

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT OF FAITH (Part 1)

CANDIDATE'S NAME: **Nathan B. Edwards**

DATE: March 1, 2016

Please attach a typed statement of your own beliefs in your own words about the following:

1. The Bible (Bibliology)

I believe in the full inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authority, necessity, and sufficiency of Scripture. The 66 books of the Bible originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are the God-breathed Word of God. These writings have been providentially preserved, transmitted, and translated so that modern critical editions and the translations based upon them make available God's Word with the highest fidelity. I believe in Sola Scriptura, meaning that these books contain all of God's special written revelation, that the canon is closed, and that these Scriptures are God's ordained means of expressing His will to His people. The Scriptures, then, are the supreme authority for faith and practice for the individual and for the church. I believe that this Word is living and active and that, though it can be read and understood by anyone, it requires the illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit for a person to respond to it in faith. I believe that the Bible centers around God's plan for redemption, thus I believe the center of the Bible's revelation is the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Bible was written through human agents who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that what they wrote retains both the individuality and unique voice of the human author while at the same time being God's very words and thus are authoritative in all its parts and for all generations. Though the Bible is relevant to all times and all places, and though its message of salvation is sufficiently clear to be understood by the widest audience, it still requires careful and responsible interpretation and trained teachers to communicate the fullness of its message into our contemporary context. Additionally, though I believe the Scriptures should be studied privately, the Word is also meant to be preached. I believe hearing the preached Word is a means of grace that should not be neglected. Thus my theological beliefs on the Bible entails a commitment to expositional preaching so that the whole counsel of God may be taught and proclaimed for the edifying and nourishing of the flock.

2. God the Father (theology proper)

God is spirit; He is perfect, unchanging, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. He is triune, meaning there is one God, existing in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person being fully God. God is self-existent and perfectly free; He is the sole necessary being. He is the creator and sustainer over all that exists. He is completely sovereign over His creation and ordains all which comes to pass. He is altogether holy, righteous, loving, good, wise, patient, true, just, gracious, merciful, and faithful. He is the Judge and the Justifier and to Him alone belongs all the glory in this age and the next. Though He is transcendent and beyond knowing fully He also makes Himself known genuinely and personally through self-revelation. Thus true knowledge of God depends upon what He has revealed in His Word about Himself. God is a covenant making God who elects, saves, leads, rules, protects, and provides for His people. God made His name, YHWH, known to His special people in the Old Covenant, and – even more intimately and exclusively – revealed Himself as Abba, Father in the New Covenant by His only begotten Son, the Christ. The revelation that in Christ God is our Father is the highest and most wondrous gift of the gospel. In the gospel, believers are born again with God's Spirit, united to Christ, and adopted as children of God so that the love the Father has for each of His children is the infinite, perfect, unbreakable, joyous, and eternal love that He has

for His only begotten Son. He knows each of His children by name and invites each of them with delight to come into his presence with confidence and boldness in order to ask whatever they need. He is a jealous God who will not allow a single one of His children to be snatched from His hand. He lovingly disciplines His children so that they will be holy as He is holy. On the last day He will wipe away every tear and He will celebrate our salvation with a great banquet in the new heavens and the new earth. All who trust in Christ will dwell in His blessed presence forever.

3. Jesus Christ (Christology)

The Son is the second person of the Trinity. He is the Word who was with God and is God. He is equal to the Father and shares in all God's attributes. Through the Son was everything made that has been made. In full agreement with the Father, the Son was sent to take on flesh and save His people from their sins. The Son took on sinless humanity in the incarnation by being born of the Virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit. As the God-man, Jesus is one person with two natures, one fully divine and the other fully human. These two natures are not to be confused, changed, divided, or separated. In the incarnation the fullness of deity fully dwelled in the person of Jesus and, though He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, He was never emptied of any of His deity. As the God-man, Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and humanity. He perfectly represents God to mankind and perfectly represents mankind to God. Jesus as our mediator is our prophet, priest, and king. Jesus is the Christ, not just the Son of God but the son of David, the long-awaited Savior and King not only of the Jews, but of all nations. He is the seed of Adam who crushes the head of the serpent; the seed of Abraham who brings blessing to all nations; the prophet greater than Moses who establishes the New Covenant; the son of David whose throne is established forever; and the priest in the order of Melchizedek who perfectly atones and intercedes for His people. In His role as the Christ, Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness by perfectly obeying God's will even to the point of death and has endured the full punishment for the sins of His people. In being offered up by the eternal Spirit He made full atonement for the sins of His people. "He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through him" (John 14:6). In His resurrection Jesus has overcome the power of Satan, sin, and death, setting all who trust in Him free. Jesus has ascended back to heaven in His glorious resurrection body to sit at the right hand of God, where He makes intercession for His people and waits for all His enemies to be put under His feet. He has been exalted above every name. All the faithful in Christ await for the bodily return of Christ when He will usher in the final judgment and establish once and for all the kingdom of God in a new heavens and a new earth where God, through Christ, will be perfectly wedded to His people, never to be separated again.

4. The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Being fully God He shares all the attributes of God. He is a full participant in the decrees and works of God. The work of the Holy Spirit in history is often to bring completion to God's plans. He makes, upholds, defends, preserves, empowers, equips, inspires, illuminates, quickens, convicts, seals, purifies, sanctifies, edifies, and perfects to the glory of God. In creation the hovering presence of the Spirit oversaw the fulfillment of the fiat culminating in the creation being "very good" in God's eyes. He breathed life into Adam making Him a living creature. He anointed and empowered craftsmen to make a tabernacle according to God's specifications in order that God may dwell with His people, Israel. He empowered through anointing judges, kings, and prophets to lead, deliver, and teach His people to be holy. He inspires and providentially preserves God's revelation in the Scriptures.

He was present in the conception of Jesus, the Holy One, and anointed Christ's earthly ministry. In the crucifixion He offered Jesus up for a perfect atonement and raised Christ three days later to be the firstborn from the dead. The Spirit applies the accomplished redemption of Christ to the elect by regenerating them unto saving faith. He seals and preserves God's people by indwelling them and sanctifying them in the Word and conforming them ever more into the likeness of Christ. He gathers the elect into one people, the church, where He works profound peace and unity through knitting God's people together with one baptism, one meal, the cry "Abba, Father," and the confession "Jesus is Lord." He edifies and equips His church to accomplish her work through calling individuals and distributing gifts as He pleases. The Holy Spirit brings the believer at the moment of death into a state of complete and permanent sanctification so that he or she possesses real righteousness, incorruptible freedom from sin and temptation, and joyous and eternal welcome into God's presence. Finally, the Holy Spirit brings God's work of creation and redemption to perfection when He gives new life to our earthly bodies and glorifies them in the resurrection to be eternal residents of the new heavens and the new earth. These spiritual bodies will be perfectly fitted to behold God as He is, to worship Him in Spirit and Truth for all eternity, and to participate in the communion that is presently known only within the Triune God. To this glorious eternal hope the Spirit calls out, "Come!"

5. Mankind (Anthropology)

Humans were created by God on the sixth day of creation as a special and distinct act. Man is created with both body and soul, both of which were created good and are essential constituents to our humanity. Mankind, both male and female, bears the image of God, which makes all humanity equal in dignity and worth from conception and all of life thereafter. As image bearers we are fundamentally covenant creatures. Humans possess the unique attributes to know God personally, to obey Him, and to make God known by godly rule and representation over the earth. Indeed, being created male and female points to our covenantal constitution, as it reveals we are made to be in relationship. Man is created to worship the one true God and to fulfill the two great commandments: to love God and to love one another. Mankind was created in a state of righteousness and with the moral ability to either obey or disobey God. I believe Adam was a historical person who stood as the representative of all mankind in the covenant of creation and was offered life for himself and all his progeny in obeying the one rule given him in the Garden, but death if he disobeyed. In Adam's transgression, he and all mankind in him, fell into a state of sin and depravity. Being sinful by nature, mankind is now born separated from intimate fellowship with God, in a state of guilt, and unable to do good. Indeed, man's will is inclined toward evil continually. Further sin has introduced suffering, misery, and death into the human condition, and has brought all of us under God's wrath. At death, the body and soul becomes separated until the resurrection. The soul continues in a conscious existence in the intermediate state between bodily death and resurrection. At the resurrection all mankind will have their souls reunited with their bodies, which will be changed and uniquely fitted for either eternal life or eternal punishment. I believe that the gospel is the only remedy to the fallen human condition. By the gospel the believer is not only reconciled to God but regenerated so that the believer recovers the moral ability to do good from the heart, though imperfectly. Our complete freedom from sin awaits the new heavens and the new earth and the resurrection body, where we will finally bear the likeness of the man of heaven in holiness and incorruptibility for all time.

6. Sin (Hamartiology)

I believe, as R. C. Sproul states, sin is cosmic treason. Sin is an act of overthrow toward God's lordship because in it – in every sin, whether "large" or "small" – is the belief that the

individual knows better than God regarding what is good and right. Thus sin erupts from self-idolatry and pride and reveals the human heart to be at enmity toward God. Sin is breaking the law of God, which involves both transgressions and omissions. It is the failure to give to God what He is owed. In Adam's fall all mankind has fallen with him. Mankind shares in the guilt of Adam and has inherited his sin nature, therefore everyone is born guilty and radically depraved. Our will is bent against God and is incapable of doing anything truly good. Sin conceals itself in the human heart through deception and self-justification. The dimensions of sinfulness are grotesque: It causes incalculable harm and corruption to relationships, to the goodness of creation, and infects every human institution. It is the ultimate source of all suffering, disease, and death. Our sinfulness leaves humanity in a state of blindness, imprisonment, and spiritual deadness. Its greatest offense, though, is to God. Because God is infinitely holy, sin against him creates an infinite offense. Because God's holiness cannot coexist with unrighteousness, sin demands an infinite and eternal separation from the loving presence of God. Sin places all of humanity under God's judgment and wrath, the outcome of which is only delayed because of the longsuffering of God. Sin rightly grasped leads to total despair in oneself. It cannot be removed by good works and it cannot be atoned by any offering we can make. Sin incapacitates us so completely that we are incapable of any good. Our sin warrants God's wrath and makes all of us deserving of eternal damnation in hell. Sin places all mankind in deepest darkness and utter lostness – in a state so desperate that our only hope must be in the sovereign grace of God.

7. Salvation (Soteriology)

I believe the Reformed doctrine of salvation. I believe that the four acts of the Bible, creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, were all ordained in the eternal counsel of God, described in Reformed theology as the covenant of redemption.

I believe that man is totally depraved as a result of the fall of Adam. We are dead in sin, inclined toward evil, and are unable to respond to the gospel until we are born again by the Spirit. I believe that God has determined from before the foundation of the world to save a group of people out of fallen humanity to be His own and to show them His mercy. I believe that this choice is completely unconditional, that it is determined by God's sovereign good pleasure and does not rest on the merit, will, or foreseen choices of the individual.

I believe that the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who went willingly to die for the elect. I believe that Jesus' death on the cross was a penal substitutionary atonement. His atonement was definite and effectual and it secured an eternal redemption for God's elect only. I believe that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and mankind and that He is the way, the truth, and the life, that no one comes to the Father except through Him.

I believe that the Spirit regenerates to saving faith those whom the Father has elected and the Son has died for. I believe that faith is salvific only because it unites us to the saving work of Jesus Christ. Faith unites us to Christ so that our punishment for sin is imputed to Him and His righteousness is imputed to us. I believe that we are justified at the point of saving faith, that we receive the Holy Spirit as a deposit of our inheritance, and that we are adopted as sons and daughters of God, the Father. I believe saving faith involves both a repentance from sin and a submission to Christ as Lord. Moreover, I believe that this faith and repentance is given by God's grace. Thus I believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

In Christ we are new creation with a new heart that desires to know and obey God. I believe it is impossible for a person who has received the Holy Spirit to ever lose his or her salvation, though such a person can still fall into sin -- even quite seriously. I believe that a person that is truly saved will persevere to the end, and that those who do not persevere reveal they were never truly saved. I believe the hope of our salvation is brought to completion at the Day of the Lord

where all of God's redeemed are declared righteous on account of Christ and displayed as the pure and blameless Bride of Christ. At the wedding of the Lamb the entire creation will be redeemed and made into a new heavens and a new earth where God will dwell perfectly with His people and heaven and earth will be brought into perfect and indissoluble union.

8. Satan

I believe that Satan is a real, personal, spiritual being, who is known by many names in Scripture including: the devil, the Adversary, the Accuser, the Tempter, the father of lies, and the Evil One. He is one of the three great enemies of God's people, the other two being sin and death. I believe that Satan was once an angel who fell from his place in heaven and brought many of the angels with him in rebellion to God and His purposes. Satan took the form of the serpent to deceive Eve and Adam into sin. He is a formidable enemy, whom no human can overcome on his own. Indeed he has the world entirely under his sway – Christ calls him the prince of this world. Though Satan is powerful and able to incite people to sin and to create great evil and havoc, he is nonetheless always under God's control. In fact, God sovereignly uses Satan to accomplish His purposes. Jesus defeated the power of Satan by overcoming all his temptations, living in perfect obedience to God through the Spirit, dying on the cross for sins and being raised to life three days later. Though Satan's days are numbered, he still seeks to resist God by attacking His church in numerous ways, even by presenting himself as an angel of light. Though he is a roaring lion seeking to devour God's people, the armor of God is able to withstand all the attacks of Satan, and the believer can rest knowing that the One who is in him is greater than the one who is in the world. Thus, though Satan can cause great pain and damage, he is powerless to snatch any believer out of the hand of God and his end is certain. He will be thrown into the lake of fire where he will no longer be able to accuse, harass, tempt, deceive, or in anyway harm God's people or creation ever again.

9. Angels and Demons

Angels and demons are personal spiritual beings created by God. They are very powerful. Angels are God's ministers who are sent to do His will. They are mighty and impressive beings who instill fear in those who see them, but they are not to be worshipped. They serve God in various ways from ministering to Him around His throne, to delivering messages, to sending strength and comort, and to fighting as His armies. Demons are fallen angels, who at some point after the creation were led by Satan in rebellion against God. Demons work to oppose the work of God and God's people. Though they are God's enemies they are nonetheless subject to God's command and are under His control. There is no salvation for the fallen angels; they will eventually be consigned to the lake of fire with Satan and all the unbelievers for eternity.

10. The Church (Ecclesiology)

I affirm the classic confession that the church is one, holy, universal, and apostolic. By one, I understand that there is only one people of God, who are bound by one baptism, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father. The church on earth, often called the militant church, is also one with the church in heaven, often called the triumphant church, which is made up of the saints in the Old Testament as well as all those who have died in the Lord. By holy, I mean that the church has been sanctified by the blood of Christ and set apart as God's holy people in the Holy Spirit. Members of the church are citizens of heaven and sojourners and exiles in the present world. Though they are not yet righteous they are being progressively sanctified through being raised up in the teaching and preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and the ministry of the church to one another. By universal, I mean that the church is not divided along national, ethnic, racial,

denominational, or familial lines. It is universal, in that Christ will have people worshipping him from every tongue and tribe and nation. By universal is also meant that the true number of the church is invisible, known only to God and thus is not identical to the externally visible church, identified by local congregations. The invisible church and the visible church have great overlap but are not the same, i.e. some in the visible church are not part of God's elect and some of God's elect are not counted in the visible church, such as the church triumphant and those who perish in the womb. By apostolic, I believe that the true church is founded upon the teaching of the apostles and the prophets, the inspired authors of the Old and New Testaments. Any given church is a true church based on its fidelity to the Word of God.

A local congregation belongs to the fraternity of the true church if it possesses the following three marks: the preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the exercise of church discipline. Though no church is perfect, I believe a church should strive to be ever increasing in its purity in their adherence to these marks. I believe the church exists primarily to worship God and to witness to Him, but also to make disciples through evangelism and discipleship, and to be a people who are known by their love for one another and ministry for one another. I believe the church is a covenantal people and thus believers and their children are counted as full members in the visible church. Finally, I believe the church on heaven and on earth will eventually be brought together at the Last Day as part of the Wedding Day of the Lamb where the invisible and visible church become one standing before God in new glorified resurrection bodies. In eternity the church will dwell physically in God's presence and rule with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth.

11. The Spiritual Life of the Believer

Upon conversion the believer is a new creation. The believer is immediately justified by faith in the finished work of Christ so that there is no longer any condemnation. The believer is also adopted as a beloved child of God, calling Him Father. At conversion a person is no longer a slave to sin or trapped in it; the believer is able to resist sin and to walk in righteousness by the power of the Spirit. Sanctification comes through putting to death – mortifying – remaining sin and being conformed more and more to the image of Christ through growing in obedience to the Word.

God provides many means of grace to the believer to grow in sanctification, these include: the ministry of the Word, participation in the sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of believers. Given these means of grace, the church is the institution where God's people are able to grow most in Christlikeness, and so involvement and membership in the visible church should not be neglected. The Spirit uses these means, as well as His divine power, to effect the perseverance of the saints in the Christian life. It is through the evidence of perseverance and the evidence of the Spirit's fruit in the individual's life that a believer finds assurance of her salvation. As certain as sanctification is for all true believers it is nonetheless the case that on this side of eternity no believer is ever entirely free from the presence of sin. Indeed, even the most mature believer is never so sanctified as to cease from all sinning. Believers remain capable of committing gross sin. However, I believe that true believers will eventually be brought back through genuine confession and repentance.

At death the believer's sanctification is brought to completion – all remaining impurity and unrighteousness is finally removed and the believer is immediately brought with joy into the presence of God. The final stage for the believer is glorification which awaits the resurrection of the body. At this point the believer's soul is reunited with his body that has been made imperishable, incorruptible, and immortal. The believer will live as a member of the new

creation where God will dwell unrestrictedly with His people who will worship Him in perfect communion and joy for all eternity.

12. Future Things (Eschatology)

I believe eschatology involves both a personal component and a general component. Regarding personal eschatology, I believe the Bible teaches an intermediate conscious state which all people enter into upon death. Those who are trusting in Christ as their Lord and Savior go to be in a blissful state that is in the presence of the Lord. Those who were not trusting in Christ are sent into a place of extreme suffering and torment. This separation is total and irreversible. This intermediate state is conscious, but disembodied, and thus remains anticipatory of the consummation of the kingdom. The resurrection will be on the last day and precedes the final judgment where all who have died and all who are still alive, believer and unbeliever, will be brought before God's judgment seat to be publically judged for all their works while in the body. In this judgment all will be found guilty of sin and unworthy of heaven. However, those trusting in Christ will also find their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and will rejoice in the grace of God as He declares them justified solely on the righteousness and atoning blood of Christ. Those who are not found in the Book of Life will be sentenced to eternal punishment in hell with Satan and the demons. This punishment will be conscious, horrific, and unceasing. I do not find any allowance in the Bible for annihilationism or for post-mortem conversion. Those who are found in the Book of Life will be part of the new heavens and the new earth where they will enjoy the presence of God and the Lamb for eternity.

Regarding general eschatology, I believe there is much that is unknowable in any great detail. I believe we live in the latter days and that the following eschatological events are still future: the final gathering of God's elect, which includes a mass conversion of the nation of Israel; the resurrection of the dead and transformation of all living into their glorified bodies; the bodily return of Christ; the final judgment; and the new heavens and the new earth. I find the amillennial position most compelling, but am far from dogmatic at this point. In short, I believe Christ's return, which will be at the end of the age, will come with the world looking similarly to how it appears today, with the righteous and the unrighteous existing side-by-side. On that day Christ will separate the righteous and the unrighteous once and for all. I believe in light of these future events that the church is to live eschatologically, i.e. living as the Lord's prayer teaches us to live – as citizens of the kingdom of heaven who are constantly and fervently praying and working for the day when it will be on earth as it is in heaven.

13. Evangelism

My views of evangelism flow out of my Reformed understanding of soteriology. I do not believe the success of evangelism rests in the skills or abilities of the evangelist, but in the God who calls. Further, I believe that the authority to evangelize rests upon the accomplished work of Christ who has had all authority given to Him. Further, I believe that as Christ has died to redeem a particular people, those people will hear and respond with faith to His voice when they hear it through the preached gospel. Additionally, I believe that for a person to respond savingly to the gospel they must first be regenerated by the Spirit, otherwise they are dead and unable to respond to the gospel no matter how artfully or passionately presented the gospel may be. In light of the Spirit's free movement, I believe the evangelist should be both expectant and diligent in sharing the gospel, taking every opportunity whether short or long.

God has determined to use evangelism as the normal means to call His elect to saving faith, and thus it is the duty of every Christian and local church to be employed in this work. Though the Spirit has gifted some uniquely at evangelism, it is, nonetheless, a duty for every follower of

Christ. All are called to pray for laborers to be sent into the harvest; all are called to teach the next generation in the church the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; all are called to proclaim the excellencies of God who has called us out of darkness; all are called to be ready to present the reason for their hope; all are called to be ambassadors of Christ and proclaim God's day of salvation. Additionally, Christians are called to live lives that adorn the gospel and to do good. However, doing good should never be pitted against gospel proclamation or treated as an alternative. The church's primary duty is evangelism. Yet, evangelism is not just a duty, but a joy that God shares with his people. For through evangelism, God has invited us, His humble servants, to be partners in the work that makes the heavens fill with rejoicing – that of seeing a sinner come to repentance.

14. Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are sovereignly distributed to the church by the Spirit and every believer has at least one gift. The use of spiritual gifts must be motivated and controlled by Christian love and are meant to serve the church. Because gifts are given as the Spirit wills, they reveal God's wisdom and good pleasure to provide what the church needs to grow, to accomplish her mission, and to glorify God. These gifts are important to the health of a church. Indeed, the individual harms the church when he or she withholds his or her gift from the service of the body. Likewise, the body harms the individual member (and itself) when it does not provide its members opportunities to develop and use their gifts. Thus, I believe that a church that seeks to fulfill God's will and give Him glory must make the discovery and use of each member's spiritual giftedness a priority.