

The Vision Glorious

A Confession of the Faith of the Apostolic Church

Together with Christ's Church around the world, across cultures, and through the centuries, The Apostolic Church confesses the orthodox faith of The Nicene Creed, and alongside it, The Apostles' Creed, The Athanasian Creed, and The Definition of Chalcedon. The fundamental doctrinal beliefs of The Apostolic Church, based on the Holy Scriptures and stated in summarised form, are set out in The Tenets of the Apostolic Church and here in more detail in The Vision Glorious: A Confession of the Faith of the Apostolic Church.

1. The Unity of the Godhead, and Trinity of the Persons therein.

The one true God — the Triune God — who is from all eternity the perfectly blessed God of all goodness and love, is alone sovereign and almighty. He cannot be divided into parts, and yet in this simplicity and unity of the divine essence, the fullness of divine perfections is to be seen.

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God in three persons. And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal. Theirs is an undivided and equal Godhead, majesty and power, and so in all things, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped.

The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is neither made nor created, but eternally begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in substance, inseparable both in what they are and in what they do, sharing one divine will. The Three Persons are one in nature, essence, and attributes: infinite, eternal, unchangeable, all-present, all-knowing, almighty, all-wise, righteous, holy, good, and merciful.

Knowing the end from the beginning of all things, in His infinite wisdom and love, the Triune God has purposed from all eternity to call out a people from every tribe and tongue into communion with Him, uniting them to the Son in the fullness of the Spirit, as His treasured possession, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Therefore, in the eternal counsel of the Triune God, the Son was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be our Redeemer through shedding His precious blood, that we might receive fullness of life in Him and glorify our Triune God as the King eternal, immortal, invisible, who alone is wise, forever and ever. Amen.

2. The utter depravity of human nature, the necessity for repentance and regeneration and the eternal doom of the finally impenitent.

In His almighty love, the Triune God created all things from nothing and called them good. All creation depends on the Triune God at every moment who in His good providence preserves, sustains, and governs all things. He reigns high over all, and all that is good depends for its goodness on the Good God.

Therefore, we bow in awe before the Almighty God, who alone is good, rejoicing in the goodness which He calls us to share, and the goodness of His creation which He calls us to steward. Yet, though bowed in awe, we are not crushed beneath His feet. For the only good God has created the whole of humanity, male and female, out of His great love and in His image.

Created in Adam, there is but one humanity in which we all share equally as those created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. Therefore, we are called to value and protect all human life from conception to natural death.

Created male and female, humanity has been blessed by the Lord God in His provision of marriage as a holy state of life-long union between one man and one woman in exclusive fidelity, open to God's blessing to be fruitful and multiply. Marriage is an honourable estate and a holy mystery, setting forth an image of the love of Christ for His Church, and should be honoured by all. Yet not all are called to marry, and the Lord has also declared in His Word that celibacy is an honourable estate, setting forth an image of the future life of the resurrection, and should also be honoured by all.

Yet, despite the goodness of all of God's creation, through the sin of the one man, Adam (our natural father and covenant head) the whole of humanity fell into sin. Just as we share equally in the image of God, through Adam's transgression we have come to share equally in sin and guilt. No one is more fallen and no one is less fallen, for we fell as one in Adam.

Now, through the fall, all human nature (except that of the Lord Christ who came to deliver us from sin) has been corrupted by sin in every part of our being. This utter depravity means that sin is rooted deep within us. All the faculties of the soul are corrupted by sin, all its powers are distorted, its motives polluted. The understanding is darkened by ignorance, the will perverted by rebellion, the affections distorted by self-gratification, and sinful human beings are utterly unable through any power of their own to regain the favour of God by any inherent goodness.

The only way to be set free from this sin and guilt is to turn out from ourselves and our sin, and up to Christ in repentance through God's gracious gift of the new birth of regeneration. Regeneration is the spiritual change wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of the Gospel, in which we are raised from spiritual death in the state of depravity to new life in Christ and are made partakers of the divine nature.

The necessity for repentance does not end at conversion, but rather, the whole life of believers should be a life of repentance. The depths of our sin mean that this repentance will encompass every area of our lives. Therefore, as we grow in likeness to Christ throughout the Christian life, we should never fear or flee from His call to repentance. We must not ignore the Holy Spirit's convicting work, but pray that our eyes would be opened to the extent of our sin and turn from it back to our Saviour.

This repentance is not only possible by God's grace for those who have been raised to new life in Christ, but necessary. On the last day, the finally impenitent will face the eternal punishment of the Just Judge. Refusal to repent therefore, is not a sign of true faith in Christ, but a warning of the coming judgment.

3. The virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection, ascension, and abiding intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ; His second coming, and millennial reign upon earth.

The Triune God, in infinite grace and love, sent the Only-Begotten Son into the world for us and for our salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word and Son of the Father, has, by His incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary, taken on true humanity, so that He is both one with the Father, sharing in His nature as true God, and one with us, sharing in our nature as true Man. In the Incarnate Son, the glory of the invisible God is seen, full of grace and truth. He has not set aside what He was, but for our sake has also taken on what we are so that in the unity of His One Person, all that He does He does as the God-Man.

Through His sinless life, the Lord Jesus fully obeyed God's law and fulfilled all righteousness for us. And in offering Himself up to the Father through the Eternal Spirit on Calvary's cross in His atoning death, He shed His blood and died for our sin, bearing in our place the full penalty which we deserved. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by bearing the curse for us in His work of propitiation.

By His glorious resurrection, the Victorious Christ gives new life to His people. Rising triumphant from the grave on the third day, having defeated the power of sin, death, hell, and the devil, Christ's resurrection is the pattern and pledge of our own; for, on the last day, He will raise us from our graves in these same bodies, transformed and glorified by Him, 'conformed to His glorious body' (Phil. 3:21) not to any merely human ideal. Therefore, the bodily identity of all believers was not only given by the Lord in our creation, but is also affirmed in the resurrection.

Now, ascended to the right hand of the Father, the Lord Jesus ever lives to intercede for us as our Great High Priest. Through His Word and by His Spirit, He teaches us to pray, and as our heavenly Intercessor and Mediator, He purifies our prayers and presents them to the Father in His own name. And one day (though no one but God knows the day or the hour) He will return in glory in the same manner as He ascended, to reign bodily upon this earth, to raise the dead for the final judgment, and to dwell forever with His people in glory.

At His return as King, Christ our God will end all oppression and injustice upon this earth. But now as we wait, He reigns as King of all the nations, and also savingly in our lives, where He wills to root out all oppression and injustice. If we truly await His return to reign, and pray diligently 'Thy Kingdom come', we cannot refuse His kingly conquest of our hearts as He subdues all His and our enemies (including our sins). Instead, as we seek the Kingdom and the coming of the One who will wipe away every tear from our eyes and bring an end to sorrow and pain, we should live in light of His coming Kingdom, in seeking (through our union with Him) to wipe away tears and comfort those who weep, to suffer with those who suffer and bind up the wounds of those who are oppressed and in pain. Our King's command is that we 'bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2), as, like our Saviour, we give ourselves for one another in sacrificial love.

4. Justification and Sanctification of the believer through the finished work of Christ.

The salvation of the world — of people from every tribe and tongue — comes only through the once-and-for-all finished work of Christ. There is one salvation in which we are all called to share, through union with the one Saviour who gave Himself for us all. This union with Christ is the Holy Spirit's work through faith which comes by hearing the Word of the Gospel. United to Christ, believers find in Him the double grace of justification and sanctification.

In graciously justifying those who rest and rely upon Christ Jesus in faith, the Lord God forgives us our sin and accepts us as righteous in His sight through the righteousness of Christ alone (in His sinless life and atoning death) imputed to us. By this gracious gift, all who believe are clothed with Christ for righteousness, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Yet, this acceptance in the Well-Beloved Son in which all believers equally share is not a transformation to perfection. Clothed with a righteousness which is not our own, we are, at the same time, righteous and sinful. Sin in our lives does not immediately disappear, but must be recognised, acknowledged, repented of, and confessed. The reality of sin in our lives must not be denied or hidden, for 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.' (1 Jn 1:8, 10); but 'if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins' (1 Jn 2:1-2).

Those who have been born again, united to Christ, clothed with Him for righteousness, and adopted in Him as sons and daughters of the living God, also receive in Christ the ongoing work of sanctification by our Holy God to conform us to the image of Christ in holiness. Sanctification is a transformation of who we are as new creatures in Christ, but it is not an erasure of who we have always been as creatures. By God's gracious work of sanctification, we are conformed more and more to the image of the Triune God in whose image we were created and to whose image we are being restored.

As the indwelling Spirit sanctifies us by the Word, we are called to mortify sin day by day through God's grace—by putting to death our sinful deeds and desires—and to live to righteousness, growing in grace and perfecting holiness in the fear of God. This we do in reliance on Christ's intercession for us and in the strength of the Spirit of grace, with confidence 'that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6).

5. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost for believers, with signs following.

From heaven, the ascended Lord Jesus pours out the Father's Promise of His Holy Spirit upon His people. The Holy Spirit lives in all believers, for it is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin, draws us to Christ for salvation, regenerates and unites us to Christ through faith. Yet, when Christ baptises us in the Holy Spirit, we receive the Spirit in another way, pouring out God's love in our hearts, assuring us that we are His children, and empowering us to serve Him and proclaim to others the good news of salvation in Jesus. Our Saviour teaches us to pray to receive the Spirit in this way, as a good Gift.

This Baptism of the Spirit is promised to every believer, for 'the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call' (Acts 2:39). This foretaste of the age to come is a recognisable experience, distinct from regeneration, and is followed by signs, as at the beginning.

6. The nine gifts of the Holy Ghost for the edification, exhortation and comfort of the Church, which is the body of Christ.

The Church which is the Body of Christ is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. There is One Body, united to its One Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom life and fullness flows to His Body. Christ came into the world once, offered Himself up on the cross once-for-all, and rose and ascended to the Father's right hand once, for the One Body which He has united to Himself. There can be no divisions in the One Body for we are all one in Christ Jesus, and He is the only Head of the Church to whom we can be united. On earth the Church is recognised where, in truth and faithfulness, the Word is proclaimed, the sacraments celebrated, and the flock is cared for, protected and fed by faithful shepherds through teaching and discipline.

This One Body is called Holy in Christ and is being transformed to ever-more Christlike holiness, and so must be cleansed from sins and instead built up in holy love, 'into a holy temple ... for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:22). This One Holy Church is catholic — a body which encompasses every nation, language, culture, ethnicity, age, and class, so that 'there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all' (Col. 3:11). We have been bought with the same blood and united by the same Spirit to the same Head, in the same Body. The unity of the one body is displayed through the diversity of its catholicity. And this One, Holy, Catholic Church is Apostolic: called across cultures and languages to belt the globe with the same gospel which was entrusted to Christ's first apostles, as we proclaim the Lord Jesus to people of every tribe and tongue and thus invite them to come to Him for life and salvation, and in Him to be added to His Church.

In pouring out His Spirit upon His Church, Christ is glorified and the church is built up, encouraged, and receives comfort from Him through the gifts of the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. The Lord encourages His people to earnestly desire these gifts, which God distributes sovereignly as He wills for the benefit of the Body of Christ. These are gifts of God's grace, not received by human merit, and so should always lead us to further humility, thankfulness, and dependence upon our gracious God, and must only be exercised in faith and love.

7. The Sacraments of Baptism by immersion and of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord Jesus has given His church the sacraments: two mysteries of physical things, which He blesses by His words, in which He promises to meet us in His grace. In the waters of Baptism, we join with Christ in his double-baptism in the Jordan and on the Cross. As believers are immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, God speaks His gospel of forgiveness of sins through our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The waters of baptism now visibly join us together as one new family in Christ, and invite us to continually come to eat and drink with the Lord's people on the Lord's Day at the Lord's Table.

In the Breaking of Bread, as with wonder, reverence, delight, and thanksgiving, we eat the bread which Christ calls His body and drink of the cup which He calls His blood, we are nourished by our Saviour and proclaim His death until He comes. The Scriptures teach us to examine ourselves as we come to the Table in remembrance of our Saviour, and to eat with faith, discerning the Lord's body. By sharing in the one bread and one cup of the Lord's Supper, we partake of the one Christ and are drawn more and more together in the unity of the body of Christ. In this sacrament the Lord by His Spirit takes up bread and wine and blesses them by His Words of Institution, so that through them He meets with us in His body and blood for our sanctification and spiritual sustenance. Renewed and refreshed at the Table where His death is proclaimed, He sends us out to proclaim His death to others, that they too may be joined to Him through faith and come to His gracious feast.

8. The Divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures.

The voice of Scripture is the voice of God. The whole Bible is the inspired Word of God, infallible in its declarations, final in its authority, all-sufficient in its provision, and comprehensive in its sufficiency. The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, in all their parts, were breathed out by the Holy Spirit through their human authors in the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. Therefore, the very words of Scripture, and all the words of Scripture, are the very Word of God. As God's Word, the Scriptures carry God's authority. As the Word of the God who cannot err, the Scriptures are without error in all that they affirm. As the written Word of God, they proclaim the Lord Jesus, the Living Word of God.

The Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation and godliness and are sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith, belief, worship, and practice. Neither custom nor decree, neither vision nor miracle, neither any other revelation nor tradition could ever modify or add to Scripture. The Bible is to be believed as God's instruction in all that it affirms, obeyed as God's command in all that it requires, and embraced as God's pledge in all that it promises. Where *Sacred Scripture has spoken, the matter is decided*, for where sacred Scripture has spoken, the living God has spoken.

The same God who has inspired the Scriptures, and who reveals Himself in the Scriptures, opens our eyes so that we may see wondrous things in His Word. By the illumination of the Holy Spirit, in reliance upon Him He enables us to properly understand the Word, and He uses Scripture to explain Scripture.

The Word of the Lord is living and powerful, and by His Word, God gives new life, faith, sanctification and growth in grace. By the Scriptures, He equips us thoroughly for every good work. His Word is our weapon in the spiritual combat and brings forth fruit in the lives of those who delight in it and meditate upon it. The Lord works powerfully by His Word and it does not return to Him void. As we faithfully proclaim the message of the Scriptures, the Lord will work by His Word to make many 'wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 3:15).

9. Church government by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders and deacons.

As Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus governs, guides, unites, matures, and grows His Body as its true Apostle, true Prophet, true Evangelist, true Pastor and Elder, and true Teacher, and in His gracious provision, He gives gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (including elders), and teachers to His Body. These ministers are not called independently, as mere individuals, but in union with Christ and reliance upon Him, and collegially with one another. True collegiality in the ministry of Christ's Church means that her ministers must sit at one another's feet and hear the word of Christ in humility and love. Christ exercises His power of binding and loosing through His ministers both in the proclamation of the Gospel and in church discipline.

Deacons, full of the Holy Spirit, are called to serve the members of Christ's body in the local assembly, alongside the presbytery. This is a spiritual ministry, demanding the Spirit's fullness, help, and wisdom, to be carried out in prayer.

The Lord sets apart His choice to the ministry in ordination through prayer and the laying on of the apostles' hands for the impartation of grace.

10. The possibility of falling from grace.

Jesus Christ Himself is God's gracious salvation, in which we share through union with Him in faith. We should never question the full provision God has made in Christ to save, to keep, and to enable every believer to attain to the fulness of glory. Yet the Scriptures warn us of the need to persevere in faith in Jesus until the end. When Paul warns of falling from grace, the warning is for those who have added something else to their full reliance on Christ as Saviour (Gal. 5:4). To turn away from Christ and abandon Him would be to turn away from God's grace. Those who abide in Jesus are secure in Him.

11. The obligatory nature of tithes and offerings.

God's love to us leads us to love Him in keeping His commands (Jn 14:15). God's Law has not been abolished, but rather Christ calls us to obey His commands as a joyful expression of love for our Saviour. Among these expressions of love is faithfulness in bringing our tithes and offerings to the Lord to support the needs of His church as an act of worship, not out of compulsion or necessity, but willingly and cheerfully. Yet, we must not merely pay our tithes, while neglecting 'the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith' (Mt 23:23). And so, just as the Lord has always called His people to love our neighbour, Christ gives us the commandment to 'love one another' (Jn 13:34), calling us to lay down our lives for one another in self-sacrificial service. Good works of obedience and love do not justify, 'for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified' (Galatians 2:16). Yet, in those who are justified by faith in Christ Jesus and united to Him, good works flow forth from faith as fruit. Apart from Christ we can do nothing, but those who abide in Christ through faith will produce much fruit by His Spirit to the glory of our Triune God.