

THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES

The goal of this document is to provide the foundation of biblical unity to Mission Bible Church. Although unity is more than truth, it is founded on biblical truth. To the best abilities of the elders of Mission Bible Church, this document lays out foundational truths to preserving the unity of faith. Unity is achieved when each of us as believers put the needs of others above our own in all modesty, humility, and lowliness of mind.

“Paul says that pastors and teachers are to equip the saints “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:13). In other words, the unity we pursue is unity in the truth. Of course, Christian unity is more than shared truth, but not less. Paul piles up the words for common-mindedness in Philippians 2:2, “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (see also Philippians 4:2). Everything is to “accord with Christ.” “May God ... grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus” (Romans 15:5).” - John Piper

For more on achieving true, biblical unity, read the article on page 3 of this document.

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Article: How can the church achieve a true, biblical unity?

The Bible underscores the importance of “unity” and “oneness.” Unity with others is “good” and “pleasant” (Psalm 133:1). Unity is absolutely essential because the church is the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27), and a body cannot be in disunity or disharmony with itself. If disunity occurs, it essentially ceases to be a body and becomes a disjointed group of individuals. Jesus’ plan for His church is people unified in the faith.

The secret to unity begins with how we view ourselves within the body and how we view others. The key verse that addresses this is Philippians 2:3: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” All disunity in a church can be traced back to the simple truth that too often we act selfishly and consider ourselves better than others. Paul goes on to explain further in the following verse: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Sadly, churches that experience disunity and are in conflict and turmoil are generally filled with people looking to their own needs, their own desires, and their own ambitions. Such behavior is characteristic of unbelievers, not those with the mind of Christ. Worldliness, not godliness, is the hallmark of the disunited church, as Paul reminded the Corinthians: “For you are yet carnal. For in that there is among you envyings and strife and divisions, are you not carnal, and do you not walk according to men?” (1 Corinthians 3:3).

But Paul tells us that we are to consider others’ needs before our own. In all modesty, humility and lowliness of mind, we are to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). A church filled with such people cannot help but have peace, unity and harmony. The truly humble person sees his own faults in light of the perfections of Christ; he does not seek to see the faults of others, but when he does, he speaks the truth in love and desires their sanctification so they will be built up in the image of Christ. He sees his own heart and the corruption that lies hidden there, along with impure motives and evil ambitions. But he does not seek to notice the errors, defects, and follies of others. He sees the depravity of his own heart and hopes charitably in the goodness of others and believes their hearts are more pure than his.

Most importantly, as Christians, we are to see one another in the light of the cross. Fellow Christians are those for whom Christ died a horrible and painful death so that He might exchange His righteous perfection for their sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). How can we not extend to them the love, compassion, and grace of our heavenly Father? How can we demean, criticize, and defame those covered with the precious blood of Christ? Were we not slaves to sin when He called us, hopelessly lost, dead in our own transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1)? But we are now slaves of Christ, slaves to righteousness, and as slaves of the Master, the task before us is not to quarrel and demand our needs be met but to reflect His grace and love to those who are also His by His mercy. A church full of such people enjoying their “common salvation” will be a true, biblical church unified in, and earnestly contending for, the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Source: Got Questions Ministries (<https://www.gotquestions.org/church-unity.html>)

What We Teach

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 (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 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 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), 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; 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 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. 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; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory 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, 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).

Marriage and Sexuality

Elders 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. [More about Divorce and Remarriage](#)

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).

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. From that point on the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.

The Gift of Tongues

The gift of tongues was a divinely bestowed supernatural ability to speak in a human language that had not been learned by the one speaking. According to the Apostle Paul, when believers exercised the gift of tongues in church, they were to speak one at a time, and only two or three were to speak in a given service (1 Cor. 14:27). Furthermore, when tongues were spoken in the church, they were to be interpreted by someone with the gift of interpretation so that the others might be edified by the God-given message (1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 27). In this way, tongues did not serve as a private prayer language, but rather—like all spiritual gifts—as a means by which one might serve and edify the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Tongues "Will Cease"

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul made an interesting, almost startling, statement: "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away." In the expression "love never fails," the Greek word translated "fails" means "to decay" or "to be abolished." Paul was not saying that love is invincible or that it cannot be rejected. He was saying that love is eternal—that it will be applicable forever and will never be passé. Tongues, however, "will cease." The Greek verb used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 means "to cease permanently," and implies that when tongues ceased, they would never start up again. Here is the question that this passage poses for the contemporary charismatic movement: if tongues were supposed to cease, has that already happened, or is it yet future? Charismatic believers insist that none of the gifts have ceased yet, so the cessation of tongues is yet future. Most non-charismatics insist that tongues have already ceased, passing away with the apostolic age. Who is right?

It should be noted that 1 Corinthians 13:8 itself does not say when tongues were to cease. Although 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 teaches that prophecy and knowledge will cease when the "perfect" (i.e., the eternal state) comes, the

language of the passage—particularly the middle voice of the Greek verb translated “will cease”—puts tongues in a category apart from these gifts. Paul writes that while prophecy and knowledge will be “done away” (passive voice) by “the perfect,” the gift of tongues “will cease” in and of itself (middle voice) prior to the time that “the perfect” arrives. When did this cessation of tongues take place? The evidence of Scripture and history indicate that tongues ceased in the apostolic age.

Evidence from Scripture

What biblical or theological evidence is there that tongues have ceased? First, the gift of tongues was a miraculous, revelatory gift, and the age of miracles and revelation ended with the apostles. The last recorded miracles in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58, with the healings on the island of Malta (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians, an early epistle. Two later epistles, Ephesians and Romans, both discuss gifts of the Spirit at length—but no mention is made of the miraculous gifts. By that time miracles were already looked on as something in the past (Heb. 2:3-4). Apostolic authority and the apostolic message needed no further confirmation. Before the first century ended, the entire New Testament had been written and was circulating through the churches.

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

Second, tongues were intended as a sign to unbelieving Israel (1 Cor. 14:21-22; cf. Is. 28:11-12). They signified that God had begun a new work that encompassed the Gentiles. The Lord would now speak to all nations in all languages. The barriers were down. And so the gift of languages symbolized not only the curse of God on a disobedient nation, but also the blessing of God on the whole world.

Tongues were therefore a sign of transition between the Old and New Covenants. With the establishment of the church, a new day had dawned for the people of God. God would speak in all languages. But once the period of transition was past, the sign was no longer necessary.

Third, the gift of tongues was inferior to other gifts. It was given primarily as a sign (1 Cor. 14:22) and was also easily misused to edify self (1 Cor. 14:4). The church meets for the edification of the body, not self-gratification or personal experience-seeking. Therefore, tongues had limited usefulness in the church, and so it was never intended to be a permanent gift.

The Evidence from History

The evidence of history also indicates that tongues have ceased. It is significant that tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the New Testament. Paul wrote at least twelve epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues; neither did Jude. Tongues appeared only briefly in Acts and 1 Corinthians as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the church was established, tongues were gone. They stopped. The later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again, and neither did anyone in the post-apostolic age.

Chrysostom and Augustine—the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches—considered tongues obsolete. Writing in the fourth century, Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time and described the gift as an obscure practice. Augustine referred to tongues as a sign that was adapted to the apostolic age. In fact, during the first five hundred years of the church, the only people who claimed to have spoken in tongues were followers of Montanus, who was branded as a heretic.

The next time any significant tongues-speaking movement arose within Christianity was in the late seventeenth century. A group of militant Protestants in the Cevennes region of southern France began to prophecy, experience visions, and speak in tongues. The group, sometimes called the Cevennot prophets, is remembered for its political and military activities, not its spiritual legacy. Most of their prophecies went unfulfilled. They were rabidly anti-Roman Catholic, and advocated the use of armed force against the Roman Catholic church. Many of them were consequently persecuted and killed by Rome.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Jansenists, a group of Roman Catholic loyalists who opposed the Reformers' teaching on justification by faith, also claimed to be able to speak in tongues in the 1700s.

Another group that practiced a form of tongues was the Shakers, an American sect with Quaker roots that flourished in the mid-1700s. Mother Ann Lee, founder of the sect, regarded herself as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ. She claimed to be able to speak in seventy-two languages. The Shakers believed sexual intercourse was sinful, even within marriage. They spoke in tongues while dancing and singing in a trancelike state.

Then in the early nineteenth century, Scottish Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving and members of his congregation practiced speaking in tongues and prophesying. Irvingite prophets often contradicted each other, their prophecies failed to come to pass, and their meetings were characterized by wild excesses. The movement was further discredited when some of their prophets admitted to falsifying prophecies and others even attributed their "giftedness" to evil spirits. This group eventually became the Catholic Apostolic Church, which taught many false doctrines, embracing several Roman Catholic doctrines and creating twelve apostolic offices.

All of those supposed manifestations of tongues were identified with groups that were heretical, fanatical, or otherwise unorthodox. The judgment of biblically orthodox believers who were their contemporaries was that all those groups were aberrations. Surely that should also be the assessment of any Christian who is concerned with truth. Thus, we conclude that from the end of the apostolic era to the beginning of the twentieth century there were no genuine occurrences of the New Testament gift of tongues. They had ceased, as the Holy Spirit said they would (1 Cor. 13:8). The gift of tongues is not for today.

Lordship Salvation

The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer. Jesus' message liberated people from the bondage of their sin while it confronted and condemned hypocrisy. It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for repentant sinners, but at the same time it was a rebuke to outwardly religious people whose lives were devoid of true righteousness. It put sinners on notice that they must turn from sin and embrace God's righteousness.

Our Lord's words about eternal life were invariably accompanied by warnings to those who might be tempted to take salvation lightly. He taught that the cost of following him is high, that the way is narrow and few find it. He said many who call him Lord will be forbidden from entering the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 7:13-23).

Present-day evangelicalism, by and large, ignores these warnings. The prevailing view of what constitutes saving faith continues to grow broader and more shallow, while the portrayal of Christ in preaching and witnessing becomes fuzzy. Anyone who claims to be a Christian can find evangelicals willing to accept a profession of faith, whether or not the person's behavior shows any evidence of commitment to Christ. In this way, faith has become merely an intellectual exercise. Instead of calling men and women to surrender to Christ, modern evangelism asks them only to accept some basic facts about Him.

This shallow understanding of salvation and the gospel, known as "easy-believism," stands in stark contrast to what the Bible teaches. To put it simply, the gospel call to faith presupposes that sinners must repent of their sin and yield to Christ's authority. This, in a nutshell, is what is commonly referred to as lordship salvation.

The Distinctives of Lordship Salvation

There are many articles of faith that are fundamental to all evangelical teaching. For example, there is agreement among all believers on the following truths: (1) Christ's death purchased eternal salvation; (2) the saved are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone; (3) sinners cannot earn divine favor; (4) God requires no preparatory works or pre-salvation reformation; (5) eternal life is a gift of God; (6) believers are saved before their faith ever produces any righteous works; and (7) Christians can and do sin, sometimes horribly.

What, then, are the distinctives of lordship salvation? What does Scripture teach that is embraced by those who affirm lordship salvation but rejected by proponents of “easy believism”? The following are nine distinctives of a biblical understanding of salvation and the gospel.

First, Scripture teaches that the gospel calls sinners to faith joined in oneness with repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 20:21; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance is a turning from sin (Acts 3:19; Luke 24:47) that consists not of a human work but of a divinely bestowed grace (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). It is a change of heart, but genuine repentance will effect a change of behavior as well (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:18-20). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that repentance is simply a synonym for faith and that no turning from sin is required for salvation.

Second, Scripture teaches that salvation is all God’s work. Those who believe are saved utterly apart from any effort on their own (Titus 3:5). Even faith is a gift of God, not a work of man (Eph. 2:1-5, 8). Real faith therefore cannot be defective or short-lived but endures forever (Phil. 1:6; cf. Heb. 11). In contrast, easy believism teaches that faith might not last and that a true Christian can completely cease believing.

Third, Scripture teaches that the object of faith is Christ Himself, not a creed or a promise (John 3:16). Faith therefore involves personal commitment to Christ (2 Cor. 5:15). In other words, all true believers follow Jesus (John 10:27-28). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that saving faith is simply being convinced or giving credence to the truth of the gospel and does not include a personal commitment to the person of Christ.

Fourth, Scripture teaches that real faith inevitably produces a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17). Salvation includes a transformation of the inner person (Gal. 2:20). The nature of the Christian is new and different (Rom. 6:6). The unbroken pattern of sin and enmity with God will not continue when a person is born again (1 John 3:9-10). Those with genuine faith follow Christ (John 10:27), love their brothers (1 John 3:14), obey God’s commandments (1 John 2:3; John 15:14), do the will of God (Matt. 12:50), abide in God’s Word (John 8:31), keep God’s Word (John 17:6), do good works (Eph. 2:10), and continue in the faith (Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:14). In contrast, easy believism teaches that although some spiritual fruit is inevitable, that fruit might not be visible to others and Christians can even lapse into a state of permanent spiritual barrenness.

Fifth, Scripture teaches that God’s gift of eternal life includes all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:32), not just a ticket to heaven. In contrast, according to easy-believism, only the judicial aspects of salvation (e.g., justification, adoption, and positional sanctification) are guaranteed for believers in this life; practical sanctification and growth in grace require a post-conversion act of dedication.

Sixth, Scripture teaches that Jesus is Lord of all, and the faith He demands involves unconditional surrender (Rom. 6:17-18; 10:9-10). In other words, Christ does not bestow eternal life on those whose hearts remain set against Him (James 4:6). Surrender to Jesus’ lordship is not an addendum to the biblical terms of salvation; the summons to submission is at the heart of the gospel invitation throughout Scripture. In contrast, easy-believism teaches that submission to Christ’s supreme authority is not germane to the saving transaction.

Seventh, Scripture teaches that those who truly believe will love Christ (1 Pet. 1:8-9; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 16:22). They will therefore long to obey Him (John 14:15, 23). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that Christians may fall into a state of lifelong carnality.

Eighth, Scripture teaches that behavior is an important test of faith. Obedience is evidence that one’s faith is real (1 John 2:3). On the other hand, the person who remains utterly unwilling to obey Christ does not evidence true faith (1 John 2:4). In contrast, easy believism teaches that disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt the reality of one’s faith.

Ninth, Scripture teaches that genuine believers may stumble and fall, but they will persevere in the faith (1 Cor. 1:8). Those who later turn completely away from the Lord show that they were never truly born again (1 John 2:19). In contrast, easy-believism teaches that a true believer may utterly forsake Christ and come to the point of not believing.

Most Christians recognize that these nine distinctives are not new or radical ideas. The preponderance of Bible-believing Christians over the centuries have held these to be basic tenets of orthodoxy. In fact, no major orthodox movement in the history of Christianity has ever taught that sinners can spurn the lordship of Christ yet lay claim to Him as Savior.

This issue is not a trivial one. In fact, how could any issue be more important? The gospel that is presented to unbelievers has eternal ramifications. If it is the true gospel, it can direct men and women into the everlasting kingdom. If it is a corrupted message, it can give unsaved people false hope while consigning them to eternal damnation. This is not merely a matter for theologians to discuss and debate and speculate about. This is an issue that every single pastor and lay person must understand in order that the gospel may be rightly proclaimed to all the nations.

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 in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

It is significant that one of the biblical names of Christ is Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6). He is the highest and ultimate One to whom we may turn for counsel, and His Word is the well from which we may draw divine wisdom. What could be more wonderful than that? In fact, one of the most glorious aspects of Christ's perfect sufficiency is the wonderful counsel and great wisdom He supplies in our times of despair, confusion, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. He is the quintessential Counselor.

This is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. There certainly is a crucial need for biblically sound counseling ministries within the Church, and this need is met by those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others. In fact, one of the very problems that has led to the current plague of bad counsel is that churches have not done as well as they could in equipping people with those kinds of gifts to minister effectively. In addition, the complexities of this modern age have made it more difficult to take the time necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy health and vitality.

In recent years, churches have looked to psychology as a replacement to Biblical counseling, but this in and of itself is insufficient. Professional psychologists operating apart from Scripture are no substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel that psychology offers cannot by itself replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Counselors (psychologists and those exercising their spiritual gifts) should always turn people back to all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.

A Psalm on Scripture's Sufficiency Psalm 19:7–9 is the most monumental and concise statement on the sufficiency of Scripture ever made. Penned by David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these three verses offer unwavering testimony from God Himself about the sufficiency of His Word for every situation. In this passage David makes six statements, each highlighting a characteristic of Scripture and describing its effect in the life of the one who embraces it. Taken together, these statements paint a beautiful picture of the sufficiency of God's Word.

Scripture Is Perfect, Restoring the Soul In the first statement (v. 7), David says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." This word "perfect" is the translation of a common Hebrew word meaning "whole," "complete," or "sufficient." It conveys the idea of something that is comprehensive, so as to cover all aspects of an issue. Scripture is comprehensive, embodying all that is necessary to one's spiritual life. David's implied contrast here is with the imperfect, insufficient, flawed reasoning of men.

God's perfect law, David says, affects people by "restoring the soul" (v. 7). To paraphrase David's words, Scripture is so powerful and comprehensive that it can convert or transform the entire person, changing someone into precisely the person God wants him to be. God's Word is sufficient to restore through salvation even the most broken life—a fact to which David himself gave abundant testimony.

Scripture Is Trustworthy, Imparting Wisdom David further expands the sweep of scriptural sufficiency in Psalm 19:7, writing, "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." David's use of the word "sure" means that the Lord's testimony is unwavering, immovable, unmistakable, reliable, and worthy to be trusted. It provides a foundation on which to build one's life and eternal destiny.

God's sure Word makes the simple wise (v. 7). The Hebrew word translated "simple" comes from an expression meaning "an open door." It evokes the image of a naive person who doesn't know to shut his mind to false or impure teaching. He is undiscerning, ignorant, and gullible, but God's Word makes him wise. Such a man is skilled in the art of godly living: He submits to Scripture and knows how to apply it to his circumstances. The Word of God thus takes a simple mind with no discernment and makes it skilled in the issues of life.

Scripture Is Right, Causing Joy In verse 8, David adds a third statement about Scripture's sufficiency: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." Rather than simply indicating what is right as opposed to wrong, the word translated "right" has the sense of showing someone the true path. The truths of Scripture lay out the proper path through the difficult maze of life. That brings a wonderful confidence. So many people are distressed or despondent

because they lack direction and purpose, and most of them seek answers from the wrong sources. God's Word not only provides the light to our path (Ps. 119:105), but also sets the route before us.

Because it steers us through the right course of life, God's Word brings great joy. If one is depressed, anxious, fearful, or doubting, the solution is found not in self-indulgent pursuits like self-esteem and self-fulfillment. The solution is found in learning to obey God's counsel and sharing in the resulting delight. Divine truth is the fount of true and lasting joy. All other sources are shallow and fleeting.

Scripture Is Pure, Enlightening the Eyes Psalm 19:8 gives a fourth characteristic of Scripture's utter sufficiency: "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." This word "pure" could better be translated "clear" or "lucid," and it indicates that Scripture is not mystifying, confusing, or puzzling. God's Word reveals truth to make the dark things light, bringing eternity into bright focus. Granted, there are things in Scripture that are hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), but taken as a whole, the Bible is not a bewildering book. It is clear and lucid.

Because of its absolute clarity, Scripture brings understanding where there is ignorance, order where there is confusion, and light where there is spiritual and moral darkness. It stands in stark contrast to the muddled musings of unredeemed men, who themselves are blind and unable to discern truth or live righteously. God's Word clearly reveals the blessed, hopeful truths they can never see.

Scripture Is Clean, Enduring Forever In Psalm 19:9 David uses the term "fear" as a synonym for God's Word: "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." This "fear" speaks of the reverential awe for God that compels believers to worship Him. Scripture, in this sense, is the divine manual on how to worship the Lord. The Hebrew word "clean" speaks of the absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. Scripture is without sin, evil, corruption, or error. The truth it conveys is therefore absolutely undefiled and without blemish.

Because it is flawless, Scripture endures forever (Ps. 19:9). Any change or modification could only introduce imperfection. Scripture is eternally and unalterably perfect. It needs no updating, editing, or refining, for it is God's revelation for every generation. The Bible was written by the omniscient Spirit of God, who is infinitely more sophisticated than anyone who dares stand in judgment on Scripture's relevancy for our society, and infinitely wiser than all the best philosophers, analysts, and psychologists who pass like a childhood parade into irrelevancy. Scripture has always been and will always be sufficient.

Scripture Is True, Altogether Righteous Verse 9 provides the final characteristic and effect of God's all-sufficient Word: "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether." The word "judgments" in this context refers to ordinances or divine verdicts from the bench of the Supreme Judge of the earth. The Bible is God's standard for judging the life and eternal destiny of every person. Because Scripture is true, it is "righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:9). The implication of that phrase is that its truthfulness produces a comprehensive righteousness in those who accept it.

Contrary to what many are teaching today, there is no need for additional revelations, visions, or words of prophecy. God's Word is true and absolutely comprehensive. Rather than seeking something more than God's glorious revelation, Christians need only to study and obey what they already have. Scripture is sufficient.

The Sovereignty of God

No doctrine is more despised by the natural mind than the truth that God is absolutely sovereign. Human pride loathes the suggestion that God orders everything, controls everything, and rules over everything. The carnal mind, burning with enmity against God, abhors the biblical teaching that nothing comes to pass except according to His eternal decrees. Most of all, flesh hates the notion that salvation is entirely God's work. If God chose who would be saved, and if His choice was settled before the foundation of the world, then believers deserve no credit for any aspect of their salvation.

But that is, after all, precisely what Scripture teaches. Even faith is God's gracious gift to His elect. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65). "Nor does anyone know the Father,

except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Therefore no one who is saved has anything to boast about (Eph. 2:8-9). "Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

The doctrine of divine election is explicitly taught throughout Scripture. For example, in the New Testament epistles alone, we learn that all believers are "chosen of God" (Titus 1:1). We were "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11, emphasis added). "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. ...He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5). We "are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son ...and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30).

When Peter wrote that we are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:1-2), he was not using the word "foreknowledge" to mean that God was aware beforehand who would believe and therefore chose them because of their foreseen faith. Rather, Peter meant that God determined before time to know and love and save them; and He chose them without regard to anything good or bad they might do. Scripture teaches that God's sovereign choice is made "according to the kind intention of His will" and "according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will"—that is, not for any reason external to Himself. Certainly He did not choose certain sinners to be saved because of something praiseworthy in them, or because He foresaw that they would choose Him. He chose them solely because it pleased Him to do so. God declares "the end from the beginning ...saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" (Isa. 46:10). He is not subject to others' decisions. His purposes for choosing some and rejecting others are hidden in the secret counsels of His own will.

Moreover, everything that exists in the universe exists because God allowed it, decreed it, and called it into existence. "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3). "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Ps. 135:6). He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1 Cor. 8:6).

What about sin? God is not the author of sin, but He certainly allowed it; it is integral to His eternal decree. God has a purpose for allowing it. He cannot be blamed for evil or tainted by its existence (1 Sam. 2:2: "There is no one holy like the Lord."). But He certainly wasn't caught off-guard or standing helpless to stop it when sin entered the universe. We do not know His purpose for allowing sin. Clearly, in the general sense, He allowed sin in order to display His glory—attributes that would not be revealed apart from evil—mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness, and salvation. And God sometimes uses evil to accomplish good (Gen. 45:7-8; 50:20; Rom. 8:28). How can these things be? Scripture does not answer all the questions, but it does teach that God is utterly sovereign, perfectly holy, and absolutely just.

Admittedly, these truths are hard for the human mind to embrace, but Scripture is unequivocal. God controls all things, right down to choosing who will be saved. Paul states the doctrine in inescapable terms in the ninth chapter of Romans, by showing that God chose Jacob and rejected his twin brother Esau "though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls" (v. 11). A few verses later, Paul adds this: "He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (vv. 15-16).

Paul anticipated the argument against divine sovereignty: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'" (v. 19). In other words, doesn't God's sovereignty cancel out human responsibility? But rather than offering a philosophical answer or a deep metaphysical argument, Paul simply reprimanded the skeptic: "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?" (vv. 20-21).

Scripture affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We must accept both sides of the truth, though we may not understand how they correspond to one another. People are responsible for what they do with the gospel—or with whatever light they have (Rom. 2:19-20), so that punishment is just if they reject the light. And those who reject do so voluntarily. Jesus lamented, “You are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5:40). He told unbelievers, “Unless you believe that I am [God], you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). In John 6, our Lord combined both divine sovereignty and human responsibility when He said, “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (v. 37); “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life” (v. 40); “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (v. 44); “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (v. 47); and, “No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (v. 65). How both of these two realities can be true simultaneously cannot be understood by the human mind—only by God.

Above all, one must not conclude that God is unjust because He chooses to bestow grace on some but not to everyone. God is never to be measured by what seems fair to human judgment. Is man so foolish as to assume that he, a sinful creature, has a higher standard of what is right than an unfallen, infinitely, eternally holy God? What kind of pride is that? In Psalm 50:21 God says, “You thought that I was just like you.” But God is not like man, nor can He be held to human standards. “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa. 55:8-9).

The Sanctity of Life

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

We believe Scripture is far more than a prohibition on the taking of innocent life; it specifies that murder in any form or by any contrived name is absolutely wrong. We are created by God for His purpose and are stewards and not owners of the lives He has given us. Life is entirely a gift of God and its end is determined by His sovereignty: “There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life” (Deut 32:39).

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

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

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

We believe that any man-made attempt to create, clone, or destroy life is a futile attack on the sovereignty of God. Only what God has willed and determined will be part of His sovereign plan of the ages (Ps 2).

A Biblical View of Gender

We believe that both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18).

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

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

We believe that Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24; 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9). We believe that the Fall introduced distortions into the relations between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16) but redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse (Rom 6:1-4, Gal 3:13-14).

We believe that in the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33, Col 3:18-19; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

We believe that in the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15). We believe that the office of elder in the church is limited to men as qualified by Scripture (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9).

Appropriate Age for Baptism

The elders of Mission Bible Church conclude that believers only are to be baptized, but the minimum age for baptism is not explicitly addressed in Scripture.

We hold that the consideration of an appropriate age for believer-baptism is a matter of obedience to Scripture and Christian wisdom and prudence on particulars not directly mentioned in Scripture.

Though baptism in the New Testament seems to have mostly occurred soon after initial conversion, the individuals specified are adults, coming from a non-Christian context, and likely facing opposition for public attestation to Christ. These factors would lend apparent credibility to conversion.

This – the credibility of conversion – is a prime consideration, with the impact on the baptism candidate and church community being significant secondary concerns.

Thus, we believe the typical age of baptism should be when the credibility of conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community. Naturally, for children who have grown up under parents in the church, this would be when the child has matured, is living a more independent lifestyle, makes their own choices, has left the God-granted dependence of their parent's authority, and showcased mature wisdom marking one who has felt the tug of the world, the flesh, and the devil, but has shown, despite allurements, to be a true follower of Christ.

While it is difficult to set a requisite age for baptism, it is vital to consider the candidate's maturity: This maturity would include the son or daughter's ability to: (1) Deal directly with the church as a whole via communicant membership, (2) Accept pastoral authority, even church discipline, rather than fundamentally remaining under parental authority, (3) Assume adult responsibilities, such as driving, employment, voting, the legal ability to marry, while declaring a public allegiance to Christ.

With the consent of Christian parents, who are members, we will carefully consider requests for baptism before a child has left home but would urge parents to be cautious at this point. Yes, children can be converted, and we pray none of our children ever walk in continual rebellion. However, the malleable nature of children (intended by God for their compliance while living at home under parental authority) should give us pause in assuming the permanence of their desires, affections, and decisions.

Nevertheless, should the teen desire to pursue baptism and membership, we will examine them on a case-by-case basis, with the involvement of the parents.

Nothing in this statement is meant to cast doubt about the legitimacy of any baptism in our church, regardless of their age, assuming a clear understanding of the Gospel message. If they have continued in the faith into their adult years, we gladly assume the legitimacy of their initial profession.

That said, we are gravely concerned about the current state of evangelicalism, especially the growing "easy-believism" teaching that claims a mere intellectual profession of historical Christian data is, in fact, genuine saving faith. Sadly, we have seen far too many young people assent to Christ, only to give soon no evidence of ever having been savingly converted, and what damage this has done, both to them and the witness of the gospel through the church's premature baptism.

We realize this issue is one of high emotion for some, and we will work heartily to support each conscience; all while trying to inform and educate those same consciences about the Scriptural necessity of an accurate and credible profession of faith for baptism.

Lastly, it is essential to know that the practice of baptizing pre-teen children is a very recent development (20th century) and of limited geography (American influence). Baptist Christians in other nations remain much more cautious than Americans, often waiting until a young person is age 20 before allowing baptism and communicant membership in the church. It is helpful to remember that in the Great Commission, Jesus said we were to "Make disciples..." then continued, "Baptizing them...." (Matt 28:18). This was shown in Jesus' own ministry, who made disciples, and then baptized them (John 4:1). Similarly, Peter commanded first repentance, then baptism (Acts 2:38). Hence, we must make every effort to baptize truly converted disciples.