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GCI's New Statement of Belief

Grace Communion International (GCI), the denomination in which *The Adopted Life* publishers serve as pastors, has recently updated its Statement of Beliefs to make the document even more fully expressive of the good news of humanity's adoption into the Trinity through Jesus. You can read the whole document at the GCI website: www.gracecommunion.org.

In this article we want to just highlight a few of the places in the statement where the gospel shines through with special clarity:

First of all, the document begins by describing God the Trinity — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Many churches and ministries start their statement of beliefs with a statement on their belief about the Bible. Kudos to GCI for getting first things first.

The opening statement on the Triune God also expresses his purpose in creating humanity using this language:

Though transcendent, God freely . . . involves himself with humanity directly and personally in Jesus Christ, that humanity, by the Spirit, might share in his eternal life as his children.

It's wonderful to see humanity's adoption as children of the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit, set forth in the opening statement as the purpose for our existence and the reason for the Triune God's involvement in our lives.

In the statement about "The Son of God" they make this declaration:

As our representative and substitute, he stands in for all humanity before the Father, providing the perfect human response to God on our behalf and reconciling humanity to the Father.

This emphasis on Jesus' role as the one who represents and speaks for all humanity before the Father is found throughout this new statement of belief. Such an emphasis is especially vital and necessary in our modern Christian culture, which so heretically emphasizes individual response, belief, and work, as the determining factor in humanity's relationship with the Father.

In the section on humanity, GCI makes this profoundly Christ-centered statement:

The eternally perfect image of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the last Adam. God creates through Jesus Christ the one new humanity over which sin and death have no power.

This is beautiful because it affirms that the first Adam, who sinned, is not the definition of what it means to be human. Rather, the last Adam, Jesus, is the definition of what a human being is. There are not two kinds of human beings in the world: those who are sinners and those who are not. There is only one, new humanity in Christ (Eph. 2:15.)

GCI's statement on the gospel also does a good job of getting ideas in their proper order. Because of Jesus, humanity belongs to the Father as his children. Since we already belong, we are able to begin to believe in our belonging. Our belief does not make us children of the Father, Jesus does — and now we can believe this truth about ourselves. The statement on the gospel phrases it this way:

It [the gospel] is the message that Christ died for our sins and has made us his own before and apart from our believing in him and has bound us to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let us go. Therefore, he calls on all humans to repent and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

At several key points in the document, GCI is not afraid to use the bold, clear language of the Bible. For example, in the opening summary of belief they make this statement taken from 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:22:

Since he [Jesus] died for all, all died in him, and all will be made alive in him.

Finally, their statement on Judgment is completely Christ-centered and rooted in the reality of who we are as humanity in Christ and what judgment must be because of who Jesus is:

God judges all humans through Jesus Christ as those who belong to God through him. Therefore, all humans are, in spite of themselves, loved, forgiven, and included in Jesus Christ, who is their Lord and Savior. God's love will never cease or diminish even for those who, denying the reality of who they are in him, refuse his love and consign themselves to hell; they will not enjoy the fruit of his salvation but rather will experience his love as wrath. God disciplines those he loves so that they will return to him and live . . .

This whole statement is profound in what it is saying in a few short words about judgment. Judgment is not something that a distant God imposes on us, rather judgment is something relational, that flows from the reality of our inclusion in Christ and our adoption as children of the Father. Judgment is not the punishment of the legalistic god in the sky, it is the discipline of a loving Father designed to bring his children to repentance.

All of us who are excited about the Spirit's work to refocus the modern Church on Christ and the life of the Trinity should be happy and thankful for GCI's new Statement of Beliefs. It is an important and significant step forward in modern theology and the life of the 21st century church.

~ Jonathan Stepp