the faithful or unworthy participation in the Supper (*1 Cor. 11:29*). A memorialist approach teaches that the Lord is held not to be present in the supper, but rather to be present in his people. Although there remains a mysterious communion both between man and God, and among brothers in the assembly, the celebration of the Supper must remain a faithful memorial through which God blesses us rather than a ceremony that claims to convey a specific measure of grace to its participants.

### ■ The Supper Was Instituted by Our Lord Himself

- **1 Cor. 11:23-26:** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for

you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

### ■ In the Supper, We Enter into Communion with God and Other Believers

- **John 6:53-56:** Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.
- **Phil. 3:10-11:** I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- **1 Cor. 10:16-17:** Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

### ■ We Must Examine Our Hearts to Avoid Casual or Unworthy Reception

- **1 Cor. 11:27-30:** Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.
- **1 Cor. 5:7-8:** Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
- **1 Cor. 11:20-21:** When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.
- **1 Cor. 10:20-21:** No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

*"This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. — 1 Cor. 11:25b-26*

## B. The Doctrines of Grace

*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. — Rom. 8:29-30*

### A. What is the Purpose of Teaching the Doctrines?

#### ■ To Establish the Sovereignty of God over Every Thing

The Second London Confession (5:1) puts it this way: “God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.”

#### ■ To Instill Greater Appreciation for God’s Sovereign Work

The only way to truly approach God is with an attitude of humility and thankfulness (*James 4:10*). The best way to achieve this position is to properly understand God’s sovereign work in the light of man’s total inability to reach Him on any other basis than the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Those who believe they had some part in achieving their own salvation can not hope but to diminish, in some part, the measure of awe and thankfulness they feel for becoming saved. Only by truly accepting that God alone initiated, maintained and completed our salvation according to His own good pleasure and sovereign will can we give Him the full glory and praise due to his merciful hand and measureless power.

The key element to understand in the Doctrines of Grace is that humans are completely unable to contribute anything to their own salvation, and therefore are entirely indebted to a gracious God for accomplishing redemption on their behalf. The best way to succinctly express the relationship between man and salvation is the condition of human inability.

#### Quiz

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Can humans truly love God with their own natural faculties?     | T | F |
| 2. Can humans truly repent on their own?                           | T | F |
| 3. Can humans choose to have saving faith in God?                  | T | F |
| 4. Can humans reject the inner call of the Holy Spirit?            | T | F |
| 5. Can humans make themselves righteous before God?                | T | F |
| 6. Can humans live a holy lifestyle on their own?                  | T | F |
| 7. Can humans lose salvation on account of their own disobedience? | T | F |

## B. What Is Meant by Predestination?

Responsible teaching of the doctrine of predestination must affirm that God omnipotently governs all things but that human responsibility is never negated by his eternal decrees. Man freely chooses the path prepared for him, according to the inclinations of his sinful nature, and is in need of divine grace to intercede and rescue him from his condition. But the existence of human freedom is not really the issue. The question is whether or not every action throughout creation brings glory to God or to the creature. We do not believe in man; we believe in God.

Pelagius taught that mankind is inherently good and only needs to obey God's commands to be holy. Jacob Arminius agreed that man is sinful and in need of grace, but denied the Calvinistic argument that the calling of Jesus to new life is irresistible. He believed man must retain the ability to reject so great a salvation in order to be either obedient to the command or guilty of the blood of Christ. The modern free will position can often be linked with the evangelistic meeting which attempts to convince hearers to confess the name of Jesus or recite the four spiritual laws and thereby inherit salvation. This last form is overly mechanistic in that it overlooks the freedom of God to select out of his own preference to enable man to accept the Lord in his heart.

Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us. The Calvinistic Doctrines of Grace convey a clear presentation of the key moments in the life of a believer by which God overcomes man's natural rebellion to impart saving grace. In this context, the doctrines of Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints, convey man's need for the grace of God very well. We must fully assert that the bible does not teach any form of universal salvation, nor does it remove from man the responsibility to repent. Appropriate instruction concerning the Doctrines of Grace (5-point TULIP) and the meaning of predestination is extremely crucial to retaining the proper perspective concerning God's ultimate control and maintenance of the created order so that salvation is emphasized from God's side, rather than man's. The Arminian view that man must retain veto power over whether or not to resist the Spirit and reject the offer of salvation is utterly denied by the concept of Irresistible Grace and the reality that the Word of God never returns void (*Isa. 55:11*).

The Doctrines of Grace and the message of predestination are intended to inspire both awe and confidence in believers rather than shake their faith in a loving God or doubt assurance of their salvation. Furthermore, both the doctrine of predestination — and any teaching on reprobation — must never impede the obedience of Christians to declare the gospel message to all men. Upholding the truth of these doctrines cannot empower believers to identify who the elect are, nor to exclude others from the congregation of faith. Contemplation of the divine decrees of God (or the "horrible decree" according to Calvin, concerning reprobation) is not intended to frighten believers, but rather to inspire awe. Assurance and peace should result when properly receiving the doctrine of predestination and election — not dread concerning judgment.

### ■ Total Depravity (or Inability)

The Roman Catholic view is that because man is created in the image of God, there remains an inherent ability to identify with God through an initial spark of grace and can result in an ability to love Him. The modern liberal interpretation is that man's rational and moral qualities are inherently good and man therefore only needs to emulate the Savior to attain a more righteous life.

- **Rom. 3:10-11:** as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;
- **Rom. 3:23-26:** ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- **Rom. 7:18:** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

### ■ Unconditional Election

The challenges to this doctrine contest the reality that God consciously choose to save certain individuals rather than merely foreknew which would accept His message and the others who would reject it. But scripture tells us that God chose us as his people before the foundation of the world.

- **Eph. 1:4-6:** ...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- **2 Thes. 2:13:** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

### ■ Limited Atonement

This doctrine is extremely unpopular to those who wish to declare that the blood of Jesus has the power to save all men. It should be made clear, however, that scripture passages which allude to God's desire to save all men fall into the realm of the preceptive will of God rather than the decretive will. We must be careful, however, when preaching Limited Atonement for this age. The truth behind this doctrine remains scripturally sound (*Heb. 9:15*), but the message that Christ's death atoned only for the elect stands rhetorically in contrast with the evangelistic promotion of salvation as a free gift. Therefore, the third point in the Calvinistic system should be employed to promote comfort and confidence among the elect, and should be proclaimed only with the utmost discretion and caution to those in the world, or when appropriate when relating it to those who reject the gospel (*John 6:65-6*).

- **John 10:14-15:** "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.
- **Heb. 9:14-15:** ...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

### ■ Irresistible Grace

The free will position that God cannot compel men to accept the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their hearts argues that human beings must be free to either accept or reject the gospel in order to merit either eternal life or everlasting damnation. Some also contend that God would never be so rude as to intrude on the personal sovereignty of man by imposing His will in such a manner.

- **John 6:37:** "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.
- **John 6:44:** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

### ■ Perseverance of the Saints

This doctrine is extremely valuable because it takes the responsibility for the assurance of salvation off man and ascribes it to the mercy of God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God — not even our own sinful disobedience — if we have been truly called according to His grace. The alternative is to believe that it may be possible not only to lose our state of justification before God, but also to regain and lose it again according to the stages of doubt and disobedience each believer may go through in the normal courses of life.

- **John 10:27-29:** "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
- **Eph. 1:13-14:** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

*...that [your] hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is Christ Himself in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. — Col. 2:2-3*

## Appendix C: Articles of Faith

1. WE BELIEVE in the Scriptures (Old Testament, 39 books and New Testament, 27 books) as verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are supreme and final authority in life and faith.
2. WE BELIEVE in one God, eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God and true Man.
4. WE BELIEVE that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned, and thereby incurred, not only physical death, but, also, that spiritual death which is separation from God; and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature.
5. WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice; and that we who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.
6. WE BELIEVE that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior are born again of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God.
7. WE BELIEVE that all whom God the Father has given to the Lord Jesus Christ will most certainly be redeemed.
8. WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit indwells all believers, that He is their comforter and guide, and that He seals them unto the Day of Redemption.
9. WE BELIEVE the Church of Christ to be the entire company of believers, baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body.
10. WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord and in His ascension into Heaven, where He now intercedes for us as High Priest and Advocate.
11. WE BELIEVE in the personal bodily return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
12. WE BELIEVE in the bodily resurrection and judgment of the saved and the bodily resurrection and judgment of the lost; the everlasting blessedness of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the lost.
13. WE BELIEVE in the existence of Satan, the deceiver and god of this present world; that he was defeated and judged at the cross, and therefore, his final doom is certain.
14. WE BELIEVE the two scriptural ordinances given to the local church are Baptism by immersion, of believers only; and the Lord's Supper, to be partaken of by believers only.

*For a fuller expression in a confessional form of what we teach, we refer to **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689** (Second London), with certain articles clarified.*

### Appendix D: Confession

1. To the extent that the Lord has given me wisdom and understanding, I subscribe to the **Covenant** and the **Articles of Faith** of Austin Square Baptist Church, Lynn, Massachusetts.
2. I believe that I am a sinner by nature and by choice, and as such, guilty before God.
3. I believe that salvation is by grace alone and that I am saved through faith in Jesus Christ who died and shed His blood as a sacrifice for my sins and arose from the dead as proof of my justification.
4. I know that I have experienced the new birth (regeneration) and have the witness of the Holy Spirit within that I am a child of God.
5. I, therefore, offer myself for Christian service in the fellowship of this assembly and in submission to those who have the rule over me, as a means of expressing my gratitude and obedience to my Savior and to exalt His name.

### Appendix E: Covenant

Believing that we were led by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and that we were, on the profession of our faith, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the power and aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this assembly in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the assembly, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel locally and thorough-out all nations.

We also engage to maintain family\* and secret devotions; to educate our children in the laws and the ways of our Lord; to seek the salvation of our kindred, acquaintances and communities; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, malicious gossip, and excessive anger; to submit to the Word of God and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in all matters and to those spiritual leaders (Elders) whom God has set over us, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage by faith and by the grace of God to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the commandments of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other assembly where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

\* *Circumstances may prevent including the whole family.*