

What We Believe

For a full understanding of our beliefs please ask for a copy of our creeds and confessions, but here is a brief summary of our views in ten key areas.

1) Jesus Christ - We believe Jesus is true man and true God. He is the eternal second person of the trinity, without beginning or end. He took on human nature, and was born in Bethlehem around 5 BC. We believe that Jesus died by crucifixion around 30 AD, that he rose again on the third day, and returned to His father forty days later. His mission was to die for the sin of his people, and pay its full penalty. Because he was true God he was able to withstand the full weight of God's anger: He is the ultimate sacrifice. Because he is true man he is our perfect representative: He is able to give us everlasting life, and bring us back into relationship with God. His victory over sin and death means He is both Lord and Saviour.

2) People - When God created our universe it was "very good". Human rebellion, however, has brought sin, failing, frustration, pain and despair to our world. The pollution of this fallenness has penetrated every aspect of humanity and our world. Human will, behaviour and thought have all been affected. The ugly consequence is that all people now live in rebellion against God – whether they realise it or not. Without God's intervention, people have neither desire nor ability to worship or honour Him, and are headed for eternal separation from Him.

3) God's Rescue of People - God is a gracious creator. While human sin grieves Him greatly, He is not prepared to leave people in their rebellion. The Bible tells us that God has always planned the rescue of human beings and their universe. From the very beginning, the Old Testament reveals God's promise to send a rescuer, or Messiah. The New Testament tells us this rescuer is Jesus Christ. God's ability to save and rescue people out of their rebellion is absolute and limitless. Even though human rebellion has polluted every aspect of who we are, God's gracious initiative will always win. He acts in human lives, opening the heart, mind and soul. His Holy Spirit enables us to hear His word, see our real condition, and turn to Him in faith. God's plan to choose and rescue people is so powerful that nothing can frustrate it, break it, or dissolve it. As a result, anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ, and acknowledges Him as leader and master of their lives, can be confident that their forgiveness and eternal life is guaranteed. This forgiveness and eternal life is God's gift: it comes by grace. We cannot earn it by our attempts to live a good life, but only by faith in Jesus Christ.

4) The Bible - God's word is the basis of our confidence. The Bible is trustworthy and authoritative. God used many different people to write all the various books, but the Holy Spirit remains the primary author. He worked in the lives of these people, used their varied personalities, perspectives and life contexts and yet kept them from error as they wrote what He moved them to say. As a result, when we open the Bible we can be confident that God speaks through it, as clearly and authoritatively as ever. This is why preaching, teaching and sharing Scripture takes central place in the life of our church and its ministries. The Bible gives us all we need to understand God and His plan to rescue us in Jesus Christ, as well as telling us how to live for God in His world.

5) The Church - The Church is God's people. It's significant that while God's rescue impacts individuals, He does not want them to be isolated and alone. He draws them into the Church, the family of Jesus Christ. His intention is for them to be a new community, expressing God's original intention for human relationships. The church is to be marked by love. This will be expressed in worship of God, a desire to see people come to trust him, and a commitment to nurture Christians in their faith. These three elements are central to our mission here at Westside. God's people – His church – are called to worship and honour him in all of life – not just on Sundays. As God's Church

we encourage one another in becoming like His Son Jesus Christ in word and deed. We are happy to express our unity and solidarity with all Christians and other churches.

6) Worship - While the word “worship” often makes us think about what happens on Sunday, God’s word reminds us that worship is really an “all of life” response to God’s goodness and grace (Rom 12). We are called to show our faith and honour Jesus Christ in every aspect of life (Col 3). “Worship” is everything we do to show our thanks for all God has freely done for us and given us in His Son, Jesus Christ. The way we do our work, how we conduct our finances, how we spend our time, in addition to how we honour God at church – is all worship. In terms of Sunday worship meetings, we have an enduring commitment to keeping the Word of God central in all we do. We start with the word. We finish with the word. The preaching of the word is really the focal point of our services. We do this because God speaks to us and leads us through His Word. Our church vision, our shared expectations, the manner and style of our Sunday celebrations are built on foundations drawn from God’s word. When people come together to worship God they are there to reflect His glory back to Him. He is the focus, not people or their needs. We are called to yield our individual views, preferences and expectations to the Gospel, and to keep God and His grace the central reality.

7) The Holy Spirit - When Jesus returned to His Father He sent His Holy Spirit as comforter and counsellor (John 14). The Holy Spirit lives in all who believe without exception. His task is to continue Jesus’ work of transforming the lives of believers, to open their minds to the truth of the Word, and to be God’s presence as he lives in them. The Holy Spirit freely distributes gifts to all who belong to the Church, Christ’s body. These gifts differ from person to person, and are to be used to build others up, to spread the Gospel, to address people’s needs, and to develop God’s world in accordance with His design (1 Cor 12). Only when God’s people use their gifts fruitfully will the church increasingly move toward a mature expression of what God designed it to be (Eph 4). Accordingly, it is every believer’s responsibility to discover their gifts, develop them, and use them to honour the Lord and build the church. Westside aims to assist people in this. The best indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is a commitment to the Spirit-revealed Gospel and the presence of all the Spirit’s fruit in their lives (Gal 5:22-25).

8) Baptism - In Baptism God promises to His people to be their God and the God of their children. The water used in baptism points to the reality of the cleansing work Jesus has done on the Cross. It also assures us that Jesus’ death is effective in bringing complete forgiveness for all our sin. The Bible makes it clear that children are part of God’s covenant community. In baptism they are rightly identified with that community. A child’s baptism does not imply a child has faith, or that their parent’s faith is somehow passed to them, nor does it guarantee they will have faith at some later date. Baptism guarantees the promise of God to be their Lord and Saviour. As such, baptism draws children toward a faith response where they accept and own the promises God has made to them. When adults are baptised, the message is the same. They are assured of God’s promise of love and forgiveness, and drawn toward deeper commitment. Our typical method of baptism is sprinkling or pouring, but the mode is not important, but what baptism signifies: the certainty of God’s promise of forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus Christ.

9) Lord’s Supper - The Lord’s Supper is the church’s meal of unity in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like baptism, the Supper points us to the certainty of the promises of God, and the truth of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ. As truly as we see bread broken and wine poured, so truly did Jesus Christ absorb all the anger and wrath of God for our sin and rebellion. This makes the Supper a celebration of forgiveness, and a means of strength for following Jesus. The Supper is only open to those who have a living relationship with Jesus Christ, and who place their total confidence in Him, those who are sincerely sorry for their sins and who renew their promise to live a godly life.

10) The Future - The same Jesus who returned to the Father almost 2000 years ago will return again. At that time the whole universe will be purged of all fallenness, rebellion, sin and evil. The Triune God will be acknowledged by all creation as True King and Ruler of all. The universe will be restored to perfection, and our Father will wipe every tear from our eyes. Gone will be mourning, crying and pain. His justice will ensure that all wrongs will be made right. This wonderfully recreated universe, and every creature in it, will honour God all the time. This is the life, the relationship, the community, the justice, the peace, and the world we all deeply long for. It is already guaranteed because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and those who honour Him are assured that His grace will make them part of His new universe. Until Jesus returns, our calling as God's people is to show God's true design for life, even in our fallen world and as best we know how. Until He returns, and in His grace and power, we are increasingly to come under His Lordship, to seek a strong, healthy and vibrant church, and to work for the overthrow of every work of the evil one.