



WHAT WE TEACH

Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote, "If we go astray in our doctrine, eventually our life will go astray as well. You cannot separate what a man believes from what he is. For this reason, doctrine is vitally important."

The goal of this document is to provide the doctrinal foundation for biblical unity within Harvest Bible Church. Although unity is more than truth, it is founded on biblical truth. To the best abilities of the elders of Harvest Bible Church, this document lays out foundational truths for preserving the unity of faith.

The statements within this document have been taken or paraphrased from statements found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, as well as the theological distinctives of Grace Community Church (Sun Valley, California) and Mission Bible Church (Orange County, California).

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

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THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Cor. 2:7-14; 2 Pt. 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God was revealed to God's chosen spokesmen (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim. 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Gen. 1:31; Ex. 31:17). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matt. 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pt. 1:20-21).

We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Pt. 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matt. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16).

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Cor. 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to carefully ascertain the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

We teach that God's Word is sufficient in that the Scriptures are all one needs to be fully equipped for a life of faith and service (1 Tim. 3:15-17), embodying all that is necessary to one's spiritual life. The Bible is all that is necessary for one to understand the character of God, the nature of man, and the doctrines of sin, heaven, hell, and salvation through Jesus Christ. The Word of God is "full of Spirit and life" (John 6:63) and will never pass away (Mark 13:31). Psalm 19:7-9 is a concise statement on the sufficiency of Scripture. Penned by David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these three verses offer unwavering testimony from God Himself about the sufficiency of His Word for every situation. Psalm 19 declares God's Word to be "perfect" and "sure" (Ps. 19:7); "right" and "pure" (Ps. 19:8); "true" and "righteous" (Ps. 19:9). Psalm 19 also declares that God's Word is capable of "reviving the soul" and "making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7); and "rejoicing the heart" and "enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:8).

GOD

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deut. 6:4; Is. 45:5-7; 1 Cor. 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

God the Father

We teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps. 145:8-9; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1-31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Ro. 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Eph. 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chron. 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Hab. 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He remove the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pt. 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as His own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 12:5-9).

God the Son

We teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

We teach that God the Father created according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2).

We teach that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the rights of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-Man (Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 2:9).

We teach that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Col. 2:9).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin-born (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Ps. 2:7-9; Is. 9:6; John 1:29; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 7:25-26; 1 Pt. 1:18-19).

We teach that, in the incarnation, the second Person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:5-8).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Rom. 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Pt. 2:24).

We teach that on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day, in Heaven, the very presence of sin; and that he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Rom. 3:25; 5:8-9; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Pt. 2:24; 3:18).

We teach that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates as our Advocate and High Priest (Matt. 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

We teach that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Rom. 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

We teach that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- Believers (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matt. 25:31-46)
- Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15)

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Is. 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to repent of their sins and believe in Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

God the Holy Spirit

We teach that the Holy Spirit is an eternal divine Person, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity, including intellect (1 Cor. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1 Cor. 12:11), eternity (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), omniscience (Is. 40:13-14), omnipotence (Rom. 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Jer. 31:31-34 with Heb. 10:15-17).

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Matt. 1:18), the written revelation (2 Pt. 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7).

We teach that the work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost, when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Cor. 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 2:22).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 1:13).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher, who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God's revelation, the Bible (2 Peter 1:19-21). Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to submit to the Spirit's control of their life (John 16:13; Rom. 8:9; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27).

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by boastful displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 3:18).

We teach, in this respect, that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today, and that speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were never intended to be characteristic of the lives of believers (1 Cor. 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:7-12; Heb. 2:1-4).

MAN

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness.

The Purpose of Man

We teach that man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 15-25; Jam. 3:9).

We teach that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Is. 43:7; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).

The Depravity of Man

We teach that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no ability to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14; 1 John 1:8).

We teach that, because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception due to his virgin birth. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

The Distinction between Genders

We teach that the fundamental distinction between male and female is embedded in the very biology of the human race (Gen. 1:27; 5:2; Ps. 139:13). Gender identity is determined by biological sex and not by one's self-perception or subjective expression (Ps. 139:14; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6).

We teach that distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and were declared by God to be very good. (Gen. 1:31; 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14).

The Sanctity of Life

We teach that there is a sacredness to human life and that God created man in His image (Gen 1:27). The key here is that we are made in the image or likeness of God (1 Cor. 11:7). Because of this, the value of man's life is intrinsic and God-given. To raise a hand, or even a word (Jam. 3:9) against a human being is an assault on God Himself. The concept is further clarified in the law given to Noah: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall His blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6).

We teach that Scripture is far more than a prohibition on the taking of innocent life; it specifies that murder in any form or by any contrived name is absolutely wrong (Ex. 20:13). We are created by God for His purpose and are stewards and not owners of the lives He has given us. Life is entirely a gift of

God and its end is determined by His sovereignty: “There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life” (Deut. 32:39).

We teach that God has given governments, kings and rulers the power to enforce the law of the land and use capital punishment, if necessary, as a prescribed consequence for murder as defined in scripture, and they are endowed to “bear the sword” against justly-defined high crimes (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1-5; Num. 35:16-21,30).

We teach that life begins at conception in the mother’s womb. That life is precious, miraculous, designed, and predestined by God long in advance of conception (Ps. 139:13-16). The deliberate aborting of the conceived, innocent child is murder, and that only God has the right to determine the days of a child (2 Sam. 12:15, 22-23).

We teach that God determines the length of every person’s life (Ps. 139:16). The quality of life is not the basis for determining whether a person should live or die (Gen. 9:5b). The Christian sees God’s sovereign hand and purpose in those suffering and facing impending death (Ps. 23:4). We can look forward to a deepened relationship with God as He strengthens us in our time of need (Is. 41:10). For those who wait upon the Lord, He will renew their strength (Is 40:31). Sickness and illness are not necessarily about recovery, but growing in our relationship with God (Jam 1:2-4 and the opportunity to be a testimony to His glory (Job 1:6-12).

SALVATION

We teach that salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Pt.1:18-19). It is man's responsibility to respond to the Gospel call through belief and repentance (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9).

Regeneration

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (John 5:24) when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (Matt. 7:16; John 15:8; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:16; 2 Pt. 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Such a conformity leads to the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Rom. 8:17; 2 Pt. 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

Election

We teach that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph.1:4-11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pt. 1:1-2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ez. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Rev. 22:17). Although it is beyond our complete comprehension, God's sovereignty does not violate the individual's responsibility to believe, so that all are genuinely invited to believe and be saved (Acts 17:30). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Ja. 4:8).

We teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part or to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Eph. 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Pt. 1:2).

We teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Rom. 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:25-28; 2 Tim. 1:9).

We teach that God is a just God (Ps. 9:8; Ps. 25:8; Ps. 33:5; Isa. 30:18; 1 Jn. 1:9). One must not conclude that God is unjust because He chooses to bestow grace on some but not to everyone. God is never to be measured by what seems fair to human judgment. It is foolish for man to assume that he, a sinful

creature, has a higher standard of what is right than an unfallen, infinitely, eternally holy God. In Psalm 50:21 God says, “You thought that I was just like you.” But God is not like man, nor can He be held to human standards. “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa. 55:8-9).

Justification

We teach that justification before God is an act of God (Rom.8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; Is.55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Rom. 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Col. 2:14; 1 Pt. 2:24) and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). By this means God is enabled to “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

Sanctification

We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and is therefore identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with the believer’s standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Pt. 1:2).

We teach that there is also, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 6:1-22; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thess.4:3-4; 5:23).

In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh—but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:22-24; Phil.3:12; Col. 3:9-10; 1 Pt. 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

Security

We teach that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God’s power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-8; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pt. 1:5; Jude 24).

We teach that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God’s Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Rom. 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Gal. 5:13, 25-26; Titus 2:11-14).

Separation

We teach that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

We teach that, out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in a way that demonstrates our adoring love to God and does not bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Rom. 12:1-2, 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).

We teach that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:11-12; Heb. 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teachings of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:2-12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

THE CHURCH

We teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; Col. 1:18).

We teach that the formation of the church, the Body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

We teach that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Eph. 2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Cor. 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Eph. 3:1-6; 5:32).

The Establishment of Local Churches

We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Cor. 11:18-20; Heb. 10:25).

The Offices and Roles of Church Leadership

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures.

The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor teachers; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11) and deacons, who serve under the elders' oversight. Both elders and deacons must meet biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:1-5). We teach that both offices, elders and deacons, are restricted to men who meet the biblical qualifications described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

We teach that the church is to be led by a plurality of elders. The term "elder" is almost always used as a plural, especially in regards to church leadership. (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17-28; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14).

We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Tim. 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Heb. 13:7, 17).

We teach the importance of discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2), mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matt. 18:5-14), as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16).

The Autonomy of the Church

We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the sharing

and spreading of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government, as well (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:4-7, 13; 1 Pt. 5:1-4).

The Purpose of the Church

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Eph. 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

We teach the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 4:12; Rev. 22:12).

We teach the need of the church to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Spiritual Gifts within the Church

We teach that there were two kinds of gifts given to the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Cor. 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Cor. 13:13-14:12; Rev. 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Rom. 12:6-8).

We teach that no one possesses the gift of healing today, but that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Cor. 12:6-10; Jam. 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

We teach that no one possesses the gift of tongues today. The gift of tongues was a divinely bestowed supernatural ability to speak in a human language that had not been learned by the one speaking. According to the Apostle Paul, when believers exercised the gift of tongues in church, they were to speak one at a time, and only two or three were to speak in a given service (1 Cor. 14:27). Furthermore, when tongues were spoken in the church, they were to be interpreted by someone with the gift of interpretation so that the others might be edified by the God-given message (1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 27). In this way, tongues did not serve as a private prayer language, but rather—like all spiritual gifts—as a means by which one might serve and edify the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

The last recorded miracles in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58, with the healings on the island of Malta (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians, an early epistle, written between A.D. 53 and 55. Two later epistles, Romans (written around A.D. 57) and Ephesians (written around A.D. 62), both discuss gifts of the Spirit at length—but no mention is made of the miraculous gifts. By that time, miracles were already looked on as something in the past (Heb.

2:3-4). Apostolic authority and the apostolic message needed no further confirmation. Before the first century ended, the entire New Testament had been written and was circulating through the churches.

The revelatory gifts had ceased to serve any purpose. And when the apostolic age ended with the death of the Apostle John, the signs that identified the apostles had already become moot (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).

Ordinances within the Church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Rom. 6:1-11). We teach that every believer has been commanded by the Scriptures to be baptized (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38), not in order to receive salvation, but in order to publicly profess his commitment to Jesus Christ and His church. Baptism is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42).

We teach that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28-32). We also teach that, whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, participation in the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ, who indwells every believer, and so is spiritually present, fellowshiping with His people (1 Cor. 10:16).

The Roles of Women within the Church

We teach that women fulfill a vital role in the Christian church; this has been the case since the very beginning (Acts 1:12-14; 9:36-42; 16:13-15; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:1-2, 18, 24-28; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and leadership in the churches was entrusted to men.

Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side by side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.

We teach that men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. We teach, however, that God, without making one inferior to the other, calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God.

Marriage within the Church

We teach that marriage was given by God as part of His common grace, and that it has no other meaning than as He has provided (Gen. 2:18-24). We teach that marriage is sanctioned by God, who joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in scripture (Gen. 2:23-24).

We teach that marriage is subject to the curse of the Fall but that believers, living in obedience to the Scripture and under the control of the Holy Spirit, can begin to experience peaceful, productive, and fulfilled marriage as intended by God (Gen. 3:16; 1 Peter 3:7).

We teach that the marriages of believers are to illustrate the loving relationship of Christ and His church, with the husband loving his wife as Christ loves the church and the wife responding to her husband's loving leadership as the church responds to Christ (Eph. 5:18–33).

We teach that, as believers' marriages are to illustrate Christ's relationship with His church, believers should choose to marry those who share their faith and regenerate life (2 Cor. 6:14).

We teach that marriage is always a public, formal, and officially recognized covenant between a man and a woman. We teach that without such a covenant, which may include a "common law marriage," where valid in specific cases under pertinent law, prolonged conjugal cohabitation does not establish, and is not equivalent to, marriage (John 4:18). We teach that where no such covenant exists, or can be discerned, between a cohabiting couple prior to coming to faith in Christ, family units should be preserved to the extent possible and, if otherwise appropriate, solemnization encouraged. We teach that where a valid marriage has been established prior to coming to faith in Christ, the couple should remain married (1 Cor. 7:24).

We teach that God hates divorce, permitting it only where there has been unrepentant sexual sin (Mal. 2:14–16; Matt. 5:32, 19:9) or desertion by an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12–15). We teach that remarriage is permitted to a faithful partner, but only when the divorce was on biblical grounds.

We teach that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We teach that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman (Heb. 13:4).

We teach that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, pornography, any attempt to change one's sex or disagreement with one's biological sex, is sinful and offensive to God (Lev. 18:1–30; Matt. 5:28; Rom. 1:26–29; 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:1–8).

We teach that homosexuality, in particular, is subject to God's wrath of abandonment, is a matter of choice and not inherited status, and epitomizes man's ungrateful rebellion against God (Rom. 1:18–28).

We teach that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture or the doctrines of the church. We teach that the faithful proclamation of the Scripture, including the call to repentance, does not constitute hate speech, or hateful and harassing behavior, but is instead a fundamental part of the church's loving mission to the world (Matt. 28:16–20; 2 Cor. 5:11–20; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1–2).

We teach that God offers redemption and forgiveness to all who confess and forsake their sin, including sexual sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We teach that His forgiveness is total and complete (Ps. 103:11–12, 130:3–4; Is. 43:25, 44:22; John 5:24; Col. 2:13–14) and that God imputes the full righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21) to the believing sinner. We teach that the forgiven sinner has been cleansed from the guilt of sin, set apart unto God, or made holy, and justified before Him (1 Cor. 6:9–11). We teach that any man or woman who has received that forgiveness is "in Christ" and is a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

ANGELS

Holy Angels

We teach that angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Heb. 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Rev. 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

Fallen Angels

We teach that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Is. 14:12-17; Ez. 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1-15).

We teach that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Is. 14:13-14; Matt. 4:1-11; Rev. 12:9-10); that he is the prince of this world, who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:20); and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Is. 14:12-17; Ez. 28:11-19; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

LAST THINGS

Death

We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Rev. 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Phil. 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:8).

We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Rom. 8:10-11, 19-23; 2 Cor. 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:29; Rev. 20:13-15).

We teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Rev. 20:13-15), when the soul and the resurrection body will be united (John 5:28-29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne of Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41-46), cut off from the life of God forever (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The Rapture of the Church

We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven-year tribulation (1 Thess. 4:16; Titus 2:13, Rev. 3:10) to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:15-5:11) and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The Tribulation Period

We teach that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thess. 2:7-12; Rev. 16), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 2:7-12). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan. 12:2-3; Rev. 20:4-6). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 24:15-31; 25:31-46).

The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign

We teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matt. 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for 1,000 years on the earth (Rev. 20:1-7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ez. 37:21-28; Dan. 7:17-22; Rev. 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded

by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Dan. 7:17-27; Rev. 20:1-7).

We teach that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Is. 65:17-25; Ez. 37:21-28; Zech. 8:1-17) to restore them to the land that they forfeited through their disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matt. 21:43; Rom. 11:1-26), but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 36:22-32; Rom. 11:25-29).

We teach that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Is. 11; 65:17-25; Ez. 36:33-38), and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan (Rev. 20:7).

The Judgment of the Lost

We teach that following the release of Satan after the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city, at which time Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10), whereupon Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne Judgment.

We teach that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (John 5:28-29), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).

Eternity

We teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Pt. 3:10) and replaced with a new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 20:15; 21:1-27; 22:1-21). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Rev. 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28), that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Cor. 15:28).

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Being a Christian is more than identifying yourself with a particular religion or affirming a certain value system. Being a Christian means you have embraced what the Bible says about God, mankind, and salvation. Consider the following truths found in Scripture:

God Is Sovereign Creator

We teach that we were created by a personal God to love, serve, and enjoy endless fellowship with Him. The New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Therefore, He also owns and rules everything (Ps. 24:1, 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship.

God Is Holy

We teach that God is absolutely and perfectly holy (Is. 6:3; Matt. 5:48; 1 John 1:5), therefore He cannot commit or approve of evil (Jam. 1:13). God requires holiness of us as well. First Peter 1:16 says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Mankind Is Sinful

We teach that everyone is guilty of sin: "There is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). That doesn't mean we're incapable of performing acts of human kindness. But we're utterly incapable of understanding, loving, or pleasing God on our own (Rom. 3:10-12).

Sin Demands a Penalty

We teach that God's holiness and justice demand that all sin be punished by death: (Ez. 18:4; Rom. 6:23). That's why simply changing our patterns of behavior can't solve our sin problem or eliminate its consequences.

Jesus Is Lord and Savior

We teach that the New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything (Col. 1:16). Therefore, He owns and rules everything (Ps. 24:1, 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Even though God's justice demands death for sin, His love has provided a Savior who paid the penalty and died for sinners (1 Pt. 3:18). Christ's death satisfied the demands of God's justice and Christ's perfect life satisfied the demands of God's holiness (2 Cor. 5:21), thereby enabling Him to forgive and save those who place their faith in Him (Rom. 3:26, Titus 3:5).

The Character of Saving Faith

We teach that true faith is always accompanied by repentance from sin. Repentance is agreeing with God that you are sinful, confessing your sins to Him, and making a conscious choice to turn from sin (Luke 13:3,5; 1 Thess. 1:9) and pursue Christ (Matt. 11:28-30; John 17:3) and obedience to Him (1 John 2:3). It isn't enough to believe certain facts about Christ. Even Satan and his demons believe in the true

God (Jam. 2:19), but they don't love and obey Him. True saving faith always responds in obedience (Eph. 2:10).