

DECLARATION OF COMMON IDENTITY

The development of this DECLARATION flows from these basic assumptions:

1. Churches, individuals, and ministries associated with the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (also subsequently referred to as "we", "us", or "our") have historically shared a common identity and desire to continue to do so for the glory of Jesus Christ.
2. It is both a biblical necessity and a shared desire that the essence of our identity be realized in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture.
3. Our historic motto, "The Bible, The Whole Bible, and Nothing But The Bible" implies both our love for the whole of Scripture, and also our non-creedal approach to its' interpretation and application. We consider the Bible to be our sole, absolute, unchanging authority. Other documents, including this one, must bow to the authority of Scripture. While this Declaration of Common Identity does not diminish the content or value of previously accepted documents such as the Message of the Brethren Ministry or the Statement of Faith, it does seek to amplify and apply them for a current generation of Grace Brethren.
4. We appreciate and honor our Grace Brethren heritage, while seeking to apply the principles of that heritage in our current cultural settings.
5. We have identified and agreed upon a threefold commitment to "Biblical Truth, Biblical Relationships, and Biblical Mission" as the essence of the Grace Brethren movement.
6. Since the early 20th century, the Grace Brethren movement has identified with the broader "evangelical/fundamental" Christian community worldwide. This continues to be our desire.
7. We desire this declaration to serve as motivation for present and future generations of Grace Brethren to mutually refine our COMMON IDENTITY under the Lordship of Jesus Christ as revealed in His Word.

OUTLINE:

I. Jesus - Our Identity In Christ

II. His Word - Our Identity In Biblical Truth

- A. Biblical Truth in Our Evangelical Core (fundamentals)
- B. Biblical Truth in Our Grace Brethren Heritage
- C. Biblical Truth in Cultural Application

III. His Church - Our Identity In Biblical Relationships

- A. Biblical Relationships in Principle
- B. Biblical Relationships in Practice
- C. Biblical Relationships in Partnership

IV. His Mission - Our Identity In Biblical Mission

- A. Biblical Mission in Perspective
- B. Biblical Mission in Presence
- C. Biblical Mission in Power
- D. Biblical Mission in Proclamation

OUR DECLARATION OF COMMON IDENTITY

We, believers in The Lord Jesus Christ associating as The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, offer this declaration with the desire of promoting and clarifying our common identity.

I. Jesus - Our Identity In Christ

We declare that Jesus Christ is the only Savior (John 14:6-10, Acts 4:12) and Lord (First Corinthians 12:3, Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:9-11). This is the center of our shared experience of true Biblical unity (Romans 15:5-7, Ephesians 4:3-6). Therefore we welcome all who share this common center in Jesus Christ to identify with us. Our identifying essence, the threefold commitment to Biblical Truth (Colossians 2:2-3), Biblical Relationships (First John 4:7-11), and Biblical Mission (Matthew 28:18-20), originates in Jesus Christ.

II. His Word - Our Identity In Biblical Truth

We declare our submission to the Bible, the Word of God, seeking to understand it according to its' own intent, as it was written.

A. Biblical Truth in Our Evangelical Core (fundamentals)

We declare our commitment to the core Biblical truths historically shared by genuine followers of Jesus Christ . . .

(1) THE ONE TRUE GOD: There is one, and only one, true God (First Timothy 2:5, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 43:10), Creator and Lord of all that is (Genesis 1:1, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16-17). God exists eternally as three Persons, never less and never more; The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, Luke 3:22, Second Corinthians 13:14).

(2) THE BIBLE: The sixty-six books authorized by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17-18, Luke 24:25-27, John 14:25-26, Luke 10:16), known as the Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God. God's inspiration and superintendence of the writing of every word of the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16, Second Peter 1:20-21) guaranteed that what was written is His Word and therefore authoritative, true, and without error (Psalm 19:7-11). God's Word is powerful and effective to accomplish His purpose of salvation among all nations (Romans 1:16, Romans 10:8-17, Romans 16:25-27). God's Spirit illumines the minds of believers in every culture to understand, apply, and disclose the unchanging truth of Scripture in fresh and relevant ways for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ (First Corinthians 2:9-16, Ephesians 1:17-23).

(3) **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:** Jesus Christ is both fully God (John 1:1-3, Titus 2:13) and fully man (First Timothy 2:5, First John 4:2). Eternally God (John 8:58), Jesus became incarnate (John 1:14, First Timothy 3:16) by virgin birth (Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:29-35), fully experienced humanity (Luke 2:42, John 19:28, Philippians 2:6-8) but never sinned (Hebrews 4:15, First Peter 2:22), died a substitutionary death (Romans 5:8, Second Corinthians 5:21, First Peter 2:24-25), resurrected bodily (Luke 24:36-43, Romans 1:4, First Corinthians 15:3-8), and ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9, Hebrews 4:14) where He is presently ministering (Ephesians 1:19-23, Hebrews 4:15-16) until He will come again personally and visibly (Acts 1:11).

(4) **THE HOLY SPIRIT:** The Holy Spirit is fully God (Acts 5:3-4) and as such is personal (John 16:7-15). He was involved in Creation (Genesis 1:2) and the inspiration of Scripture (Second Peter 1:21). His works of convicting (John 16:8-11) and regenerating (Titus 3:5) are essential to the believer's salvation. His works of indwelling (Romans 8:9), baptizing (First Corinthians 12:13), and sealing (Ephesians 1:13-14) occur simultaneously with regeneration and are the possession of every true believer. Believers have the benefit and joy of being filled (Ephesians 5:18) and walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) for empowerment in Christian life, service, and mission (Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 3:16-21, Acts 1:8).

(5) **MAN:** God directly created Adam and Eve in His own image (Genesis 1:26-28) therefore all people are bearers of that image (James 3:9). However, Adam's subsequent sin resulted in a condition of spiritual death (Genesis 3:1-24) which all people have also experienced (Romans 5:12), marring the beauty of God's image in them in every facet of life. This condition of spiritual death (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:1-3) has rendered all people unable to save themselves (Romans 8:6-8), therefore the new birth (John 1:12-13, John 3:3-5) is a necessity for salvation.

(6) **SALVATION:** The salvation brought by God is a complete and eternal salvation by His grace alone, received as the gift of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work (Ephesians 2:4-9, Titus 3:5-7, First Peter 1:18-21).

(7) **CHURCH:** The one true Church is the Body and Bride of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 5:25-32), composed of all true believers of the present age (First Corinthians 12:12-13). Believers are to assemble as local churches for worship, mutual edification, proclamation, and worldwide Gospel witness (Acts 2:42-47, Romans 15:5-7, Ephesians 4:11-16, Hebrews 10:24-25).

(8) **CHRISTIAN LIFE:** While the believer is justified by faith alone (Romans 4:5), the faith that justifies is expected to produce obedience (Romans 1:5) and good works (James 2:14-17, Titus 3:8) as evidence of its reality. The dimensions of Biblical ethics are both individual and social, and extend to every facet of life (Matthew 22:37-40, Colossians 3:17). God faithfully continues to finish the work of sanctification

which He has begun in the life of each believer (Philippians 1:6, Philippians 2:12-13) with the goal of Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29, Second Corinthians 3:18).

(9) SATAN: Satan exists as a personal being who is the adversary of God and His people (First Peter 5:8-9, Revelation 12:1-10). Jesus Christ has overcome him (First John 3:8) so that Satan's final doom is certain (Romans 16:20, Revelation 20:10).

(10) FUTURE LIFE: The Bible affirms the conscious existence of the dead (Luke 16:19-31, Philippians 1:21-23), the resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29), the judgment and reward of believers (Romans 14:10-12, First Corinthians 3:12-15, Second Corinthians 5:10), the judgment and condemnation of unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15), the eternal life of the saved (John 3:16), and the eternal punishment of the lost (Matthew 25:46, Revelation 20:15).

B. Biblical Truth in Our Grace Brethren Heritage

We declare our commitment to the Biblical truths shared throughout the history of the Grace Brethren movement . . .

(1) CHURCH: Each local church is autonomous (Philippians 1:1, Hebrews 10:24-25), but cooperating in fellowship and work (Romans 16:3-5, 16).

(2) CHRISTIAN LIFE: While we desire to submit to all of the specific teachings of the New Testament regarding the Christian life, the following have been highlighted throughout Grace Brethren history: a life of righteousness, good works and separation unto God from the evil ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2, First John 2:15-17), manifested by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15, James 5:12), maintaining the sanctity of marriage and family (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), properly exercising church discipline (Matthew 18:15-35, First Timothy 5:19-21), settling differences between Christians in accordance with the Word of God (First Corinthians 6:1-8), showing a Christlike attitude and behavior toward all men (Romans 12:17-21), exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and maintaining a life of prayer (Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6) including the privilege, when sick, of calling for the elders of the church to pray and anoint with oil in the Name of the Lord (James 5:13-18).

(3) BAPTISM: Christians should obey the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized in water (Acts 8:36-38) which is the baptism of believers by triune immersion (Matthew 28:19).

(4) COMMUNION: Christians should obey the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to visibly symbolize our communion with Him and one another through participation in a communion service which consists of the washing of the saints' feet (John 13:1-17), the Lord's Supper (First Corinthians 11:20-22, 33-34; Jude 12), and the communion of the Bread and the Cup (Matthew 26:26-28, First Corinthians 11:23-26).

(5) SECOND COMING: Jesus Christ will come in the air to remove His Church from the earth (First Corinthians 15:51-52, First Thessalonians 4:16-17) before the seven-year period (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 11:2-3, 12:6) of God's wrath (First Thessalonians 1:10, 4:16-5:9; Revelation 3:10), and afterward will

descend to the earth (Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:11) with His Church (Romans 8:19, Colossians 3:4, Revelation 19:14) to establish His millennial Kingdom upon the earth (Revelation 20:1-6).

C. Biblical Truth in Cultural Application

We declare that believers in every culture are responsible to biblically clarify and address issues and problems that face society and the Church in their culture. Such current statements currently needed in North America include . . .

- (1) We affirm the sanctity of human life (Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 9:5-6, Psalm 139:13-16), and therefore the responsibility to value and protect human life, including that of the unborn, the weak, and the aged. We, therefore, deny that actions such as abortion, genocide, active euthanasia, or similar means of harming human life have any ethical validity according to Scripture.
- (2) We affirm the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman as ordained by God (Genesis 2:21-25, Matthew 19:4-9, Ephesians 5:31-33). Therefore, we deny that marriage constituted in any other way (polygamy, same-sex relationships) has any ethical validity according to Scripture. We further affirm that sexual activity which takes place outside of the context of marriage between one man and one woman is sinful, whether it be fornication, adultery, incest, pedophilia, homosexuality, bestiality, etc. (First Corinthians 6:9-10,18; First Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 13:4).
- (3) We affirm a "complimentarian" view of the roles of men and women in the church and home (Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 5:22-33, First Timothy 2:8-15). We deny that the extreme "subordination" and "egalitarian" views sufficiently reflect Biblical teaching or healthy relationships.

III. His Church - Our Identity in Biblical Relationships

A. Biblical Relationships in Principle

We declare that the eternal inter-relationship between God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Spirit is the foundational principle of Biblical relationships (Genesis 1:26, John 17:24). Because God is a relational Being, people made in God's image are relational beings. The reality that the three Persons of the Trinity are one and yet each acts with individuality is the teaching of Jesus concerning unity with diversity in His Church (John 17:21-23, First Corinthians 12:12). According to Jesus, the world will validate the authenticity of His message and mission (John 17:23), as well as our discipleship (John 13:34-45) by observing the way His people relate to one another.

B. Biblical Relationships in Practice

We declare that the New Testament statements that include the phrase "one another" provide a basic description of the practice of Biblical relationships. These are: love one another (John 13:34-35, John 15:12, Romans 12:10, First Thessalonians 3:12, First Thessalonians 4:9, First Peter 1:22, First John 3:11 and 23, First John 4:7 and 11, Second John 5), be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50), wash one another's feet (John 13:14),

give preference to one another in honor (Romans 12:10), do not judge one another (Romans 14:13), accept one another (Romans 15:7), admonish one another (Romans 15:14), greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16, First Corinthians 16:20, Second Corinthians 13:12, First Peter 5:14), when you come together to eat, wait for one another (First Corinthians 11:33), have the same care for one another (First Corinthians 12:25), through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), show tolerance for one another in love (Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13), be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32), forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13), speaking to one another, teaching and admonishing in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16), be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21, First Peter 5:5), do not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9), comfort one another (First Thessalonians 4:18), build up one another (First Thessalonians 5:11), encourage one another (First Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 10:25), consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24), confess your sins to one another (James 5:16), pray for one another (James 5:16), as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another (First Peter 4:10), be hospitable to one another without complaint (First Peter 4:9).

C. Biblical Relationships in Partnership

We declare the value of mutuality in discipleship (John 13:34-35, Second Timothy 2:2) and the necessity of cooperation with other believers for the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Philippians 1:3-8, 4:15-18). Each church or organization identified with us has the liberty to constitute itself and enter into cooperative relationships as led by the Holy Spirit under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (see section I. of this DECLARATION). We intend and desire that our Declaration of Common Identity be applied as an attraction that will draw other believers to identify and cooperate with us and we with them, not as a barrier to repel or divide. We do affirm that Biblical wisdom and purity require us to maintain distinctions that protect us from the evil of the world (Romans 12:2, Second Corinthians 6:14-18) as well as harm and division from within (Acts 20:28-31, Romans 16:17-20, Jude 4-24).

IV. His Mission - Our Identity in Biblical Mission

A. Biblical Mission in Perspective

We declare that God, the Bible, and the Church are essentially missionary by nature. God the Father is a missionary-sending Father, sending His Son to be the Savior of the world (First John 3:9-10). God the Son came as a missionary into the world to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and sending His disciples as He Himself was sent (John 20:21). God the Holy Spirit empowers the Church for mission (Luke 24:46-49, Acts 1:8). The Bible communicates God's desire that His glory be declared among all the nations (First Chronicles 16:24, Psalm 96:3) from which He is calling His people as His Own possession (First Peter 2:9, Revelation 5:9). The Church has the Great Commission as her motivating principle (Matthew 28:18-20), with her focus on reaching the unreached and least-reached.

B. Biblical Mission in Presence

We declare that the presence of God's people as salt and light in the world is essential to Biblical mission (Matthew 5:13-16, James 2:18, First John 3:16-18). We affirm our agreement with the Charis Commitment to Common Mission, including its commitment to integrated ministries stressing the impact of the Gospel upon the whole person and the whole Creation (Colossians 1:18-23).

C. Biblical Mission in Power

We declare that Jesus Christ, His Spirit, and His Gospel are powerful to accomplish His mission (John 14:12-14, John 15:4-5, Acts 1:8, Romans 1:16). We gratefully acknowledge His power in us (Second Peter 1:3), and our complete dependence upon Him.

D. Biblical Mission in Proclamation

We declare the absolute necessity of the proclamation of the Gospel in both word and deed (Mark 16:15, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:14-17, First Corinthians 15:1-5, First Thessalonians 1:5-8).

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS

- (1) We declare that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord.
- (2) We declare our submission to the Bible, the Word of God, seeking to understand it according to its' own intent, as it was written.
- (3) We declare our commitment to the core Biblical truths historically shared by genuine followers of Jesus Christ.
- (4) We declare our commitment to the Biblical truths shared throughout the history of the Grace Brethren movement.
- (5) We declare that believers in every culture are responsible to biblically clarify and address issues and problems that face society and the Church in their culture.
- (6) We declare that the eternal inter-relationship between God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Spirit is the foundational principle of Biblical relationships.
- (7) We declare that the New Testament statements that include the phrase "one another" provide a basic description of the practice of Biblical relationships.
- (8) We declare the value of mutuality in discipleship and the necessity of cooperation with other believers for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.
- (9) We declare that God, the Bible, and the Church are essentially missionary in nature.
- (10) We declare that the presence of God's people as salt and light in the world is essential to Biblical mission.
- (11) We declare that Jesus Christ, His Spirit, and His Gospel are powerful to accomplish His mission.
- (12) We declare the absolute necessity of the proclamation of the Gospel in both word and deed.