

Things which we believe in at Evans Head/Wardell Presbyterian Church

Here are some basic but very important foundations. You'll notice that these are all things that Jesus himself taught. If we are to be involved in Jesus' mission it's pretty important that we listen to him.

The Bible is completely true.

Jesus' Bible (or Scriptures) was what we call the Old Testament, the front part of our Bibles. Jesus understood that the Scriptures were God's own words (eg Matt 15:4) even though people had written them. Earlier in Matthew Jesus showed that he actually believed this. Jesus chose to live his life under the authority of Scripture (Matthew 4:4-10), even though it was tempting not to. Jesus knew that the Scriptures, God's very words were truth (John 17:17).

While Jesus was still on earth (after he rose from the dead but before he went up to heaven Matt 28, Acts 1) he told his chosen disciples that they would be his witnesses (Luke 24:46-49). As his witnesses Jesus would give them a power from on high (the Holy Spirit) to do this task. It was through the Holy Spirit that some of these disciples and some later followers of Jesus wrote the books of the New Testament. Paul, one of these Spirit empowered authors describes the process in 2 Timothy 3:16, let's take a look.

It seems that these men knew that although they were writing letters of encouragement and instruction to certain churches and people they were also writing Scripture (2 Peter 3:14-16; Revelation 22:18-19).

We would say that the whole Bible is God's authoritative word. It has no errors or contradictions and it's our supreme guide to life and faith.

Sinners are fully sinful.

When we say this we do not mean that no one can ever do anything good or right, just or kind. There are plenty of people in our world doing good, moral, just things – you might even be one of them.

What we do mean is that, apart from the work of Christ, every single person is ruled by sin. Sin has infected and impacted every single aspect of our being. In our natural state we are under its influence and power and as such enemies of God.

What does gentle Jesus have to say about this hideous claim? Well, take a look at Matthew 7:11. Jesus shows that he took it for granted that we are all evil – he knew the truth. In Mark 7:21-23 Jesus teaches that this evil was much more than skin deep. What Jesus is saying here is that we sin because we are sinners (ie: we are not labelled sinners because we sin). Sinner is the natural condition and sin is the natural consequence. If I take the Bible at it's word then I understand that I am sinful to the core.

We would say then that we hold to the teaching of the Total Depravity of all People and so their need for forgiveness through Jesus.

God's so very big.

"My God is so big, so strong and so mighty ..." That is the first line of a children's song and a great truth about God. He is very big, a lot bigger than us. In fact there are a number of things about God that are hard to comprehend.

For instance we believe that God is the only God, without beginning and without end – hard to comprehend? There's more. We believe God when he says that he exists as triune (Father, Son and Holy Spirit all eternal and divine). We say that this is what we believe even if we might not fully understand how that works. But God is after all the powerful creator and sustainer of all things and we are part of his creation. So it's quite obvious that we won't know everything like he does. We believe God when he tells us that there is nothing outside of his control even the death of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). Jesus was quite clear that God's power and control govern all things even down to granting the ability to believe in him and take him at his word (John 6:44). Some people don't like that idea, but Jesus is insistent, no one will trust in him to become one of God's children unless God enables them to (John 6:37-38).

We would say that God is sovereign.

The cross marks the spot.

The cross is rightly the most prevalent symbol of Christianity. However, what we miss today is the absolute offence of the cross in the first century. To wear a cross as an ornament then would be similar to wearing a miniature gas chamber in the 1940's or possibly an electric chair while visiting an inmate on death row. It was a despised symbol of humiliation and torture. Used by the Romans to engender dread and fear in order to maintain their oppressive rule.

Yet it was on just such a cross that sinless Jesus (God the Son) gave his life willingly as a ransom for rebellious sinners like you and me (Mark 10:45). Peter, the human author of the letter 1 Peter describes it as, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." (v18) Without the cross there is no forgiveness of sin. Without forgiveness of sin we would have to pay the price of sin ourselves and the wages of sin is death (spiritual, eternal death). Every Christian understands this truth that Jesus Christ, God's son died in my place to pay for my sin.

We would refer to this as the centrality of the cross, the need for Jesus' *atonement* sacrifice.

Grace is amazing.

The famous hymn by John Newton begins, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." When we understand what has been done for us we must agree that Grace is amazing! Why would God send the son he loves perfectly to die for people intent on rejecting him? There is no explanation other than to say it is a display of God's vast mercy, immense love and amazing grace. God is a holy, just God. He cannot leave sin unpunished. Yet he is a loving God who knows that we cannot bear the cost of our disobedience ourselves. Instead of leaving us without hope and in the path of his eternal wrath/anger, God sent Jesus to bear the brunt of his wrath on our behalf.

As Jesus interacted with people during his time on earth leading right up to his death on the cross he showed the scandalous nature of this grace: a prostitute

forgiven (Luke 7:36-50); a tax collector declared right with God (Luke 18:9-14); a condemned criminal on the verge of death promised eternal life (Luke 23:39-43).

Our desire is that we are a people continuously staggered and amazed by the truth of God's grace.

Followers are fully & firmly fixed in the family of God.

In John 6:37-39 we read some very reassuring words from Jesus. Jesus says that all the people that God brings to him for eternal life will get that life – he will not lose any of them. Notice a few things from these words. First, God has made it possible to understand the truth about Jesus. Lots of people don't understand but God has enabled you to understand. God chose you and God does not change his mind (Numbers 23:19). Secondly, Jesus will never let us go. We will sin, there will be times where we doubt or forget, times when life is hard and difficult. The promise still stands that Jesus will always stand before God on our behalf and say, "That one belongs to me, they are all right." Therefore, we can face this life with great confidence, nothing can separate us from the love of the God who loves us and has included us in his eternal plans of heavenly glory. We can also confidently approach God not based on our ability but in what Christ has achieved for us.

We expect that members of our church will not rely on their own efforts to be right with God but will thankfully and joyfully trust in Jesus for right standing.

It's an all of life proposition.

Throughout the Bible God's people are called to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15). Being holy means being set apart for God. His people displaying his characteristics which are going to be different to and often at odds with how people in our world usually do things. In fact many times people who are not God's people will not understand why we do things differently and some times they might treat us as strange or even as enemies. In fact Jesus warned his followers that people in our world who do not recognise God's glory or Jesus as Lord and Saviour will hate us and give us a hard time (Luke 21:17). But Jesus promises that if we persevere we will have eternal life (Luke 21:19).

Being fore warned is being fore armed. That's why Jesus said to count the cost if you are going to be his follower (Luke 9:23). Following Jesus is going to impact every area of your life; your priorities, your spare time, your sexual conduct, financial transactions, the way you think and speak and act. The way you work, your motivations in life, your daily routine. Every area of life belongs to Jesus.

Once Jesus healed a man who had been tormented by demons for a long while (Mark 5:1-20). When he was healed the man wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus told him to go home and tell the people about what God had done for him. The man did this and the people were amazed (Mark 5:20). As those rescued by Jesus we too are called to tell those around us what God has done for us. Following Jesus means that our normal life is lived for him. There is no special time with Jesus and then the rest of time just on our own. So whatever we are doing it is all done to the honour of Jesus – mowing the lawn, washing the dishes, eating dinner, folding clothes, building a house, brokering a deal, changing nappies. It's all done in honour of Jesus.

Life is not lived trying to pay back a debt to Jesus. Rather it is lived with a sense of thanksgiving and rejoicing in honour of Jesus, and what he has done, and the Father who sent him to do it.

Important symbols

There are two important symbols that Jesus called on his followers to observe while they wait for him to return – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Communion. These symbols or sacraments are outward and visible signs of an inward and invisible reality. If you are a follower of Jesus then these symbols will be significant and important for you.

Baptism is an outward sign that you have turned to Jesus, that you have ‘died’ to a life controlled by the sinful nature and that you have been washed clean through the blood of Jesus. At BPC we practice infant and believer baptism by sprinkling or full immersion. While baptism does not make you right with God it does symbolise a relationship with God through faith in Jesus. All members of our church confess that they are followers of Jesus. Therefore, we expect that all members of our church will be or will have been baptised.

Communion is a meal of remembrance. We use bread and wine (grape juice) to remember Jesus body broken for us (bread) and his blood spilt for our forgiveness (grape juice). Communion is open to all people who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (not just BPC members) as their Lord and Saviour. Neither the bread or the wine are anything other than symbols. They are not changed into anything different or more holy, they do not inherently possess any spiritual power – they are merely physical symbols of an important truth. However, this remembrance is an important aspect of our faith. At BPC we currently observe communion once a month alternating between morning and evening meetings.

Counting the Cost.

Two passages in Matthew’s Gospel are foundational to our understanding and approach to church.

The Great Commandment – Matthew 22:35-40.

- Jesus states that the greatest (most important) commandment is that God be absolutely first in our lives. In all that we do and say and think God is to be at the very forefront. He is to be the single greatest influence in all our lives.
- And the second greatest commandment is that we love others as we love ourselves.
- These two commandments are the basis of all the commandments ever given.
- We take this teaching seriously and hold every member to this teaching. This is the goal of our lives to love God above all and others as we love ourselves.

The Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20

- Jesus commands his followers to go to all the world and seek out people who will follow him; teaching them and bringing them into the church family, training them to continue on with this commission by the power of Jesus at work in them.

We understand that this our mission, CONNECT.GROW.SERVE