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The following is a paper I wrote a number of years ago briefly describing my personal biblical beliefs and interpretations. I updated the document to include definitions of theological words that may be unfamiliar to many readers.

The subsequent statements I am making here, do not reflect the official doctrinal statement of the *Cheshire Community Church*, but they do not contradict their statement in any way. The basic beliefs of the *Cheshire Community Church* are identical to the statement of the *National Association of Evangelicals*. That statement can be viewed at: <https://www.nae.net/statement-of-faith/>.

(The above is the official belief statement of the church and the view of the *Cheshire Community Church* members, but not necessarily those who attend)

### ***My View of God (Theology)***

#### *The Father*

I hold an orthodox Christian view of God. That is, I believe that there is only one true and eternal God, who exists in the form of a Trinity. This has been the official view of Christianity throughout history.

There is one God the Father who is the creator of everything we can see and cannot see (Isaiah 43.1.) He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He has always existed, and will always exist. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1.8.) He is hidden from our eyes, but it is His nature and character to reveal Himself to people; he does this most effectively through His Son. (Luke 10:22.)

Since it is God's plan to reveal Himself, ministry to make him known is foremost (Hebrews 1.1.)

### *The Son*

Jesus Christ is the only begotten son of God. He existed in the form of God, but did not feel that He must grasp onto His divinity (Philippians 2.6.) He emptied Himself, and took on the form of humankind. He, therefore, has become our Lord (Luke 10.22.)

Christ's entrance into the human race was through the Virgin Mary, who conceived Him by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.35.) He was begotten; and not made. He is co-equal with the Father, and He existed before the world began, and all things that have come into being have come through Him (John 1.1-4.) He is truly God, and He is truly a man. The Son was incarnated and put on the form humanity. He became subject to all the infirmities of humankind. (Philippians 3.) He learned from teachers and grew into adulthood (Luke 2.46.) He was tempted in every way that mortal human being are tempted. Yet He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15.) He displayed a full range of human limitations. He was hungry and He thirsted. He was weary, and He wept. He spent His days in communion with the Father, and He listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He reached out to the people with the word of God. He was despised by many, and He learned obedience to God the Father through the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5.8.)

Jesus portrayed five main characteristics of ministry: He was the Great Apostle (Hebrews 3.1,) He was a bold prophet (Matthew 21.11.) He was a good Pastor (John 10.11.) He was an inspiring Teacher (John 13.13.) He was an extraordinary evangelist (Matthew 4.23.) It is upon these characteristics of Christ that I build my ecclesiology (an understanding of the church.)

### *The Holy Spirit*

There is one Holy Spirit, who is God and dwells in the holy universal church; He is the giver of life. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified by His Church. The Holy Spirit brings people to repentance by convicting them of their sins (John 16.8.) He is also the teacher who guides the people of the church into all truth (John 16:13.) The Holy Spirit is granted to individual people to profit the whole church group. At least nine spiritual gifts are manifested in people with the purpose of edifying the whole body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; John 16:13.)

In addition, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22.) There is no law against such things, and they are emphasized in ministry, and should be increasingly reflected in the lives of the believers as they grow in grace toward maturity (Galatians 5.22-23.)

### ***Creation and Intelligent Design***

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The Spirit of God moved upon the chaos (Genesis 1.2,) and all things created came into existence through the Son (John 1.1-3.) Beyond this, I do not care. How it was done does not matter.

Human beings of both sexes were created in the Image of God (Genesis 1.26-27.) Therefore, all humans are to be treated with dignity, whether they are male or female and whether they are believers or not.

Initially everything in the creation was good, and God gave humans the dominion over “the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that

moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1.28.) Therefore, a balanced ministry must emphasize a care for our environment as well as care for souls.

### ***Hamartiology (The Biblical Study of Sin)***

To discuss the doctrine of salvation requires we begin with a discussion of Hamartiology (sin.) New Testament writers base their soteriology (the study of salvation) on an underlying doctrine of a sinful fallen mankind. According to the Scriptures, the original people disobeyed God and became acquainted with the knowledge of both good and evil (Genesis 3:22.) Brothers began to slay brothers and death spread to all (Genesis 4:8.) This side effect of sin means all people began to die of old age and natural causes. The whole cosmic order went from being very good, to being a place where good and evil co-exist (Genesis 2.17.) Therefore, any biblical definition of salvation must include an answer for the presence of evil in the world, and the problem of death. And any true salvation must seek to restore the earth to pre-fall condition so far as is possible. Very few people would deny that evil is prevalent in the world, and none will deny there is death.

These thoughts are a good starting point in evangelism leading to salvation.

### ***Soteriology (The Biblical Study of Salvation)***

I do not agree with Calvin or Augustine (great Christian teachers of the past) in thinking that the fall of humankind resulted in their “total depravity.” In my opinion, it is more scriptural to view humankind as being damaged. (instead of seeing them as being completely depraved) I base this view on both observation, and scripture. It appears that some people are exceedingly wicked, while others are quite good. I have observed by my work with church people that even the best people have a small mixture of wickedness;

My work in prison ministry has shown me that even the worst people have a flicker of good within them.

The Apostle Paul wrestled with the problem of evil and concluded that all human beings existed within their forefathers (1 Corinthians 15:22.) (Science has in my lifetime corroborated Paul's thought with the discoveries about human DNA.)

Since Adam and his wife sinned and died because of their sin, all people continue to sin and die. Paul preached that since sin came in by one man, all can be made alive in Christ, by His one act of righteousness.

The question of salvation is then not a matter of how good a person is, or how evil they might be. The question becomes: "Are they a part of Adam, or are they born anew and baptized into Christ?" Personal salvation comes because of a person's faith in God's Christ; and without such faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11.6.)

Baptism (turning around and starting over,) therefore becomes a central issue in salvation. Not baptism as an outward legal act, but a lifestyle within the Savior. When any person puts their faith in Christ, they are supernaturally baptized into His body (Romans 6.) Just as the ancient poet has said, "in Him we live, and move, and have are being" (Acts 17.28.) Christians are placed into Christ's supernatural birth, and they have a new life. (This is sometimes called a born-again experience.) Christians are placed into Jesus Christ's death so that sin no longer has power over them. Christians are baptized into Jesus' resurrected life so they may walk therein. Believers are immersed into Christ's ascension, and are therefore seated together with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2.6.) Those who are in Him, will come with him to rule and reign at the Parousia (second

coming of Christ.) This understanding is central to the things I teach and how I minister, and is also why I can see no proper place for infant baptism.

### ***Ecclesiology (The Biblical Study of the Church)***

Just as a proper study of God brings us to a proper understanding of Christ. A proper understanding of Christ brings us to a proper understanding of the nature of salvation. A Proper understanding of salvation leads to the church.

The Patristic (early church fathers) writers understood this. They contended for a proper understanding of the Trinity, and the two natures of Christ (human and divine,) because they understood that a proper soteriology (understanding of salvation was at stake.) They understood Jesus to be fully God and fully human. He was the Word of God; he who had bridged the gap between a Holy God and sinful people; the exact expression of God's communication to people.

I reason that since Christ is both divine and human, then the church (that which is His representation of the earth) must be both human and divine as well. God is dwelling in and among human beings. And, if Jesus is the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, then a healthy church must display those attributes as well.

A five-fold ministry model has been emphasized by members of the *Latter Rain Movement*. This understanding is patterned on the *ascension gifts* mentioned in Ephesians 4.11. As I noted above, human gift ministries derive directly from the person of Jesus Christ. That is: Jesus is an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, and a teacher. These aspects of Jesus Christ would not be denied by Greek Orthodox believers, Roman Catholics or the most fundamental Baptist. Yet some of them think these gifts currently do not exist as orders of the church.

If Christ is all of these things, then I argue the visible body of Christ (church) must demonstrate these traits as well. Some members of the church are especially gifted in these areas. They are to help the church grow in these areas. Here is a table that explains the calling and motivation, according to this system:

	<b>Apostle</b>	<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Evangelist</b>	<b>Pastor</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
<i>Motivation</i>	Missions	Justice	Witness	Gathering	Instruction
<i>Of Christ</i>	Heb. 3.1	Mat. 21.11	Mat. 4.23	Joh. 10.11	Joh 13.13
<i>Of Women</i>	Rom. 16.7	1Cor. 11.5	Phil.4.2-3	Mat. 23:37	Tit. 2.3

Many Americans are very uncomfortable with using the word *apostle* or *prophet*. Yet these are good descriptive terms. The American church has tended to avoid using these terms and call all such people *ministers* or *pastors*, when some of these people may not be pastors at all, but in fact their true motivation gifts may be missions (apostolic ministry) or social justice (Prophetic Ministry.) A healthy church will certainly contain all of these motivations and work in conjunction in order to carry out the great commission which is to make converts, and reach the whole earth.

Since women are equal in creation, as noted above, I have shown in this table that they may and should function within the church. (see the third line of the above table) When thinking of the church, some groups have tended to emphasize the gathered people of God. Others have viewed the church as being those who gather at the communion table, and equally partake of His body and blood. Some others, like the Apostle Paul have tended to view the church as the Body of Christ. Each member functions differently, and each person contributes their own gifts to the good of the whole.

I am Baptist in orientation, I view the church as being composed only of believers, each congregation being local in nature, but spiritually connected to other congregations of every Trinitarian variety.

After studying the concept of catechesis (the process of growing in Christian spirituality,) I am less inclined to understand salvation as an instantaneous experience brought about by a crisis of faith. I once saw it that way. That was my experience, and that was how it was taught in the Pentecostal circles I was involved in. However, my more mature view is to see salvation as a process that begins with an awakening and then develops toward maturity. I allow participation on many levels for those who have not yet come to the place where they have repented and are wholeheartedly following Christ. This may differ in other congregations, but I believe it takes time for people to change and since they are in the image of God, they deserve their dignity.

### ***Eschatology (The Biblical Study of the End Times)***

I believe in a literal Parousia (second coming of Jesus Christ) and a physical resurrection at the end of time. This thought scriptural, and a plank in the Apostle's creed (an ancient statement of belief.) The Eucharist (communion where bread and wine are shared) it is said, proclaims the Lord's death until he comes, thus bridging the gap between the first and second advents (comings of Christ.) Each time the communion is served it proclaims the death of Jesus until he returns (1 Corinthians 11:26.)

### ***My Conclusion***

The New Covenant is a covenant of salvation. It is a new relationship in Christ acquired by faith in the son of God. It is living within Christ that causes us to be able to overcome and attain personal salvation with important societal implications.



The societal implications (social justice) of salvation have been neglected by some in the evangelical wing of the American church. It is equally true that the implications of personal salvation have been neglected within folds of the liberal American church. The full implications of salvation must include a world dominated by the kindness and the grace of God. It will truly be a place where the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2.4.)