

ABSTRACT OF FAITH
Kevin James Gilbert

This is my current personal doctrinal statement. I reaffirm it regularly, develop it as demanded by God's Word, and clarify its articulation as necessary. It provides a *summary* of what I, through a lifetime of prayer, study, contemplation, dialogue, and reflection, believe to be biblical doctrine. The statement harmonizes with contemporary evangelical Christianity and also reaffirms key features of historic Christianity. It thereby identifies me not only with the Scriptures, but also in many respects with the Church Fathers, the Reformers, the Evangelical movement (as distinguished from fundamentalism), but mostly with the American Reformation popularly known as the Stone-Campbell or Restoration Movement. The statement also defines the biblical perspective which informs my specific commitment to Christian growth and proclamation: empowered by the prevenient and sanctifying grace of God the Holy Spirit, to lead myself, my sisters and brothers, and God's humanity yet outside of salvation toward greater wisdom (skillful living) through increased knowledge of God our Father, of his desire to adopt all humanity as his children through God the Son, and of his Way of Salvation. These doctrines, historically confessed by individuals and by churches, cast light on the study of God and his creation, including man and his natural, social, and cultural environments. That I confidently believe that they are biblical and valuable to the progressive edification of the church should *not* be construed to imply that I intolerantly bind the opinionated aspects of them on others (cf. Romans 14 and Thomas Campbell, "Proposition 6," in *Declaration and Address*, 1809).

AFFIRMATION 1: I BELIEVE in one sovereign God, Yahweh, eternally existing in three equal persons: God the Father; the only begotten God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and God the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and comfort. I believe that God created the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them by his spoken word in order to freely share the loving relationship of his society with his creation and thus, to mirror his glory.

AFFIRMATION 2: I BELIEVE that God has revealed himself and his truth in the created order, in the Scriptures, and supremely in Jesus Christ; and that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writing, so that they are fully trustworthy and of supreme and final authority in all they say.

AFFIRMATION 3: I BELIEVE that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God and true man, existing in one person and without sin; and I believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in his ascension into heaven, and in his present life there for us as Lord of all, High Priest, and Advocate.

AFFIRMATION 4: I BELIEVE that God directly created Adam and Eve, the historical parents of the entire human race; and that they were created in his own image, distinct from all other living creatures, and in a state of original righteousness.

AFFIRMATION 5: I BELIEVE that our first parents sinned by rebelling against God's revealed will and thereby incurred both physical and spiritual death; that consequently all human beings are born with a natural propensity or tendency to sin; that in all except Christ, this propensity has and will come to fruition in actual personal sin in thought, word, and deed.

AFFIRMATION 6: I BELIEVE in the existence of Satan, sin, and evil powers, and that, although these have been defeated by God in the cross of Christ, still engage all humans, the saints, and the forces of good in real spiritual warfare.

AFFIRMATION 7: I BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, as a representative, substitutionary, atoning sacrifice, triumphing over all evil, redeeming man and all creation; that all who have true faith in him he will justify by his shed blood, forgiving all their sins.

AFFIRMATION 8: I BELIEVE that all who have true faith in Christ will be penitent, confessing their powerlessness to save themselves, their submission to Jesus as the Lord of salvation, and their trust in the efficacy Jesus' death, burial and resurrection by imitating it by being buried in and resurrected from water. They will rise to walk in newness of life, born again by the Spirit, and receive the sanctifying, indwelling gift of the Spirit.

AFFIRMATION 9: I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit indwells and gives life to believers, empowers them through his sanctifying grace to understand the Scriptures in a way impossible without it, helps them grow to maturity in godly living (wisdom), and equips them for acceptable worship, service, and proclamation.

AFFIRMATION 10: I BELIEVE that the one, holy, universal Church is the body of Christ and is composed of individuals and communities of Christians; that its mission in this world is to be God's redeemed and redeeming community, embodying his love by worshiping God with confession, prayer, and praise; by proclaiming the gospel of God's redemptive love through our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth by word and deed; by caring for all of God's creation and actively seeking the good of everyone, especially the poor and needy.

AFFIRMATION 11: I BELIEVE in the blessed hope that Jesus Christ will return to this earth, personally, visibly, and unexpectedly, in power and great glory, to gather his elect by resurrecting the bodies of the dead, glorifying all the faithful by transforming them into humans fully suited by the Holy Spirit for eternal life; to judge the nations; and to bring his Kingdom to its ultimate perfection.

AFFIRMATION 12: I BELIEVE in the bodily resurrection of the just and unjust, the everlasting destruction of the lost, and the everlasting blessedness of the saved.

ITEMS OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Acappella music: I want to remain in the a capella tradition and maintain it in our churches as much as possible. I am comfortable defending a capella theologically, but I recognize it takes stretching inferences, and therefore has less relative authority than other doctrinal statements. Because it is inferential (and so, it is not “gospel,” among other reasons), I do not make acappella a matter of fellowship. It is a matter of conscience and advocacy for me.

Women’s Roles/Gender Issues: I am a complementarian (cf. John Piper & Wayne Grudem, eds., *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*). The church is being pressured from the left by egalitarianism, even in its evangelical feminist forms, and from the right by those believers, churches and institutions that have been oppressive and too restrictive with women. I reject both. In this context, I see the responsibility of Christians to cautiously grow toward including women in the life of the church to the full extent allowed by Scripture and in accordance with their consciences (women should not be pressured). This may be accomplished while continuing to reflect the principle of male familial headship in the church (in the roles of elder and evangelist).

Wahiawa, Hawaii
November 7, 2001