

*The
Mount Prospect
Bible Church*

- * Our Purpose
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 - * Church Discipline

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Our Purpose

We, the Mt Prospect Bible Church, exist to glorify our God and Savior, to build up His people in the faith, and to help the peoples of the world trust Jesus Christ to be their Savior, submitting their lives to Him as their Master.

Our Membership Agreement

As a follower of Jesus Christ, I joyfully and thoughtfully enter into a bond of mutual edification,¹ fellowship,² and accountability ³ with the other members of this body. I have repented of my sin,⁴ trusted in Christ as my Savior and Lord,⁵ and been baptized as a true believer.⁶

I will faithfully participate with this church in worship, prayer, study, fellowship, and the ordinances of baptism and communion.⁷ I will use my spiritual gifts for the common good.⁸ Through my involvement, and even sacrifice, I will seek to illustrate to my family and a watching world the immense significance of life in the body of Christ.⁹

In addition to the regular meetings of the church and in the spirit of a true disciple of Christ, I will diligently train myself and my family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Seeking to develop Christian character, knowledge, and skills.¹⁰

I will work toward doctrinal unity with a humble and teachable spirit.¹¹ For this reason, I am willing to be taught according to the statement of faith which this church believes to be an accurate summary of biblical truth.¹² Where there is disagreement or a lack of understanding regarding doctrinal convictions. I assume the liberty to ask questions and engage in edifying discussion. I will reject all heretical beliefs and practices, using Scripture as the final authority.¹³

I will accept and fellowship with all members, regardless of race, gender, background, social status, or level of education since all are of equal value in Christ.¹⁴

I will pursue peace with all people, especially with other believers, always being slow to take offense and eager to reconcile.¹⁵ I will shun gossip and divisive words, knowing that they are destructive to Christian fellowship.¹⁶

I will seek to live a life that is above reproach. I will be just and honest in my dealings and faithful in my responsibilities and commitments. I will abide by the standards of sexual purity and ethical integrity as taught in the Bible.¹⁷

I will seek the preservation of marriage, knowing that God hates divorce, and I will submit to biblical regulations regarding divorce and remarriage.¹⁸

I will watch over the other members in love as they watch over me.¹⁹ I will remember them in prayer,²⁰ help them in sickness and distress,²¹ promote their spiritual growth,²² restrain them from sin,²³ and stir them up to love and good deeds.²⁴

I will submit to the church's discipline upon myself and lovingly assume my responsibility to participate in the discipline of other members, as taught in Scripture.²⁵ If I am offended in connection with a disciplinary matter, I will seek resolution within the Church. I will never initiate or pursue civil legal action against the church or any other Christian.²⁶

I will contribute cheerfully and regularly to this Church for its general ministry and expenses, the relief of the poor, the cause of reformation and revival, and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. I will dedicate myself, my money, and my possessions to the cause of Christ as a faithful steward, avoiding all forms of greed.²⁷

I will seek the salvation of my family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, and people of all nations.²⁸

I promise to remain faithful to this church in membership. I will consult with the pastor(s) in advance if I sense that God is directing me elsewhere. If I must leave, I will unite with another true church.²⁹

In summary, I will love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and I will love others as Christ loves me.³⁰

I will not allow my weaknesses and failures to deter me from my intention to abide by these Christian standards. I will pursue holiness through genuine repentance and persevering faith in the one to whom I owe all obedience for time and eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ.³¹

Scripture Proofs

- (1) *Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26; Ephesians 4:16, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:11*
- (2) *Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:1-4*
- (3) *Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; James 5:16; 2 John 8*
- (4) *Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10*
- (5) *John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31; Romans 10:9-10*
- (6) *Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:36-38; 10:47-48*
- (7) *Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:14-20; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 10:24-25*
- (8) *Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 18:27; Ephesians 4:11-16*
- (9) *Matthew 6:19-21, 24-26, 16:24; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 4:1-5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 2:15-17*
- (10) *Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 5:13-14;*

- 1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 3:17-18*
- (11) *Psalm 133:1; Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:2*
- (12) *Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:9; 2:1; Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1*
- (13) *Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 3:15; 6:3-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 2:15-18; 4:3-4; Hebrews 13:8-9; 2 John 9:11; Jude 3*
- (14) *Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:26-28; James 2:1-5*
- (15) *Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 12:18; 14:19; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Colossians 3:12-15; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:19-20*
- (16) *Proverbs 6:16-19; 10:19; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 4:29,31; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 3:10-11; James 3:6-10*
- (17) *Proverbs 10:9; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:16,37; Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Corinthians 6:3; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:25; Titus 2:6-8; Hebrews 13:4*
- (18) *Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7*
- (19) *1 Corinthians 10:24; Galatians 6:1-2, 10; Philippians 2:4*
- (20) *2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; James 5:14-16*
- (21) *Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 12:13,15; Galatians 6:2-10; Philippians 4:14; 1 John 3:16-18*
- (22) *Titus 2:1-15; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:17-18*
- (23) *Proverbs 24:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:20; James 5:19-20*
- (24) *Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:1-10; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; 13:16*
- (25) *Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20*
- (26) *1 Corinthians 6:1-8*
- (27) *Malachi 3:8-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:6-7; Philippians 4:18*
- (28) *Matthew 9:36-38; 28:18-20; Romans 10:14-15; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20*
- (29) *Proverbs 3:5-6; 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 18:1; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6; 1 Corinthians 12:18; Philippians 2:3-4; Hebrews 10:24*
- (30) *Mark 12:28-31; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 3:16-19; 4:7-21*
- (31) *Matthew 5:6; Philippians 3:12-14; Hebrews 12:1-4; 1 Peter 1:14-19*

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Our Statement of Faith

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Head and He rules His Church through the authority of His written Word. We are “the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3.15) Every member of our church is responsible to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3) The following statement is meant to unify us around His truth and to help protect us from the deception which is constantly flowing around us. This statement reflects our commitment to these five truths:

1. Soli Deo Gloria - For the Glory of God alone - 1 Chron 16.23-31; Rom 11.33-36; 1 Cor 6.19-20; 10.31

All that He has done in the creation of the universe is for His own glory. All that He does in the salvation of His children is for His own glory. All that He will do in the out-working of His purposes in the future is for His own glory. We must live for His own glory, by His own grace and Holy Spirit empowering.

2. Solus Christus - because of Christ alone - Acts 4.12; 1 Timothy 2.5-6

Our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary death alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

3. Sola Scriptura - Scripture alone - Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3.14-17

The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all teaching and behavior must be measured.

4. Sola Fide - through Faith alone - Romans 5.1-2; Ephesians 2.8-9

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone. Justification can never be the reward or result of human works or merit, nor does it grow out of an infusion of Christ’s righteousness.

5. Sola Gratia - by Grace alone - Romans 5.15; Titus 3.7

In salvation we are rescued from God’s wrath by His grace alone. God’s spontaneous and unmerited grace is granted through the calling and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit who releases us from our willful bondage to sin and enables us to repent and trust in our Savior and His death on the cross in our behalf.

1. The Holy Scriptures

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the sixty six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 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 (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 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 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 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 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully 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 the Scriptures are totally sufficient (adequate for the purpose, enough) for His own glory, human salvation, faith and life. It contains all we need for life and godliness. (Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

2. God

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; 1 Corinthians 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 (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 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 (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36).

We teach that He orders and directs His universe in every detail. (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Job 38:4-41; Proverbs 16:33; Isaiah 46:9-11; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11; Acts 17:25, 28; Hebrews 1:3) Every event of nature and every human action and decision is according to His decree and purpose. (Exodus 4:21; 5:2; 7:2-5; 9:15-16 (cf. Romans 9:17-21); Proverbs 16:9; 21:1, Daniel 4:25, 35; Matthew 10:29; John 6:37-40; Acts 4:27-28; 13:48; Philippians 2:12-13)

In God's infinite wisdom and power, all things work together for the benefit of His people, (Romans 8:28; Hebrews 12:5-11) and for His glory. (Exodus 9:16; Isaiah 60:21; Ezekiel 28:20-24; Romans 9:22-24; 11:33-36; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-14)

His Fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 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; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 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; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2).

We teach that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the prerogatives 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 (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9). We teach that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Colossians 2:9).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 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 (Psalm 2:7-9; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 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, assumed the place of a Son, and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Philippians 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; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24).

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 (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 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; Romans 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Corinthians 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 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23): a. Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10) b. Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46). c. Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15).

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31). 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 the very presence of sin; and that he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Romans 3:25; 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

God the Holy Spirit

We teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternality (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 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

(Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 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 Corinthians 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; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 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 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 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. 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 be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 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 ostentatious 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 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 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 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:14).

3. Man

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 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 (Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).

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 recuperative powers 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 (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 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. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

We teach that the fall brought every person into a state of utter depravity, meaning every dimension of his being is distorted by sin. (Genesis 6:5, 12; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:28-32; 3:9-18; Titus 1:15) Apart from the grace of God, fallen people treat sin as their master, (Romans 6:16-22; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:26; Titus 3:3) God as an enemy, (Romans 5:10; 8:6-8; Colossians 1:21; James 4:4) and the message of the cross as foolishness. (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21; 2 Corinthians 2:15-16) Until he is born again, he possesses neither the desire nor the ability to love God, to keep His laws, to understand the gospel, to repent of sin, or to trust in Christ. (Jeremiah 13:23; John 3:3; John 3:19-20; 6:44, 65; 8:43, 45, 47; 14:17; 15:5; Romans 1:21; 3:9-18; 8:6-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Ephesians 2:1; 4:17-19; Colossians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:2)

4. 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; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

We teach that the Old Covenant, with the Law of Moses as its core, (Exodus 20:1-23:33; John 1:17; Acts 15:5; Hebrews 10:28) was revealed to the nation of Israel, (Deuteronomy 4:7-8; Romans 3:1-2; Galatians 2:14) promising earthly blessings for obedience, (Deuteronomy 7:12-24; 11:13-15, 26-29; 28:1-14) and threatening curses for disobedience. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17, 26-29; 28:15-68) The purpose of the Old Covenant was never to offer eternal life, (John 5:39-40; Romans 3:19-22; 8:3; 10:1-4; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:19-23; Hebrews 7:18-19) but rather to govern the life and worship of the Old Testament nation of Israel, (Deuteronomy 4:5-6, 14; 6:1-3; 10:12-13) to reveal the extent of man's depravity, (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-13; Galatians 3:19) and to foreshadow Christ and the New Covenant. (Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (cf. Acts 3:14-24; 7:37, 51-53); Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:6-14, 23-24; 10:1; 13:11-12)

We teach that the New Covenant, established through the person and redemptive work of Christ, (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 7:22;

8:6; 9:11-26; 13:20) provides eternal blessings which are acquired by grace through faith. (Romans 4:1-25; 6:14; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7) The Old covenant was fulfilled in Christ, thus becoming obsolete. (Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 7:4, 6; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:2-11; Galatians 3:24-25; 4:21-31; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 7:11-12, 18-19, 22; 8:1-13; 10:9b) God's final words of revelation, given through Christ and His New Testament apostles and prophets, (John 1:17-18; 13:34-35; Ephesians 2:19-20; 3:4-5) have become the authority concerning Christian conduct, and the interpretive lens through which the Old Testament must be understood and applied. (Deuteronomy 18:15-1; Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 28:20a; John 13:34-35; 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10, 14; Romans 14:5-6; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Colossians 2:16-17; Colossians 3:15-17; Hebrews 7:12; 10:28-29)

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 instrumentality of 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 will be its proper evidence and fruit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 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 (Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12b; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 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 (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 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 (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). 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; James 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 nor to God's

anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 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 (Romans 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 (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Justification

We teach that justification before God is an act of God (Romans 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; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 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 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 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; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 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 (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 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; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 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 (Romans 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Galatians 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 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 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 such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 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 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

5. 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 Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 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 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 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 (Ephesians

2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1-6; 5:32).

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; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 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; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

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

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 presentation and propagation 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 Corinthians 5:4, 7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 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 (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

We teach the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 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. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

We teach that there were two kinds of gifts given 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 (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 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 Corinthians 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:12; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those nonrevelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 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 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

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 (Romans 6:1-11). It 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 Corinthians 11:28-32). We also teach that whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

6. 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; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 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 (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-15).

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

7. Last Things (Eschatology)

Death

We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 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 Corinthians 5:8).

We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Romans 8:10-11, 19-23; 2 Corinthians 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 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; Revelation 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 judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), cut off from the life of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 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 Thessalonians 4:16; Titus 2:13) to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11) and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Tribulation Period

We teach that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 16), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matthew 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Daniel 12:2-3; Revelation 20:4-6). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 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 (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for a thousand years on the earth (Revelation 20:1-7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezekiel 37:21-28; Daniel 7:17-22; Revelation 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 (Daniel 7:17, 27; Revelation 20:1-7).

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

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

The Judgment of the Lost

We teach that following the release of Satan after the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 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 (Revelation 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 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 (Romans 14:10-13), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11, 15).

Eternity

We teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 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 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth wherein only righteousness dwells (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15, 21-22). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Revelation 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; Revelation 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Some of these statements are non-negotiable. On the non-negotiable points we will allow no disagreement or teaching in our fellowship and ministry, such as, the Trinity, the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ: His virgin conception and birth, His perfect, sinless life, His substitutionary death, His bodily, supernatural resurrection from death, the inerrant 66 books of the Holy Scriptures, salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, etc. But there are other matters in this document that we can disagree on with others and still fellowship with them, such as the gifts of the Spirit, and the rapture of the church. May our Lord enable us to be wise in the proper use of this document. It is meant to be a guide. We acknowledge the weakness of our own reasoning and the final authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters. Please continue to search the Scriptures to see if these things are true, for the glory of our wonderful Lord and Savior.

On Truth and Certainty

At the turn of the twenty-first century, both the truth of Scripture and objective truth in general are being questioned. Individuals in society are sometimes skeptical of the ability to know anything about the world or the Bible. These issues have risen to such a level that they cannot be ignored, and have prompted us to affirm our position on truth and its knowability with a statement that places our church firmly within the bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy.

We affirm that:

1. God knows all things perfectly in one eternal act, both possible and actual (Ps. 139:1-6). As a result, all true knowledge of reality which we apprehend is a subset of that which God knows.

2. God created humanity in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, we are able to think about and accurately understand truth (that which constitutes and corresponds to reality). Because humanity is finite, we are incapable of an

exhaustive grasp of what can be known (Isa. 55:8-9). There are also mysteries to our faith that, while beyond our grasp, are not irrational. Moreover, our understanding of truth exists within the context of a given point in history and a given culture. Yet, as created in His image, God holds us morally responsible for believing the truth that we can know and promoting belief in that truth (Rom. 1:18-25).

3. The Fall affected the image of God in all humanity. Therefore, while not erased, our ability to think, perceive, understand, and communicate accurately has been marred (Eph. 4:17-18; Col. 3:10). Humans distort and shun truth in thought, word, and deed, especially that truth which relates to God and their relationship to Him (Rom. 1:18-23; Eph. 4:17-19). Thus, human learning will be mixed with error and should be properly scrutinized against God's Word.

4. Despite the debilitating effects of the Fall, God in His grace continues to communicate with humanity in a manner that it can accurately comprehend. God operates through creation, providence, conscience, the community of the church, and the Scriptures to bring the truth to bear on humans for their benefit or, should they reject it, for their judgment. God reached beyond the barriers erected by sin through the incarnation of Christ, Who is the definitive revelation of God as God in flesh (the Word of God, John 1:1, 14). An accurate, foundational understanding and deeper appreciation of reality is possible through God's Word and the Spirit when one engages that Word and responds to it in faith.

a. *The Bible is the uniquely inspired Word of God and possesses inherent power (2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 4:12).* Scripture is able to accomplish the purpose for which God spoke it (Isa. 55:11). God can and does wish to communicate with humanity through His Scriptures in a way that, by His Spirit, can be understood and obeyed.

b. *The truths of the Scriptures are the necessary and ultimate foundation for all human knowledge of reality because they reveal the nature and purpose of His creative and redemptive acts.* Within a variety of literary forms and historical contexts, Scripture commends to its readers a basic framework of worldview truths (2 Th. 2:15; Jude 3). This means that the truth conveyed in Scripture can be expressed in doctrine. Furthermore, Scripture when rightly understood stands as the primary validating criterion of truth claims to the degree that the claims of Scripture intersect with truth claims arising from any other source. Thus, we acknowledge that truth is conveyed in many forms, including scientific discovery, the creative arts, and in many language forms. These forms not only convey truth, but truth can be derived from them and known with varying degrees of certainty. Yet, the Bible provides the ultimate reference point for all knowledge of truth. It shapes the presuppositions, interpretations, and conclusions of all knowledge of the world.

c. *The Holy Spirit ministers in relation to the Word (1 Th. 1:5).* God's grace, through His Holy Spirit, guides us into a knowledge of objective realities about which Scripture speaks (even if we doubt them) that are adequate for life. The fruit of faith includes being convinced of the truths found in Scripture (Heb. 11:1).

d. *The truth of Scripture can be known through applying appropriate principles and practices of interpretation (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 2 Peter 3:15-18).* The meaning of the truth of Scripture is attainable through the appropriate study of the words, sentences, and paragraphs of the text in their literary and historical contexts (1 Tim. 4:6). Valid interpretation will reflect the assumptions and practices commended in the Scriptures (Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 1:7-9). The meaning of Scripture is that which the divine/human author intended to convey. The essential consensus of the church in interpretation through the ages bears witness to the Spirit's guidance of God's people over time (2 Tim. 1:13; e.g., such core teachings as the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and the sinfulness of humanity). Furthermore, those interpretations of the Scriptures which fall outside this essential consensus should be carefully scrutinized.

e. *Believers do possess an inner conviction and assurance concerning the truths taught in the Scripture that is the result of the effectual working of the Word of God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in response to faith (2 Tim. 1:13-14).* For the Christian, this conviction and assurance is more than merely an option. The Christian has the privilege of living with confidence made possible by God's grace. Christians can be assured that their beliefs are warranted, even if their understanding is not comprehensive or perfect in every instance. This certainty is to be held with humility and love. There is no necessary dichotomy between love and humility on the one hand and this firm confidence on the other.

5. Biblical truth addresses the whole person across the whole of life, individually and in community. It is designed to shape the way in which one lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Its precepts should be consistently reflected in our behavior, attitude, and thinking. This stewardship of our lives requires that all the academic disciplines be thoroughly integrated with a biblical worldview. Inner conviction is designed to promote a living and growing relationship with God Himself, and a winsome testimony of Christ to others characterized by gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

6. Biblical truth requires aggressive evangelism until the completion of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

“On Truth and Certainty is adopted from the Cedarville University Board of Trustees Resolution on Truth and Certainty August 21, 2006

Restoring Those Who Continue Sinning

Our Statement Regarding Church Discipline

Church discipline is one of the primary means God uses to correct and restore His children when they fall into sin. It is also one way in which He maintains the unity, purity, integrity, and reputation of the church. Through private or public instruction, warning, counsel, or rebuke, and in some cases even social avoidance or expulsion from membership, God corrects his disobedient children or removes those who are not truly His. Christ Himself declared the church to be heaven's instrument in carrying out this difficult but necessary function (Matthew 18:18-20).

The purpose of this statement is to define, in general terms, five classes of sinful behavior for which church discipline may be necessary, and to explain how the Bible tells us to respond to each¹. We must not assume, however, that every situation will fall neatly into a single category. Disciplinary matters are often confusing combinations or variations of these general classes, making the proper course of action difficult to determine. For this reason, the church must carry out discipline with prayer, diligent application of Scripture, and reliance upon the Spirit of God.

1. Minor Faults

Minor faults are attitudes and actions such as rudeness, impatience, grumbling, complaining, negativity, pettiness, boasting, irritability, speaking too much or when inappropriate, lack of trust, worry, timidity, selfishness, etc. They are minor sins *by comparison*, but are nevertheless contrary to biblical instructions to be considerate, patient, content, always thankful, always rejoicing, forbearing, humble, slow to anger, slow to speak, trusting, bold, selfless, etc.

We are permitted, and actually encouraged to overlook most minor faults rather than resorting to discipline (Proverbs 10:12; 19:11; Romans 15:1; Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:8). Should a minor fault be thought serious enough to require private counsel, we should be particularly careful to apply Christ's words about removing the "speck" from our brother's eye while a "plank" is in our own (Matthew 7:1-5). Only if a minor fault is repeated so consistently or in such a disruptive manner that it causes harm to the church should any measure(s) be taken beyond private instruction, warning, or rebuke.

2. Unverifiable Sins

Whether minor or serious, unverifiable sins are offenses that are known to *only one member* besides the offender(s). Additionally, they are matters in which *no evidence* could be brought forth as proof. For example: insulting words spoken in private, physical assault or theft where no physical or

circumstantial evidence exists, breach of a private verbal contract, private awareness of another member's illicit behavior, etc.

In such cases, it may be necessary for the offended person or lone witness to rebuke the offender privately. But if private rebuke is unsuccessful and the offender is not willing to admit his sin to others, no further church action may be taken. The matter must be left with God; it should not be revealed to anyone else (Matthew 18:16, cf. Deuteronomy 19:15; Proverbs 25:8-10). (Note: Exceptions to this rule include the reporting of criminal offenses to the proper authorities when necessary or required by law, and/or warning any individuals who are endangered by the offender. Even in these cases, however, unnecessary publicity among church members should be avoided.)

3. Personal Offenses

Personal offenses are offenses between two Christians—more specifically, two members of the same church. Personal offenses could be defined as “any sinful behavior by one member that causes harm to another.” For example: insults, slander, breach of personal trust or contract, physical or sexual abuse, adultery, physical assault, theft, vandalism, etc.

In these situations, the offended person must closely follow Matthew 18:15-17:

* He must first meet with the offender in private, explain his offense to him, and seek his repentance (Matthew 18:15).

* If the offender remains unrepentant, the offended person must be cautious before taking additional measures. If the offense is unverifiable (as defined above) or not significant enough to bring before the whole church, it should not be pursued further.

* If the offense is significant and verifiable, a meeting should be arranged (a mini trial, as in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8), during which the offended person can present his case to the offender in the presence of one or two other members (Matthew 18:16). These should either be witnesses to the offense, or mature, discerning members who are able to evaluate evidence and testimony, question both parties effectively, determine guilt or responsibility, and offer appropriate biblical counsel.

* If the offender remains unrepentant even after his guilt has been proven before witnesses, the matter must be told to the general membership of the church at another meeting (Matthew 18:17). If he is present, the elder(s) should rebuke him publicly and implore him to confess and repent. If he is absent, the matter should still be revealed to the church (in appropriately limited detail, of course). In either case, the members of the church should be encouraged to make personal efforts to persuade him to repent. A date should be set for a final meeting, during which the matter will be brought to conclusion. The offender must be notified regarding this meeting (either in

person or via certified mail) and encouraged to attend in the hope that he will make a public confession. (Note: Because the offender's guilt was established at the "mini-trial," no opportunity will ordinarily be given at these subsequent meetings for him to debate the matter or defend himself publicly.)

* At the final meeting, the offender (if present) will be offered a final opportunity to repent and be restored. Regarding a publicly known offense, repentance would begin with a public confession. If he remains unrepentant or is not present, he will be considered an unbeliever and expelled from membership (Matthew 18:17).

* Even if the offender repents at some point prior to expulsion from membership, restitution and/or other remedial actions may be necessary, as determined by the elders (i.e. mandated accountability, removal from church office, counseling, etc.).

4. Public Disobedience

Public disobedience describes sinful behavior that causes harm to the unity, doctrinal integrity, purity, or reputation of the church as a whole. This category would include false teaching, divisiveness, contentions, gossip, slander of the church or its leaders, insubordination, sexual immorality, drunkenness, covetousness, theft, dishonesty, outbursts of anger or fighting, foul language, willful failure to provide, wrongful divorce or remarriage, breach of public trust or contract, etc. The two goals of church discipline in these situations are:

* to protect and preserve the unity, doctrinal integrity, purity, and reputation of the church (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 12:14-16).

* to identify those who begin to commit these types of sins, employ various biblical measures to call them to repentance, and restore them when possible (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

Unlike the singularity and clarity of the instructions for resolving personal offenses (Matthew 18:15-17), the instructions for dealing with acts of public disobedience are much more varied. Especially here, we must pause, pray, seek wise counsel, and apply the Scriptures carefully, considering each situation to be unique.

The following is a general representation of the range of biblical measures we have been given to deal with public disobedience. Not every measure listed here will be appropriate for every situation. We have listed them in order of severity, from the most gentle or subtle to the most direct, but this should not be construed to mean that they must be applied in this order in every case.

* **Be watchful. Be on guard against offenses** (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 12:14-16; etc.). We should not aggressively hunt for offenses or opportunities to enact discipline (Matthew 13:28-30), but we must be vigilant, ready to address sinful behavior when it becomes known.

* **Note those who are offending and watch them closely** (Romans 16:17; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:14-15). This is particularly the responsibility of the elders who are the shepherds of the flock. We are warned in the New Testament that there will be some who profess to be Christians who will seek to harm the church (Acts 20:30; 2 Peter 2:1-3). A person who begins to teach contrary to sound doctrine, is divisive or insubordinate, or seeks to exalt himself (i.e. 3 John 9-10), may be a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” and must be watched carefully in order to protect the true sheep.

* **Correct through teaching** (2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 1:9). The Word of God is powerful and effective. In all cases, especially when more direct or severe measures are not immediately necessary, elders and other teachers must address disobedience by applying the Scriptures humbly, gently, patiently, and convincingly (also see 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2).

* **Plead with the offender(s)** (1 Corinthians 1:10-11; Philippians 4:2-3). Paul pleaded with the Corinthian church as a group, and with Euodia and Syntyche as individual Christians in Philippi, imploring them to stop being divisive or contentious. In both situations, his pleas, which were in the form of open letters to the churches, also served as gentle public rebukes.

* **Warn them of consequences** (1 Thessalonians 5:14; Titus 3:10-11). Unruly or disobedient Christians who have not responded to gentle or subtle disciplinary measures are exposing themselves to public rebuke, social avoidance, or even expulsion from the church. Warn them of these embarrassing and painful consequences. Warn them most seriously of the day when they will stand before the Lord Jesus to be judged according to their deeds (2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

* **Rebuke them** (Matthew 16:22-23; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; 2:15). The prospect of being publicly rebuked should be a powerful deterrent to sinful behavior, both for the one rebuked, and for others who witness the rebuke. Public rebuke also serves the purpose of public teaching by identifying and exposing the nature of error (Ephesians 5:8-13).

* **Silence them** (Titus 1:10-11). Paul insisted that false teachers and divisive people “must be silenced,” and his implication was that the *leaders* of the church should make every effort to silence them. This could be accomplished through private warning, public rebuke and exposure of error, administrative removal from a teaching role, etc.

* **Shame them through social avoidance** (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15). Demonstrate to them that their behavior is not acceptable among the church

by excluding them from all fellowship *without* expelling them from membership. (Note: This type of brotherly exclusion is rare in the New Testament. It is most likely found only in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, where the offense was idleness and unruliness due to misguided views about the nearness of the second coming of Christ. It is possibly seen in 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 as well, but the reasons for exclusion in that case are unknown. The reference in Romans 16:17 is almost certainly to outsiders, not members of the church.)

These various measures are all intended to correct and restore, and to maintain peace and purity. They are to be applied while there is still hope for repentance. None of them are as severe as expulsion from membership, which is the subject of the next section.

5. Insufferable Wickedness

Insufferable wickedness refers to situations where there is only one proper course of action—expulsion from membership. There are three types of offenders whose behavior should be considered insufferable, and who must be expelled:

Unrepentant personal offenders—those who have refused to acknowledge their sin and repent, even after public rebuke and exhortation from the entire church (Matthew 18:17).

Gross offenders—those who commit even a single sin that is so abhorrent, shameful, or notorious that the reputation of Christ and the church is imperiled if they are not immediately expelled. (Romans 2:21-24; 1 Corinthians 5:1,5,13)

Offenders who are known by their wickedness—professing Christians who are known publicly for such sins as heresy, apostasy, divisiveness, sexual immorality, drunkenness, covetousness², etc. Their sinful lifestyle makes them indistinguishable from unbelievers. In other words, they are so characterized by false beliefs, false teaching, destructive motives, worldly affections, or immoral living that they cannot, by definition, be considered Christians (1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Titus 1:16; 1 John 1:5-6; 2:3-4; 3:9-10; 2 John 9-11).

In these situations, all that is necessary before expulsion is the establishment of the facts. We must notice that in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul did not instruct the church to first warn the incestuous man or seek his repentance. No command was given to rebuke him, publicly or privately, before casting him out. With the man's gross immorality well-known to all, Paul told them to immediately expel him from the church (1 Corinthians 5:5,13). In verse 11 of the same chapter, Paul lists other types of offenders who must be treated in the same way (Also see 1 Timothy 1:20 and Titus 3:10-11). Even if sorrow

is expressed by the offender upon exposure of his sin, expulsion is still necessary at this point in order to maintain the reputation of Christ and the church.

Additional Considerations:

1. The desired result of church discipline is always repentance and the restoration of the offender. Our private and public disciplinary measures should always be undertaken in a spirit of love, gentleness, and humility as we seek to bring about this positive end (Galatians 6:1-2). When restoration does not occur and expulsion becomes necessary, we are glad to see the purity of Christ and the church upheld, but we should be grieved, individually and corporately, that one with whom we shared fellowship has become known to us as an unbeliever.

2. Genuine repentance consists of more than outward sorrow and tears (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). It becomes evident when the offender is willing not only to leave his sin, but also to confess it to all who are affected by it (even to the general membership of the church if necessary, as determined by the elders), and to make restitution when appropriate.

3. When a member is expelled or socially excluded, he or she may not attend any gathering of the church, unless it is with the permission of the elders and for the purpose of public confession. Members who have any necessary continuing association with an expelled person must not participate with him or her in any shared activity that might be construed as Christian fellowship (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; Ephesians 5:11). The manner of such association must also never imply approval of the offender's behavior and/or condemnation of the disciplinary action taken by the church (Proverbs 17:15).

4. In the case of a member who was expelled, restoration will be considered with great caution, and then only after the membership process is repeated in its entirety. Depending upon the nature of the offense, a restored member may have become disqualified for biblical offices within the church (i.e. elder or deacon) due to a tarnished reputation, issues regarding marriage and divorce, and/or an obvious weakness in a particular area (1 Timothy 3:2-3,7,10; Titus 1:6-8; 1 Peter 5:3).

5. Disciplinary matters should be addressed promptly upon discovery of the sin. Unnecessary delay is unprofitable since it permits the perpetuation of the sin, maintains an unhealthy tension within the church, and creates the perception of apathy regarding sinful behavior.

6. If an offending member leaves our church after initial disciplinary action begins but prior to expulsion from membership, the matter will still be brought to conclusion (meaning, formal expulsion will still occur as if the member were present). If we learn that a recently expelled member (or one who is fleeing our disciplinary action) is seeking membership with another

church, one of our elders will, in most cases, attempt to arrange a private meeting with a pastor of that church along with the offender, in order to discuss the ongoing offense and protect the other church from harm (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

7. Where two members disagree regarding blame or degrees of responsibility, the matter should be brought before the elders and/or other mature men in the church who will judge according to the pattern found in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

8. Every member must agree that he or she will never initiate, pursue, or participate in any civil legal action against the church or against any member in connection with a disciplinary matter (see *Our Membership Agreement*). In fact, any Christian considering civil legal action against another Christian for any reason should consider Paul's prohibition of such behavior (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

9. Persistent and willful non-attendance is a sin requiring church discipline (Hebrews 10:24-25). Except where persistent non-attendance is the result of unavoidable circumstances (i.e. extended illness, incapacitation, out-of-town college education, military service, etc.), it will be considered a public offense and addressed appropriately. Those who persist in their non-attendance without legitimate excuse, even after exhortations and warnings from the church, will be expelled from membership. (Note: We have established no specific length of time to designate non-attendance as "persistent." Each situation will be treated as unique. Also, we will be diligent in conducting the most thorough and comprehensive investigation possible in determining the reason(s) for non-attendance. We will assume, until conclusive proof to the contrary exists, that the reason(s) are legitimate. Only when we are certain that the offender is *willfully* and *sinfully* neglecting the church will he be expelled.)

10. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 5:19 ("Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.") should not be construed to mean that elders are to be protected from proper disciplinary action. Paul knew that elders, being in a position of authority, could easily become the objects of false or frivolous accusations. His command is simply a warning to watch for such abuses. Elders are church members just as all others, and are subject to discipline according to the same biblical principles as previously stated. (Note: The removal of an elder from his position due to an evident lack of biblical qualification is an issue we have not addressed in detail in this statement (see our document entitled *Appointment and Removal of Elders*).

11. The training and discipline of children is the responsibility and biblical obligation of parents, particularly fathers (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14; Ephesians 6:4). Member-parents who refuse or neglect to properly train and discipline a child, resulting in the perpetuation of sinful behavior on the part of the child, are committing a public offense and are subject to church discipline. In the event that an older child has become a member, yet is living

under parental authority, the parent(s) remain responsible. If the member-parent(s) of a member-child refuse or neglect to train and/or discipline, resulting in the perpetuation of the child's sinful behavior, both the member-parent(s) and the member-child are subject to the discipline of the church. This is not meant to refer to parents who *do* properly, diligently, and biblically train and discipline a particularly obstinate child who nevertheless remains rebellious and disobedient. Even in these rare cases, however, whether the child is a member or not, if his or her behavior is so disruptive, immoral, and/or violent that the meetings of the church cannot proceed in a safe, peaceful, and orderly manner, he or she will be excluded from attendance or expelled from membership.

A Final Thought

There is admittedly a certain tension between the different principles involved in church discipline. On the one hand there is the gentleness of Galatians 6:1, on the other, the severity of Titus 1:13. While we may never be judgmental in our attitudes (Matthew 7:1), we must nevertheless judge among ourselves (1 Corinthians 5:12). Just as we are called to love in a manner that is willing to overlook certain sins (1 Peter 4:8) we must also “exhort one another daily” so that none will be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). The tension is seen most clearly in that we are to love our brother as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35), yet remain willing to consider him an unbeliever and cast him away if he continues in sin (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:11).

We might be tempted to use the word “balance” in describing our desire to manage this tension. But as it is all-too-commonly understood, “balance” means compromise—easing away from convictions and obligations in order not to appear “unbalanced” or overly zealous. The problem with this understanding is that Scripture never tells Christians to be “balanced” people in this way. On the contrary, we are told to be zealous and fervent, *both* in our love for one another (Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8), *and* in our pursuit of holiness and purity (Titus 2:14; Hebrews 12:14-17).

What this means for the church in the area of discipline is that we must never rely upon human understanding, which is prone to setting itself against the Word of God. It means we must trust, study, and obey the Scriptures, even when the perceived tension between biblical obligations seems unbearable. We must hold *both* goals of church discipline in the highest regard, always allowing the Word of God to determine our course of action.

Key passages of Scripture regarding church discipline

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up

cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

Hebrews 12:14-16

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

Ephesians 5:11

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife. And you are puffed up and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you . . . deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. . . . Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven . . . I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. . . . For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'.

1 Corinthians 5:1, 2,5-7, 11-13

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:19-20

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly . . . 1 Thessalonians 5:14

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. . . . And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

1 Timothy 5:20

Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.

Proverbs 27:5

Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Titus 3:10-11

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

Romans 16:17

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. 2 John 9-11

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner . . . For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all these things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11

¹ We are indebted here to Rev. Eleazer Savage who published a *Manual of Church Discipline* in 1845. It is difficult to find a complete copy of this work, but a helpful portion is published in the book, *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, edited by Mark Dever, (Washington D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001.), pp. 479-523.

² In our wealthy and materialistic society, Christians often tend to trivialize covetousness, but this should never be. Covetousness is a serious sin—one that is utterly uncharacteristic of a true Christian if it becomes a pattern of life.

A covetous person is one whose affections are not for God, but rather for worldly things. Instead of worshiping God

and loving Him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, the covetous person has an inordinate craving for money, material goods, or the lusts of the flesh. Prohibited in the Ten Commandments, covetousness is a sin that should be hated by God's people (Exodus 18:21; 20:17). Paul refers to covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). He lists it as one of a number of sins that are bringing the wrath of God "upon the sons of disobedience" (Colossians 3:6). Concerning the love (or coveting) of money, Paul told Timothy that it was "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). And John was speaking of covetousness when he wrote, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). "Do not be deceived," Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. No covetous person "will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).