

# REDEEMER

## CHURCH • FOLKESTONE

### Our Doctrinal Distinctives

*All members of Redeemer Church Folkestone joyfully affirm our Core Beliefs, which we believe reflect historic Christianity. In addition to our Core Beliefs, the elders of Redeemer Church joyfully affirm these Doctrinal Distinctives as reflecting the teaching of the Bible.*

*You can be a member of Redeemer Church and take a different evangelical view on the Doctrinal Distinctives summarised below – although as a member of the church it is important you accept this is the teaching position of the church and do not seek to change it; are happy to be taught from God's word along these lines and grow in your understanding; and agree not to cause division over these matters.*

#### Reformed Theology

Scripture alone is our authority. But understood properly, we believe the Reformed theology found in historic confessions (particularly *'The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689'*) is an excellent reflection of the teaching of the whole of Scripture, which brings the most glory to God. Therefore, at Redeemer Church we are joyfully and unashamedly 'Reformed'.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. The following historic 'five points' are a very helpful summary of a Reformed understanding of the Bible's teaching about salvation: 1) Humanity is *totally depraved* – every aspect of us is corrupted by sin. 2) God has *unconditionally chosen* out of sheer mercy whom he will save – not based on anything in us. 3) Christ died to *actually save his people*. 4) God's grace is ultimately *irresistible*, overcoming our resistance to him. 5) All who are truly saved will *persevere to the end* since nothing can snatch us from God's hand.

Being Reformed also means we believe that God's glory is the goal of creation and redemption, and the reason we exist is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. It also means we believe Jesus Christ is Lord of the whole of life – so we aim to preach all of Christ, for all of life, from all of Scripture.

#### God's Sovereignty & Human Responsibility

God, the perfect Creator of all things, is sovereign over all he has made. In his infinite power and wisdom, he upholds, directs, and governs all things – to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy. God has decreed from all eternity, by the most wise and holy purpose of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things that shall come to pass.

Yet God is not the author of sin, nor can he ever commit any evil, nor does he violate the will of his creatures. As human beings we make genuine choices according to our own wills for which we are morally responsible and will be held accountable. At Redeemer Church we believe and teach God's sovereignty *and* human responsibility as clearly found in the Scriptures.

## **Sovereign Grace in Salvation**

Because of our fall into a state of sin, we have wholly lost all ability and desire to turn to God for salvation. Our will since the fall is, biblically speaking, 'bound' rather than 'free'. Left to ourselves we are dead in our sins, by nature children of wrath, the servants of sin, enslaved to the Devil, the subjects of death, and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal (i.e. in this life) and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus sets us free.

Thankfully, God's sovereignty extends over all things, including salvation. Before the foundation of the world God in his great mercy chose a people for himself out of the human race – a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language. He did not choose us on the basis of our foreseen faith or works, but on the basis of his incredible kindness and perfect desire to glorify himself in his Son by our redemption.

For anyone to come to Jesus in repentance and faith requires God in his grace to draw them to himself and open their eyes to see and believe the gospel. This truth leads to great glory going to God and humility and assurance of salvation for believers.

This certainly does not imply that the church should be inactive in evangelism. Far from it – proclaiming the gospel is the means God uses to bring salvation to people. So, while we look to God to bring new life by his Spirit, we are committed to seeking and taking every opportunity to share the gospel with others, in obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus.

## **God's Unfolding Plan of Redemption**

The Bible tells one unified true story of redemption through Jesus Christ which unfolds progressively through the pages of Scripture. In common with other Reformed churches, we see in Scripture the central place that covenants play in God's unfolding plan of redemption. This plan itself is based on the agreement between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity past to redeem a people for himself.

God made a covenant in the garden in which life was promised to Adam, and through him to his descendants, on the condition of perfect, personal obedience. Because of the Fall, humanity has brought itself under God's judgment, and we have made ourselves utterly incapable of attaining everlasting life, blessing and acceptance by God through our own obedience. Yet it was always God's plan to make a covenant of grace, in which he freely offers sinners life and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This covenant of grace is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation through a descendent of Eve, and afterwards by further steps, until the full revelation of it was completed in the New Covenant. It is only by the grace of this covenant that anyone has ever been saved and obtained everlasting life – since there has only ever been one way of salvation.

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ until after his incarnation, all the benefits of it were imparted to God's people in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world. God gave promises, covenants, prophecies, sacrifices, shadows, and types in the Old Testament that revealed and pointed to Jesus Christ the only Redeemer.

At Redeemer Church we seek to expound from the Scriptures God's unfolding plan – and to show how all the Scriptures point to Jesus our Redeemer, the redemption we have in him, and how we are to live as God's redeemed people.

## **The Sufficiency of Scripture**

Everything needed for people to come to faith in Christ, to grow to maturity in him, and to live lives pleasing to Him is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. Nothing at any time can be added to God's word, whether by 'new revelations' or human traditions.

## **The Preaching of God's Word**

We believe the Bible is God's written word and that, by the work of the Holy Spirit, as it is faithfully preached, God's voice is truly heard. The public preaching and teaching of God's word in the gathered church is fundamental and central to God's plan for building the church and reaching the world. The normal pattern at Redeemer Church is to expound God's word as he has given it to us, and to preach Christ and the gospel from all the Scriptures.

## **The Mission of the Church**

The mission the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his church is the Great Commission – to proclaim the gospel of Christ's life, death and resurrection and the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; to make disciples of all nations, to baptise them, and to teach them to obey everything he commanded. It is the great privilege and responsibility of each local church to participate in the fulfilment of this Great Commission, and to keep this mission front and centre in the life of the church. The Great Commission was given, strictly speaking, to the church as the church rather than to individual Christians, but it is the joy and calling of each Christian to play our part in the one mission of the church – each using our different gifts and serving together, to the glory of God.

The gospel is at the heart of who we are and everything we do as Christians. As Christians 'scattered' in our different homes, workplaces and communities we are called to love God and love our neighbour; to be 'salt' and 'light' where the Lord has placed us; to make the most of every opportunity; to be wise in the way we act; to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have; to live godly lives of integrity that adorn the gospel; to honour, glorify, and live for Christ in every area of life; and to actively seek opportunities to speak to others about Jesus.

## **Believer's Baptism**

Baptism is for Christian believers. It is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ and an outward sign of our fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection, of being united to him, of our sins forgiven and washed away, and of the new life we have now begun. At Redeemer Church we offer baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to those who publicly and credibly profess faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism should, wherever possible and practicable, be administered by immersion in water.

## **Baptism & Church Membership**

It is necessary to be a Christian and baptised to become a member of Redeemer Church. If a person is not yet baptised as a believer – we would encourage this first. At Redeemer Church we only practise believer's baptism, but we do acknowledge that infant baptism is a position held by many Bible-believing Christians throughout church history. If a person is thoroughly convinced of this position from Scripture, and in good conscience believes that their infant baptism is truly baptism, then on that basis they would be welcome to become a member of the church.

## **The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper is a means of grace for Christian believers and is to be observed in local churches until Christ returns, as a continual remembrance and proclamation of his sacrifice offered once for all, a confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits of the gospel, for our spiritual nourishment and growth in him, and as a sign of our communion with him and with each other. It involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

Because of the close connection biblically between conversion, baptism, church membership, and the Lord's Supper – the most natural and normal pattern is that those who receive the Lord's Supper at Redeemer Church are members of Redeemer Church. At the same time we recognise that on any given Sunday there may be visitors as well as those in the process of becoming members of the church – who are most welcome to the Lord's table so long as they are Christians and in good standing in their local church – including not being under biblical church discipline.

## **Church Leadership & Membership**

The church belongs to Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep who alone is the head of the church. Jesus governs his church by his Word. In the local church God has appointed elders to oversee, lead, teach and pastor the church under Christ. The elders are to operate as under-shepherds of Christ, exercising their leadership of the local church in accordance with the character of Christ. They are to love, serve and protect the church, to pray and minister God's word, to work to present the members of the church fully mature in Christ, to help equip them for life and service, and to watch their own life and doctrine closely. In accordance with the pattern established in Scripture, a local church congregation should be led, wherever possible, by a plurality of elders – one of whom may be a 'first among equals' typically called a Pastor or Minister. These elders are ordinary Christian men who are qualified for the office by character and gifting as found in Scripture.

Whilst God created men and women in absolute equality and richly equips both men and women for active ministry, by God's design leadership in the context of the church (as in marriage and the family) is the responsibility of men. For this reason, in obedience to the pattern and teaching of the Bible, the elders of Redeemer Church are male. Also, in accordance with the pattern of Scripture, male and female members of the church with appropriate gifts may be set apart as deacons to serve particular needs arising in the life of the church. Our position on the incredibly valuable role of women in the church is explained in more detail in the FIEC statement '*Women in Ministry*' to which all FIEC churches subscribe.

The members of the church have an active role to play in the life and ministry of the church. They agree to submit to the leadership of the elders in so far as that leadership is exercised in

accordance with the Bible – so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, which would be of no benefit to the church. The members have a responsibility collectively to serve in the church; to be welcoming and hospitable; to care for each other; to guard the gospel and to not put up with false teaching. They also have a role in affirming who is ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the church; and are involved by the elders in certain big decisions.

In practice, what this means at Redeemer Church is that we are not a ‘congregation-ruled’ church where everything is voted on and the elders are not free to lead the church properly; neither are we a ‘elder-ruled’ church where there is no congregational involvement and the members are merely ‘passengers’. Instead, in seeking to apply what the Bible says about both elders leading and the important role of the congregation – we are elder-led with an actively engaged congregation (what is known as an ‘elder-led congregational’ church). More detail about how this works in practice can be found in our ‘*Church Practice*’ document.

## **Gospel Unity**

Our policy on uniting with other churches and groups, and the biblical reasons for our approach, are set out in the FIEC statement ‘*Gospel Unity*’ to which all FIEC churches subscribe.

## **God’s Law & the Christian Life**

God created humans in his image; put his Law in the human heart; and gave clear commands so we would know how to live in his world. After the Fall that moral Law remained unchanged, and we remain accountable to God for how we live. This moral Law is expressed clearly in the Ten Commandments.

The purpose of the moral Law is to convict us of our sin and show us our need of a Saviour; to restrain evil; and to guide us in how to live as God’s people. For those under the Old Covenant who did not put their faith in the promise of the coming Saviour, the Law was a burden that remained outside of them and stood over them condemning them. But for those who did trust in the promise, God’s Law was a gift and a delight.

As well as this moral Law, God also gave to Israel under the Old Covenant ceremonial and civil laws. The ceremonial laws (e.g. priests, the temple, sacrifices) were pointing forward to Jesus, and now that he has come are fulfilled in him. The civil laws pertained to Israel’s life as a nation in the land, and are not intended to be directly applied today, although the general principles we can draw from them continue to have value.

Believers today are not under the Old Covenant which prepared the way for Christ, but under the New Covenant – the age of fulfilment in Christ. The moral Law was fulfilled by Christ in that he perfectly obeyed it for our justification. In the New Covenant, it is this same Law – which Jesus summarised in the command to love God and love our neighbour – that is written on the hearts of all those who believe. God has given us his Spirit so that now we begin to want to, and are enabled to, joyfully obey our Lord and Saviour. Our obedience is in response to God’s grace – and those who love Jesus will seek to keep his commands not to earn salvation but as the outworking of the new life we have in Christ.

Christians are not under the Old Covenant or the application of the Law as it was under that covenant (e.g. the Sabbath on the Saturday); rather we are under the New Covenant with God’s

Law written on our hearts and applied in New Covenant ways (e.g. the Sabbath applied to the day Jesus rose again – the Lord's Day). In the New Covenant, the Law continues to function in God's hands to point us to the gospel and guide us in our lives.

## **The Work of the Holy Spirit Today**

The Old Testament looked forward to the New Covenant age when the blessing of the Spirit would be universal among all God's people. After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, this promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. From that day on, all genuine believers are baptised with, or receive, the Holy Spirit when they are brought to faith and new life in Christ.

Whilst every genuine believer is therefore always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it does not follow that every believer is necessarily filled with the Spirit at all times. All believers are urged by Scripture to ensure they are increasingly yielding to the power, influence and control of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. The Holy Spirit transforms believers so they bear the fruit of the Spirit which is Christ-like character.

We recognise that Bible believing Christians will take different views regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit and we want to be humble and charitable in our attitude towards our brothers and sisters with whom we differ. Our position as a church is that 'signs and wonders' and certain gifts of the Spirit had a particular function in the life of the early church and are not the 'norm' for all time. We believe that the apostolic era was unique, foundational and revelatory, and the miraculous gifts (e.g. tongues, healing, miracles) were concentrated around this unique period in the early church since those gifts were primarily revelatory and confirmatory in function. We do not therefore expect or seek 'signs and wonders' or other miraculous gifts in our meetings. There are no modern-day apostles or prophets, as the foundation for the church has already been laid in God's sufficient word. We do not therefore expect or seek prophetic messages from God outside the Bible.

Unlike some 'hard' or 'closed' forms of cessationism we do emphasise our need for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. We need God's Spirit to bring true joy, life, holiness and reverence for God in the church; and to empower us day by day to serve God in this world. We believe that as the Lord God Almighty, God can and does do miracles today according to his sovereign will; and that, in his sovereignty, he does at times graciously heal people in answer to prayer. The Lord can guide and prompt his people, bring scriptures to mind, give insight into particular pastoral situations, and even work in extraordinary ways especially in missionary contexts.

At the same time, we reject the following ideas that sadly from time to time blow through churches and create problems, cause division, stunt the growth of God's people, and take people's eyes off Christ and his word: That apostles and prophets exist today; that God always or regularly heals if we have enough faith; that we can 'name and claim' what we want; that God promises his people in this life health, wealth and prosperity; and that popular movements with false teaching and bizarre unbiblical behaviours are authentic – when in fact, ironically and sadly, such movements are often the most irreverent and disrespectful to the Spirit of God and his word.

At Redeemer Church we want to honour the Holy Spirit by acknowledging our need of him and celebrating his work in our lives and in the life the church. Churches that are full of the Holy Spirit are churches that glorify Jesus. The Holy Spirit enables us to know more deeply the gospel we

already know; to grasp more deeply the things we already have in Christ; and to feel and experience the truths we believe.

A summary of our understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit can be found in our *'Core Beliefs.'*

## **Worship**

The whole of the Christian life is worship. We express our worship of God in how we live our lives Monday to Sunday. At the same time, Sunday is special – the beginning of the new creation when Jesus rose again; the time we gather as the church to worship the risen Lord; the day we rest and remember the salvation he has won for us. The Bible is our guide in what to do when we gather as God's people on the Lord's Day.

Worship is more than singing, but God has given us music and singing to help us express our thanks and praise to him and to engage on an emotional level with the truths we believe. God's people have always been a singing people. In our Sunday gatherings we seek to worship God together and singing is a significant element within our corporate worship. We sing to remind ourselves and each other of the truths taught in the Bible, to encourage each other in living for God, and to respond to him in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, praise and petition. In our gatherings, we sing Christian songs and hymns of all kinds, old and new, where they contain biblical truth and allow us to address God and each other in the ways mentioned above.

We want to be a church where people feel comfortable to raise their hands if they want to, and where people feel comfortable not to if they don't.

## **Creation**

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to create the heavens and the earth and everything in them, both visible and invisible, to display the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness.

Along with Christians down the ages we believe that the Bible is the foundation for understanding ourselves and the world around us, including its past. The Bible teaches that God created all things out of nothing simply by his word. The creation is distinct from God and fully dependent on him. Adam & Eve were real, historical people, created directly by God in his image to rule the rest of creation under him, and were the first parents of all humanity. There was a literal historical fall and entrance of sin into God's good creation, and spiritual and physical death began for the human race as a result of the fall. The narrative of Genesis is historical and not simply a metaphor or story. Our understanding of creation has a direct impact on the gospel. As a church we do not insist on a particular view regarding the age of the earth.

## **Eschatology**

At Redeemer Church we are optimistic about the spread of the gospel and the fulfilment of the Great Commission in this present age. At the same time, we do not believe God has promised things will definitely get better, or necessarily worse, in any given generation. The 'last days' are the whole period of time between the first and second coming of Christ. Each generation of Christians should be eagerly looking forward to the return of Christ and the coming new creation,

and actively engaged here and now in the work of the gospel and living for Christ in every area of life.

Whilst we recognise there are a number of legitimate millennial views held by evangelical Christians, our position as a church is best described as 'amillennial'.