

**Doctrinal Statement
- What We Teach -
Puget Sound Bible Church**

Contents

The Holy Scriptures	3
God	3
God the Father.....	3
God the Son.	4
God the Holy Spirit.....	5
Man	6
Salvation.....	7
Regeneration.	7
Election.	7
Justification.....	8
Sanctification.	8
Security.	9
Separation.	9
The Church	9
Angels	12
Holy Angels.	12
Fallen Angels.	12
Last Things	12
Death.	12
The Rapture of the Church.	12
The Tribulation Period.....	13
The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign.	13
The Judgment of the Lost.	13
Eternity.....	14
What It Means To Be a Christian	14
God Is Sovereign Creator.	14
God Is Holy.....	14
Mankind Is Sinful.	14

Sin Demands a Penalty.....	14
Jesus Is Lord and Savior.	15
The Character of Saving Faith.	15
STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, AND SEXUALITY	15
Biblical Eldership.....	17
The Office of Elder.....	17
A Plurality of Elders.....	17
The Qualifications of Elders.....	18
The Functions of Elders	19
The Role of Women	19
The Old Testament and Women.....	19
Jesus and Women	20
The Epistles and Women	21
The Family.....	21
The Church	21
Divorce & Remarriage	22
The Grounds for Divorce	22
The Possibility of Remarriage	23
The Role of the Church.....	23
Pre-conversion Divorce	24
Repentance and Forgiveness	24
Church Discipline.....	24
The Purpose of Discipline	25
The Process of Discipline	25

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 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.

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). 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 the 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 the eternal Son, the second Person of the Trinity, without altering His divine nature or surrendering any of the divine attributes, made Himself of no reputation by taking on a full human nature consubstantial with our own, yet without sin (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26).

We teach that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35) and thus born of a woman (Galatians 4:4-5), so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the divine and the human, were joined together in one person, without confusion, change, division, or separation. He is therefore very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

We teach that in His incarnation, Christ fully possessed His divine nature, attributes, and prerogatives (Colossians 2:9; cf. Luke 5:18-26; John 16:30; 20:28). However, in the state of His humiliation, He did not always fully express the glories of His majesty, concealing them behind the veil of His genuine humanity (Matthew 17:2; Mark 13:32; Philippians 2:5-8). According to His human nature, He acts in submission to the Father (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38) by the power of Holy Spirit (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:1, 14), while, according to His divine nature, He acts by His authority and power as the eternal Son (John 1:14; cf. 2:11; 10:37-38; 14:10-11).

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 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).

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):

- Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46)
- 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).

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), eternity (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; 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 (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 be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 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 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 2:1-4).

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).

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).

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 are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (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 or 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).

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 serving 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 perform according to their gifts as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and honor His authority in service to the church. The congregation is to submit to Jesus' leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17), while in alignment with Biblical guidance and directives.

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 Christ-led, Spirit-led 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 follow Biblical instructions in the determination 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 and active promotion of all saints to the work of service, including service in the church services (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12). Full

member participation - as each is led by the Holy Spirit according to Scriptural boundaries - is the major guidance for an orderly worship service (1 Corinthians 11:26-40).

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 to fulfill and complete the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12, 1 Corinthians 14:26-40), 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). As a regular occurrence, the only gifts in operation today are those nonrevelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8). With the objective of not quenching the Spirit, we teach that God can do as He wants, wherever and however He wants (1 Thessalonians 5:19), while maintaining the need for balance in the area of spiritual gifts.

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, participation in the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ, who indwells every believer, and so is present, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

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); that he is 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).

Last Things

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 1,000 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 that 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 1,000-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 (John 5:28-29), 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; 21:1-27; 22:1-21). 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).

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.

Contemporary thinking says man is the product of evolution. But the Bible says 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; Colossians 1:16). Therefore, He also owns and rules everything (Psalm 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship.

God Is Holy.

God is absolutely and perfectly holy (Isaiah 6:3), therefore He cannot commit or approve of evil (James 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.

According to Scripture, 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. (Romans 3:10-12).

Sin Demands a Penalty.

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

Jesus Is Lord and Savior.

The New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything (Colossians 1:16). Therefore He owns and rules everything (Psalm 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 Peter 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 Corinthians 5:21), thereby enabling Him to forgive and save those who place their faith in Him (Romans 3:26).

The Character of Saving Faith.

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 Thessalonians 1:9) and pursue Christ (Matthew 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 (James 2:19), but they don’t love and obey Him. True saving faith always responds in obedience (Ephesians 2:10).

Statement on Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage and Sexuality

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

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).

Biblical Eldership

Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. An elder is one of a plurality of biblically qualified men who jointly shepherd and oversee a local body of believers. The word translated “elder” is used nearly twenty times in Acts and the epistles in reference to this unique group of leaders who have responsibility for overseeing the people of God.

The Office of Elder

As numerous passages in the New Testament indicate, the words “elder” (presbuteros), “overseer” (episkopos), and “pastor” (poimēn) all refer to the same office. In other words, overseers and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The qualifications for an overseer (episkopos) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an elder (presbuteros) in Titus 1:6-9 are unmistakably parallel. In fact, in Titus 1, Paul uses both terms to refer to the same man (presbuteros in v. 5 and episkopos in v. 7). All three terms are used interchangeably in Acts 20. In verse 17, Paul assembles all the elders (presbuteros) of the church of Ephesus to give them his farewell message. In verse 28 he says, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimainō] the church of God.” First Peter 5:1-2 brings all three terms together as well. Peter writes, “Therefore, I exhort the elders [presbuteros] among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [poimainō] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopēō] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.” The different terms, then, indicate various features of ministry, not varying levels of authority or separate offices, as some churches espouse.

A Plurality of Elders

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that each local body of believers is shepherded by a plurality of God-ordained elders. Simply stated, this is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture does one find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by a single pastor.

The Apostle Paul left Titus in Crete and instructed him to “appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). James instructed his readers to “call for the elders of the church” to pray for those who are sick (James 5:14). When Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they “appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, the apostle referred to “the elders who rule well” at the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 5:17; see also Acts 20:17, where Paul addresses “the elders of the church” at Ephesus). The book of Acts indicates that there were “elders” at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4; 21:18).

Again and again, reference is made to a plurality of elders in each of the various churches. In fact, every place in the New Testament where the term presbuteros (“elder”) is used it is plural, except where the apostle John uses it of himself in 2 and 3 John and where Peter uses it of himself in 1 Peter 5:1. Nowhere in the New Testament is there a reference to a one-pastor congregation. It may be that each elder in the city had an individual group in which he had specific oversight. But the church was seen as one church, and decisions were made by a collective process and in reference to the whole, not the individual parts.

In other passages, reference is made to a plurality of elders even though the word presbuteros itself is not used. In the opening greeting of his epistle to the Philippians, Paul refers to the “overseers [plural of episkopos] and deacons” at the church of Philippi (Phil. 1:2). In Acts 20:28, Paul warned the elders of the church of Ephesus, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which God has made you overseers [plural of episkopos]” (Acts 20:28). The writer of Hebrews called his readers to obey and submit to the “leaders” who kept watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Paul exhorted his Thessalonian readers to “appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction” (1 Thess. 5:12)—a clear reference to the overseers in the Thessalonian assembly.

Much can be said for the benefits of leadership made up of a plurality of godly men. Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (cf. Prov. 11:14). If there is division among the elders in making decisions, all the elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. In this way, the unity and harmony that the Lord desires for the church will begin with those individuals he has appointed to shepherd His flock.

The Qualifications of Elders

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That’s why Scripture stresses the importance of qualified church leadership and delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position.

The qualifications for elders are found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-8. According to these passages, an elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, not fond of sordid gain, a good manager of his household, one who has his children under control with dignity, not a new convert, one who has a good reputation outside the church, self-controlled, sensible, able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict, above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, just, and devout.

The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be “above reproach.” That is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. An elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his business life, and his spiritual life. In this way, he is to be

a model of godliness so he can legitimately call the congregation to follow his example (Phil. 3:17). All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skills, only amplify that idea.

In addition, the office of elder is limited to men. First Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” In the church, women are to be under the authority of the elders, excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over them.

The Functions of Elders

As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus, it carried a great amount of responsibility. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource to know the mind and heart of God with regard to issues in the church.

The primary responsibility of an elder is to serve as a manager and caretaker of the church (1 Tim. 3:5). That involves a number of specific duties. As spiritual overseers of the flock, elders are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); oversee the church (Acts 20:28); ordain others (1 Tim. 4:14); rule, teach, and preach (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2); exhort and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the New Testament church’s work.

Because of its heritage of democratic values and its long history of congregational church government, modern American evangelicalism often views the concept of elder rule with suspicion. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, demonstrates that the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders, and only by following this biblical pattern will the church maximize its fruitfulness to the glory of God.

The Role of Women

Although women have traditionally fulfilled supportive roles in serving the church and gained their greatest joy and sense of accomplishment from being wives and mothers, the feminist movement has successfully influenced many women to abandon these divinely ordained roles. Unfortunately, this movement has made headway even in the church, creating chaos and confusion regarding the role of women both in ministry and in the home. Only in Scripture can God’s intended design for women be found.

The Old Testament and Women

In the creation account of Genesis 1, God’s first word on the subject of men and women is that they were equally created in the image of God (v. 27). Neither received more of the image of God than the other. So the Bible begins with the equality of the sexes. As persons, as spiritual beings standing before God, men and women are absolutely equal.

Despite this equality, there is in Genesis 2 a more detailed account of the creation of the two human beings that reveals differences in their God-given functions and responsibilities. God did not create the man and the woman at the same time, but rather He created Adam first and Eve later for the specific purpose of being Adam's helper. Eve was equal to Adam, but she was given the role and duty of submitting to him. Although the word "helper" carries very positive connotations—even being used of God Himself as the helper of Israel (Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20)—it still describes someone in a relationship of service to another. The responsibility of wives to submit to their husbands, then, was part of the plan from creation, even before the curse. The first books of the Bible establish both the equality of men and women and also the support role of the wife (see Exod. 21:15, 17, 28-31; Num. 5:19-20, 29; 6:2; 30:1-16).

Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's command resulted in certain consequences (Gen. 3:16-19). For the woman, God pronounced a curse that included multiplied pain in childbirth and tension in the authority-submission relationship of husband and wife. Genesis 3:16 says the woman's "desire" will be for her husband but he shall "rule" over her. In Genesis 4:7 the author uses the same word "desire" to mean "excessive control over." Thus, the curse in Genesis 3:16 refers to a new desire on the part of the woman to exercise control over her husband—but he will in fact oppressively rule and exert authority over her. The result of the Fall on marriage through history has been an ongoing struggle between the sexes, with women seeking control and men seeking dominance.

Throughout the Old Testament, women were active in the religious life of Israel, but generally they were not leaders. Women like Deborah (Judges 4) were clearly the exception and not the rule. There was no woman with an ongoing prophetic ministry. No woman was a priest. No queen ever ruled Israel. No woman wrote an Old Testament (or New Testament) book. Isaiah 3:12 indicates that God allowed women to rule as part of His judgment on the sinning nation.

Jesus and Women

In the midst of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, which viewed women almost on the level of possessions, Jesus showed love and respect for women. Though Jewish rabbis did not teach women and the Jewish Talmud said it was better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman, Jesus never took the position that women, by their very nature, could not understand spiritual or theological truth. He not only included them in His audiences but also used illustrations and images that would be familiar to them (Matt. 13:33; 22:1-2; 24:41; Luke 15:8-10) and specifically applied His teaching to them (Matt. 10:34ff.). To the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), He revealed that He was the Messiah and discussed with her topics such as eternal life and the nature of true worship. He also taught Mary and, when admonished by Martha, pointed out the priority of learning spiritual truth even over "womanly" responsibilities like serving guests in one's home (Luke 10:38).

Although men in Jesus' day normally would not allow women to count change into their hands for fear of physical contact, Jesus touched women to heal them and allowed women to touch Him (Luke 13:10ff.; Mark 5:25ff.). Jesus even allowed a small group of women to travel with Him and His disciples (Luke 8:1-3), an unprecedented happening at that time. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and sent her to announce His resurrection to the disciples (John 20:1-18), despite the fact that women were not allowed to be witnesses in Jewish courts because they were considered liars.

The Epistles and Women

In the Epistles, the two principles of equality and submission for women exist side by side. Galatians 3:28 points to the equality, indicating that the way of salvation is the same for both men and women and that they are members of equal standing in the body of Christ. It does not, however, eradicate all differences in responsibilities for men and women, for this passage does not cover every aspect of God's design for male and female. In addition, there are many other passages that make distinctions between what God desires of men and what He desires of women, especially within family and within the church.

The Family

While Christian marriage is to involve mutual love and submission between two believers (Eph. 5:21), four passages in the New Testament expressly give to wives the responsibility to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). This voluntary submission of one equal to another is an expression of love for God and a desire to follow His design as revealed in His Word. It is never pictured as demeaning or in any way diminishing the wife's equality. Rather the husband is called to love his wife sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25) and to serve as the leader in a relationship of two equals.

While husbands and fathers have been given the primary responsibility for the leadership of their children (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1 Tim. 3:4-5), wives and mothers are urged to be "workers at home" (Titus 2:5), meaning managers of the household. Their home and their children are to be their priority, in contrast to the world's emphasis today on careers and fulltime jobs for women outside the home.

The Church

From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (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.

Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. However, without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even between the Father and the incarnate Son (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.

Divorce & Remarriage

God hates divorce. He hates it because it always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that two partners have entered into before Him, and because it brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children (Mal. 2:14-16). Divorce in the Scripture is permitted only because of man's sin. Since divorce is only a concession to man's sin and is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there is no other recourse. With God's help a marriage can survive the worst sins.

In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ teaches clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage bond (Gen. 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of "hardness of heart" (Matt. 19:8). Legal divorce was a concession for the faithful partner due to the sexual sin or abandonment by the sinning partner, so that the faithful partner was no longer bound to the marriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12-15). Although Jesus did say that divorce is permitted in some situations, we must remember that His primary point in this discourse is to correct the Jews' idea that they could divorce one another "for any cause at all" (Matt. 19:3), and to show them the gravity of pursuing a sinful divorce. Therefore, the believer should never consider divorce except in specific circumstances (see next section), and even in those circumstances it should only be pursued reluctantly because there is no other recourse.

The Grounds for Divorce

The only New Testament grounds for divorce are sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever. The first is found in Jesus' use of the Greek word *porneia* (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This is a general term that encompasses sexual sin such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. When one partner violates the unity and intimacy of a marriage by sexual sin—and forsakes his or her covenant obligation—the faithful partner is placed in an extremely difficult situation. After all means are exhausted to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the Bible permits release for the faithful partner through divorce (Matt. 5:32; 1 Cor. 7:15).

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving mate does not desire to live with his or her believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Because “God has called us to peace” (v. 15), divorce is allowed and may be preferable in such situations. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, perhaps because of lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believer is in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill. Because “the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor. 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing the displeasure of God.

The Possibility of Remarriage

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In fact, the purpose for a biblical divorce is to make clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10-11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matt. 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Cor. 7:11). The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

The Role of the Church

Believers who pursue divorce on unbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who obtains an unbiblical divorce and remarries is guilty of adultery since God did not permit the original divorce (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11-12). That person is subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. If a professing Christian violates the marriage covenant and refuses to repent during the process of church discipline, Scripture instructs that he or she should be put out of the church and treated as an unbeliever (v. 17). When the discipline results in such a reclassification of the disobedient spouse as an “outcast” or unbeliever, the faithful partner would be free to divorce according to the provision for divorce as in the case of an unbeliever departing, as stated in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Before such a divorce, however, reasonable time should be allowed for the possibility of the unfaithful spouse returning because of the discipline.

The leadership in the local church should also help single believers who have been divorced to understand their situation biblically, especially in cases where the appropriate application of biblical teaching does not seem clear. For example, the church leadership may at times need to decide whether one or both of the former partners could be legitimately considered “believers” at the time of their past divorce, because this will affect the application of biblical principles to their current situation (1 Cor. 7:17-24). Also, because people often transfer to or from other churches and many of those churches do not practice church discipline, it might be necessary for the leadership to decide whether a member’s estranged or former spouse should currently be considered a Christian or treated as an unbeliever because of continued disobedience. Again, in some cases this would affect the application of the biblical principles (1 Cor. 7:15; 2 Cor. 6:14).

Pre-conversion Divorce

According to 1 Corinthians 7:20-27, there is nothing in salvation that demands a particular social or marital status. The Apostle Paul, therefore, instructs believers to recognize that God providentially allows the circumstances they find themselves in when they come to Christ. If they were called while married, then they are not required to seek a divorce (even though divorce may be permitted on biblical grounds). If they were called while divorced, and cannot be reconciled to their former spouse because that spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then they are free to either remain single or be remarried to another believer (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14).

Repentance and Forgiveness

In cases where divorce took place on unbiblical grounds and the guilty partner later repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. A sign of true repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, which would involve a willingness to pursue reconciliation with his or her former spouse, if that is possible. If reconciliation is not possible, however, because the former spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then the forgiven believer could pursue another relationship under the careful guidance and counsel of church leadership.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed (Mark 10:11-12). God does forgive that sin immediately when repentance takes place, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate anything other than that. This includes qualifications for church leadership - both the roles of elder and deacon. From that point on the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.

Church Discipline

On occasion a Christian will wander away from the fellowship of other believers and find himself ensnared by sin through ignorance or willful disobedience. It then becomes necessary for the church, and particularly its shepherds, to actively seek the repentance and restoration of that Christian. As shepherds of the flock, the elders love the sheep and are

also held accountable by God for their spiritual welfare, including that of the wandering sheep. As in Jesus' parable in Luke 15:3-8, it is a time of joy, both in heaven and within the church, when the wandering Christian truly repents.

One means by which the church seeks to lovingly restore wandering believers is the process of church discipline. In Matthew 18, the Lord explains to His disciples how to respond when a fellow believer sins. The principles He sets forth must guide the body of Christ as she seeks to implement discipline in the church today.

The Purpose of Discipline

The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord. When a sinning believer is rebuked and he turns from his sin and is forgiven, he is won back to fellowship with the body and with its head, Jesus Christ.

The goal of church discipline, then, is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is not to embarrass people or to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose is to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back into a pure relationship within the assembly.

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus says, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." The Greek word translated "won" was originally used of accumulating wealth in the sense of monetary commodities. Here it refers to the gaining back of something of value that is lost, namely, an erring brother. When a brother or sister strays, a valuable treasure is lost, and the church should not be content until he or she is restored. The body of Christ is in the business of recovery (Gal. 6:1), and such is the purpose of church discipline.

The Process of Discipline

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus sets forth the four step process of church discipline: (1) tell him his sin alone; (2) take some witnesses; (3) tell the church; and (4) treat him as an outsider.

Step One (Matt. 18:15). The process of church discipline begins on an individual level. Jesus said, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private" (v. 15a). Here, an individual believer is to go to a sinning brother privately and confront him in a spirit of humility and gentleness. This confrontation involves clearly exposing his sin so that he is aware of it and calling him to repentance. If the sinning brother repents in response to the private confrontation, that brother is forgiven and restored (v. 15b).

Step Two (Matt. 18:16). If the sinning brother refuses to listen to the one who has rebuked him privately, the next step in the discipline process is to take one or two more believers along to confront him again (v. 16a). The purpose of taking other believers is so that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (v. 16b). In other words, the

witnesses are present not only to confirm that the sin was committed but, in addition, to confirm that the sinning brother was properly rebuked and that he has or has not repented.

The presence of additional witnesses is as much a protection for the one being approached as it is for the one approaching. After all, a biased person could erroneously say, “Well, I tried to confront him, but he’s impenitent.” It would be presumptuous to think that one person could make that ultimate determination, especially if he was the one who had been sinned against. The witnesses need to confirm whether there is a heart of repentance or one of indifference or rejection. Such a report provides the basis for further action because the situation has been verified beyond the report of one individual.

At this point, it should be hoped that the one or two who are brought along to confront the sinner will not have to become public witnesses against him before the rest of the church. Ideally, their added rebuke will be sufficient to induce a change of heart in the offending brother that the initial rebuke did not cause. If this change of heart does occur, that brother is forgiven and restored, and the matter is dropped.

Step Three (Matt. 18:17a). If the sinning brother refuses to listen and respond to the confrontation of the witnesses after a period of time, those witnesses are then to tell it to the church (v. 17a). This is most appropriately done by bringing the matter to the attention of the elders, who in turn oversee its communication to the assembly as a whole.

How long should the witnesses continue to call the person to repentance before telling the church? The elders should avoid carrying out the third or fourth stage of church discipline until they are absolutely certain that the erring believer has truly sinned, or is continuing to sin, and that he has refused to repent when appropriately confronted. The elders will routinely send a letter by registered mail warning the individual that the third (or fourth) step of discipline will be taken if they have not received word of repentance by a specific date. When this date has passed, the person’s sin and refusal to repent are made known publicly, either before the entire assembly during a Communion service or through a fellowship group in which the person is known.

Step Four (Matt. 18:17b). The fourth and final step in the process of church discipline is ostracism. If a sinning believer refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be ostracized from the fellowship. Jesus said, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer” (v. 17b). The term “Gentile” was primarily used of non-Jews who held to their traditional paganism and had no part in the covenant, worship, or social life of the Jews. On the other hand, a “tax-gatherer” was an outcast from the Jews by choice, having become a traitor to his own people. Jesus’ use of these terms doesn’t mean that the church is to treat these people badly. It simply means that when a professing believer refuses to repent, the church is to treat him as if he were outside of the fellowship. They are not to let him associate and participate in the blessings and benefits of the Christian assembly.

When a man in the Corinthian church refused to forsake an incestuous relationship with his stepmother, the apostle Paul commanded that the man be removed from their midst (1 Cor. 5:13). The believers there were not even to share a meal with him (1 Cor. 5:11), for dining with someone was symbolic of a hospitable and cordial fellowship. The one who is persistently unrepentant is to be totally ostracized from the fellowship of the church and treated like an outcast, not a brother.

As far as the welfare of the church is concerned, the purpose of putting the brother out is to protect the purity of the fellowship (1 Cor. 5:6), to warn the assembly of the seriousness of sin (1 Tim. 5:20), and to give a testimony of righteousness to a watching world. But as far as the welfare of the brother himself is concerned, the purpose of the ostracism is not to punish but to awaken, and it must therefore be done in humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteous superiority (2 Thess. 3:15).

When a church has done everything it can to bring a sinning member back to purity of life but is unsuccessful, that individual is to be left to his sin and his shame. If he is truly a Christian, God will not cast him away, but He may allow him to sink still deeper before he becomes desperate enough to turn from his sin.

The command not to have fellowship or even social contact with the unrepentant brother does not exclude all contact. When there is an opportunity to admonish him and try to call him back, the opportunity should be taken. In fact, such opportunities should be sought. But the contact should be for the purpose of admonishment and restoration and no other.

Notes:

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