

# The ReKnew Manifesto

## 1. ReThink the Source of Life

Because traditional Christianity has often held that people get right with God simply by believing the right things, many Christians tend to get their “life” (their core sense of identity, worth, significance and security) from the rightness of their beliefs. Our conviction is that **followers of Jesus should get all of their “life” from the love that God has shown them on Calvary**. Attempt to get our “life” from any other source of “life”—including the assumed rightness of our beliefs—is idolatry.

You can find discussions related to this topic [here](#).

## 2. ReThink the Nature of Faith

Many Christians throughout history (and still today) have assumed that a person’s faith is only as strong as the degree to which they feel certainty and free from doubt. Likewise, many have assumed faith is opposed to reason, antithetical to historical-critical approaches to Scripture, and at odds with much of the scientific enterprise—especially evolutionary theory.

Our conviction is, in contrast to this modern psychological concept of faith, Scripture understands faith in covenantal terms. More specifically, the strength of a person’s faith is not measured by their feeling of psychological certainty, but by their **willingness to commit to a course of action in the face of uncertainty**. This does not mean that faith is irrational, however. While faith always goes beyond reason, we don’t believe it should ever go against it. We thus believe Jesus-followers should never be afraid of wrestling with the challenges posed by biblical criticism, science, or any other field of rational inquiry.

Along the same lines, we do not believe the goal of faith is to arrive at a point at which we convince ourselves we possess all the right beliefs and thus become closed off to further inquiry. Rather, when we get all our “life” from Christ (and not from the assumed rightness of our beliefs), and when we understand that faith is not the absence of doubt, **we are free to view faith instead as a process of honest, open-ended inquiry**. It’s our conviction that the fear-based, dogmatic rigidity that characterizes so much of contemporary Evangelicalism reflects an idolatrous relationship with beliefs, which in turn causes many to become hostile and unloving to opponents when debating beliefs. We are convinced **God is more concerned with the love *with which* we debate than with the content of what we debate**.

## 3. ReThink Our Picture of God

The dominant image of God espoused in the religion of Christendom has been a composite picture in which the revelation of God in Christ has been fused with violent images derived from

the Old Testament as well as with other philosophical sources, such as ancient Hellenistic philosophy.

Our conviction is that **Jesus is the one and only perfect revelation of God's true nature** (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus doesn't merely reveal part of what God is like. Rather, the fullness of God is in Christ and revealed through Christ (Colossians 1:19; 2:9). As Jesus himself tells us, when we see him, *we see the very character of the Father* (John 14:7-9). Moreover, it's our conviction that Jesus' self-sacrificial death on the cross expresses the central theme that weaves together everything Jesus was about. From his incarnation, to his ministry, death and ascension, Jesus reveals the truth that God's nature is other-oriented, non-violent, self-sacrificial love. We thus believe that **all of our thinking about God, as well as all of our reading of Scripture, must be done through the lens of the cross** and with this cruciform understanding of God's love in mind.

## 4. ReThink Biblical Inspiration

As the Church has always confessed, we affirm that the entire Bible is "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16) for the ultimate purpose of bearing witness to Christ (Jn 5:39-45), and especially to his sacrificial suffering on the cross (Lk 24:25-7, 44-6). Yet, because the crucified Christ is the quintessential revelation of God, we believe we must read Scripture through the lens of the cross. And as is true of our reflection on every other Christian doctrine, we believe that our thinking about what it means for God to "breathe" Scripture must be centered on the cross.

Here it is important to notice that God "breathed" his definitive self-revelation on the cross both by *acting toward humanity* and by humbly allowing humanity to *act toward him*. God acted toward humanity when he devised his plan of redemption, when the Son became a human, and when the Father "delivered him over" to wicked humans to be killed (Rom 4:25; 8:32). Yet, God humbly allowed these humans to act toward him when they tortured and crucified him, and he allowed all humans to act toward him when Jesus bore our sin on the cross.

This means that the "breathing" of God's definitive revelation was not a unilateral process. It was rather dialectical in nature in that it incorporated a back-and-forth process. And note that, insofar as God acted toward humanity on the cross, the cross is beautiful, for it perfectly reveals God's humble, loving, self-sacrificial character. But insofar as God humbly allowed humans to act toward him, the cross is ugly, for it mirrors the depth of our sin that Jesus humbly bore.

Since the cross reveals what God is *truly* like, it reveals what God has always been like. Moreover, since all-Scripture is "breathed" for the ultimate purpose of bearing witness to the cross and must be interpreted through the lens of the cross, we believe we must understand God's "breathing" of Scripture to involved the same back-and-forth process that was involved in the "breathing" of his culminating revelation on the cross. That is, it involves both God *acting toward the authors* he "breathes" through as well as God humbly allowing the personalities, cultures, and spiritual state of these authors to *act toward him*. This is evidenced by the fact that the biblical writings all reflect the distinct personalities, styles, and limited cultural perspectives of their authors. But even more significantly, since God humbly stooped to take on an appearance that mirrors the sin of humanity when he allowed humanity to act toward him as he

bore their sin on the cross, we believe that we must read Scripture with the understanding that some of what we find may reflect God humbly bearing the sin of the people he “breathes” his written revelation through, thereby taking on an appearance that mirrors their sin.

We thus ought not to be surprised when we find certain Old Testament authors depicting God with a character that falls short of the loving, self-sacrificial character revealed on the cross. Our conviction is that these portraits are no less “God-breathed” than Scripture’s many Christ-like portraits. It’s just that, for those of us who read Scripture through the lens of the cross, we must understand that these sub-Christ-like portraits bear witness not to the manner in which God *acted toward humanity* on the cross, but to the manner in which God humbly allowed humanity to *act toward him* as he bore their sin and thus took on an appearance that mirrored the ugliness of their sin. Interpreted this way, we believe that all Scripture, including its most violent depictions of God, infallibly bears witness to the humble, self-sacrificial, non-violent love of God revealed on Calvary.

## 5. ReThink the Kingdom of God

Jesus came to inaugurate a movement he called “the kingdom (or reign) of God.” As the one sinless person in history, Jesus is the one and only perfect reflection of what it looks like for God to fully reign over a person’s life. Jesus is thus the perfect embodiment of “the kingdom of God” (the “dome” over which God reigns).

For this reason, we at ReKnew believe that the kingdom of God always reflects the humble, loving, self-sacrificial, and non-violent character of Jesus, especially as it is displayed in his self-sacrificial death. People enter this kingdom when they surrender their lives to Christ, for they are then called and empowered by the Spirit to display this same character in all that they do. Individuals and groups can be considered to manifest the kingdom of God only to the degree that they display this Christ’s loving character. To the extent that any individual or group fails to display this character, they indicate that they are not under the reign of God, regardless of what beliefs they profess or what titles they ascribe to themselves.

The highest aspiration for any kingdom individual or group must be to “do everything in love” (I Cor 16:14). And love, in Scripture, is defined by Jesus’ self-sacrificial death on the cross (I Jn 3:16).

## 6. ReThink The Church

Jesus came to establish and build his church (Mt 16:18-9). While many today automatically identify the church with a special building, in the NT the word church (*ecclesia*) refers to a **people** who are set apart from others for a distinct vocation. The church is the corporate body of all who have placed their trust in Jesus and surrendered their lives to Jesus, and this corporate body is intended by God to be the primary means by which the reign of God becomes displayed and is advanced in the world. When the church is faithful, it reflects the loving, non-violent, self-sacrificial character of God, as it is most perfectly revealed by Jesus’ death on the cross.

For the first three centuries after Christ, the church was a persecuted minority that quite faithfully bore witness to God’s humble, cruciform character. This changed dramatically in the fourth and fifth centuries when the church inherited political power from the State and when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. It was at this time that Christendom, with its conception of the “Church Triumphant,” was birthed.

Whereas the pre-Christendom church reflected the humble character of the crucified Messiah, the church of Christendom largely reflected the character of a victorious Caesar. Whereas the pre-Christendom church never blurred the lines of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world, the Christendom church closely aligned the two. Whereas the pre-Christendom church viewed all disciples as ministers, the Christendom church adopted the ancient pagan distinction between a “laity” and religious professionals (priests). And while the pre-Christendom church consisted of tight-knit communities in which people served one-another, the Christendom church was largely reduced to people occasionally gathering in a sacred building to hear the teaching of religious professions.

We at ReKnew believe it is time for people to fundamentally rethink the nature of the church and to strive to recover the flavor of the pre-Christendom church. Our conviction is that the church is called to reflect the loving, non-violent, self-sacrificial character of Jesus, reflected most perfectly on the cross. We believe it is vital that Christians keep the kingdom of God “holy” – separate and distinct from all versions of the kingdom of the world. We believe that all who follow Jesus are called to be ministers and missionaries wherever they find themselves. And while we are not opposed to large weekly church services if they help win people to Christ, we believe that all who follow Jesus are called to live and minister in smaller, close-knit communities where they can use their spiritual gifts to minister to others and to the world.

## 7. ReThink Providence

The dominant image of God within Christendom after Augustine (fifth century) has been that of an all-controlling deity. The church has therefore tended to espouse a “blueprint worldview” in which it was assumed that every event that comes to pass conforms to a meticulous “blueprint” God designed before the creation of the world. In this view, God wills (or at least allows) every particular event for a specific good reason—including each and every evil thing that transpires in the world.

In contrast to this, Paul declares that, while “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, to those who are being saved it is *the power of God*” (I Cor 1:18, emphasis added). When God displays his omnipotent power, Paul is saying, it looks like him *allowing himself to be crucified out of love for the enemies who are crucifying him!* This means that the power that God relies on to accomplish his objectives is world history is the power of his self-sacrificial love, not the power of coercion, let alone the power of violence. Self-sacrificial is the greatest power there is, for while coercion may control another’s behavior, only this kind of power can transform hearts.

Hence, as every church father prior to Augustine believed, we at ReKnew hold that “God is a God of persuasion, not coercion,” as Irenaeus (second century) put it. While God remains in

control of the big picture, we believe God has given humans and angels free will, which means we have a degree of “say-so” over what comes to pass. We can either use that “say-so” to further God’s purposes or to resist them. As such, we believe all evil is the result of the misuse of created free wills, whether human or angelic. In place of the “blueprint worldview,” therefore, we advocate a “warfare worldview” in which the creation is viewed as a battlefield between God and Satan, along with all created human and angelic agents who align themselves with one or the other.

Moreover, since creation includes free agents who have the power to resolve *possible* courses of actions into *actual* events, we believe the future is partly comprised of possibilities rather than exclusively as a domain of pre-settled facts. And since the all-knowing God knows all of reality, exactly like it is, God knows the future as partly comprised of possibilities rather than exclusively as a domain of pre-settled facts. Yet, because God is infinitely intelligent and can anticipate future possibilities as effectively as pre-settled certainties, we don’t believe God loses any providential advantage by virtue of anticipating possibilities rather than pre-settled facts.

Hence, whatever possible event ends up being actualized, we can say that God had an eternally prepared plan in place as to how he would respond to that possible event *in case* that event came to pass. And because God can anticipate possible events as perfectly as pre-settled events, the plan God has to respond to every possible event is just as perfect as it would have been had the event been a pre-settled fact. So while we don’t believe everything happens *for* a good purpose, we believe everything happens *with* a good purpose—namely, the eternally prepared good purpose God had in place *in case* any given possible event came to be actualized.

## 8. ReThink the Atonement

The majority of Evangelicals today believe that the main significance of what Christ accomplished on the cross (the atonement) is that he satisfied the Father’s wrath against sin by being punished in our place, thereby allowing the Father to accept us despite our sin. While the church has always understood that Jesus died in our place, the depiction of the Father venting his wrath on Jesus instead of on us — the “*penal substitution*” view of the atonement — originated with Luther and Calvin (though it was in some respect anticipated by Anselm in the eleventh century). And while the church has always allowed for a variety of atonement theories, it’s worth noting that for the first 1000 years of church history the dominant view was that “[t]he reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn3:8; Heb.2:14). This is called the “Christus Victor” view of the atonement.

With the historic-orthodox church, we affirm that Jesus died as our substitute and experienced the death-consequences of sin in our place. But we do not believe this means the Father needed to “satisfy” his own wrath by violently pouring it out on his Son in order to forgive us and reconcile us to himself. And while we affirm that Christ accomplished a variety of things by his life and death and resurrection, we believe that Christ’s victory over Satan and the powers of darkness lies at the base of them all. We thus consider the “Christus Victor” view of the atonement to be the foundation of all other views.

## 9. ReThink Salvation

With the rise of the penal substitution view of the atonement, the western church began to think of salvation increasingly in legal categories. God has thus come to be viewed as the judge, humans as the guilty defendants, and Jesus as our defense attorney who allows us to be acquitted by suffering our sentence in our place. As a result, salvation has come to be thought of primarily as an acquittal (escaping hell) that people receive when they simply believe that Jesus did this for them. Among the many unfortunate consequences of this view is the fact that Christianity has become much more focused on how we benefit in the afterlife from what God has done for us than it is focused on the beautiful things God wants to do in our present life—the relationship God wants with us, the character that God wants to cultivate in us, and the things God wants to accomplish through us *now*.

While legal metaphors are sometimes used to express salvation in the New Testament, the dominant way of expressing salvation is as a marriage covenant. Salvation is not primarily about being acquitted by God. Nor is it primarily about the afterlife. Rather, salvation is primarily about becoming part of “the bride of Christ” and participating in—and being transformed by—the fullness of God’s life that he opens up for us *in the present*. For this reason, salvation is not merely about believing in Jesus; it’s even more profoundly about being empowered *to follow Jesus’ example*.

Salvation thus cannot be divorced from the call to follow Jesus’ example of loving enemies, refraining from violence, and caring for the poor and oppressed. Moreover, salvation is about manifesting God’s fullness of life by cultivating a counter-cultural lifestyle that revolts against every aspect of society that is inconsistent with the character of God and of his will for the world. And finally, salvation is about living and praying in a way that actualizes the fullness of the Lord’s prayer that the Father’s will would be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

## 10. ReThink Humanity

Against the long-standing patriarchal mindset of the church tradition, ReKnew is passionate about encouraging husbands and wives to assume an egalitarian mindset in their marriages in which they “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). We are convinced that the several instructions on wives needing to submit to husbands (and even to call them “lord” (1 Pet 3:6!)) reflect fallen aspects of first century culture that God had to temporarily accommodate, along the lines of the instructions for slaves to submit to masters (I Pet 2:8). For the same reason we are passionate about encouraging women to pursue whatever ministry God has gifted them for and called them too.

Along the same lines, against the ethnocentrism of the western church tradition, we believe Jesus died to create “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15) that has done away with the separating walls erected from the curse of Babel (Gen 11). In Christ, all ethnic, gender and class distinctions that the world invests so much significance in are rendered utterly insignificant (Gal 3: 27-9). We thus believe racial reconciliation is not something a church can choose to engage in or not. To the contrary, it is one of the reasons for which Jesus died, and as such, it must be proclaimed and practiced by all followers of Jesus.

Racial reconciliation involves, among other things, relationship-building across racial lines. For only by this means can people of different races enter into each other's story and learn to understand and appreciate their distinct perspectives, birthed out of their different experiences.

## 11. ReThink Hell

The earliest Christians understood “hell” in several different ways. Some viewed it as annihilation (“Annihilationism”), others as eternal conscious suffering, and others as a redemptive process that will ultimately result in everyone being saved (“Universalism”). After Augustine however, the view of hell as eternal conscious suffering became dominant. Annihilationism quickly became a marginal view while Universalism was eventually pronounced heretical.

In light of the love that God has revealed for all humans in Christ, we are convinced that, if there is any way that God *could* save all, he most certainly *would* save all. We don't see how anyone who genuinely loves all people—as Christ commands and empowers us to do—could fail to *hope* that God's love will eventually rescue and transform everyone. Paul instructs us that love believes the best and hopes for the best for all (I Cor 13:7). At the same time, our belief in free will rules out the belief that there will come a time when everyone *must* be saved. Moreover, we don't see in Scripture sufficient warrant for being confident enough that all will be saved to teach this as doctrine.

What is more certain to us is that the fire of God's love will salvage and purify everything in a person that is consistent with God's loving character, but this same fire will burn up (metaphorically speaking) everything that is not (I Cor 3:12-5). If it unfortunately turns out that people can sink to the point where there is nothing salvageable about them, it's our conviction God will justly, yet mercifully, withdraw his sustaining hand (Heb1:3), thereby allowing them to return to nothingness – “as though they had never been” (Obadiah 16). When Scripture speaks of hell as “eternal,” we believe this most likely refers to the irrevocable *effect* of this punishment, not to the duration of anyone's experience of it.

However, we are convinced that what is more important than the particular views of hell that we hold is that we understand that the New Testament's warnings of hell concern the dire fate of those who travel down a path of resisting Christ's love and redemption. The intention of these warnings is not so much to describe that future fate as it is to motivate people to avoid this fate by changing the path they are on. Along the same lines, we believe that far more important than the particular views we hold is the *manner* in which we hold them. Since the biblical material on this topic is ambiguous, and since the witness of the early church is not uniform on this matter, we encourage Jesus-followers today to not christen their own view as *the* orthodox view, but to rather allow all views to be entertained and lovingly debated.

## 12. ReThink End Times

For a good portion of contemporary Evangelicals, the ultimate hope for the future is to be “raptured” out of this world before Christ wipes out the remaining population in an eschatological bloodbath. We at ReKnew think this “escapist” theology is rooted in a

fundamentally misguided and irresponsible way of interpreting Scripture. It is also an extremely damaging theology inasmuch as it demotivates multitudes to take responsibility for the welfare of earth and the animal kingdom.

It is our conviction that God's goal from the start has been to reign over the earth, with humanity serving as his viceroys, reflecting his loving care as they take responsibility for the earth and animal kingdom (Gen 1:26-8). Jesus came not to abandon this goal and take humanity somewhere else, but to reestablish this goal by freeing us to play the role God created us to play. We also hold that the apocalyptic imagery used in the New Testament, and especially in the book of Revelation, was not intended literally. Indeed, in Revelation we find violent apocalyptic and Old Testament imagery being turned on its head to communicate *non-violence*. Hence, for example, we find the violent image of Yahweh covered in the blood of enemies after a battle (Isa 63:1-3) applied to Jesus (Rev. 19: 13)). But in Revelation Jesus is covered in *his own blood*, and he's covered in this blood *before* he goes into battle. **This signifies that Jesus and his followers wage war not by slaughtering others, but by being willing to lay down their lives out of love for others.** A close reading of Revelation reveals that John does similar things with all violent imagery.

Most importantly, it is our passionate conviction that the point of the Bible's various images about the end of history are intended not to satisfy anyone's curiosity, but to motivate us to live a certain way *in the present*. We are not to "worry about tomorrow" (Mt 6:24). We are to instead chose to live each day as passionate and faithful disciples of Jesus. And this includes living as responsible caretakers of the earth and animal kingdom.