

Girard Bible Church Doctrinal Statement

This document is intended to articulate—in addition to our Statement of Faith—doctrinal positions that are taught at Girard Bible Church. While the GBC elders recognize that there are differing views on these positions in evangelical Christianity, the document has sought to be clear about where GBC stands on the issues without condemning those who hold a differing view. However, there are consequences to the doctrine that is taught and believed in a church. Therefore, the document also addresses areas that may be detrimental to the life and maturity of the church. At the same time, this document is not intended to state what any member or potential member of GBC must believe. Although those who teach at GBC may hold differing views in contrast to the doctrinal positions articulated herein, they may not teach content that is contrary to these expressed doctrinal positions. Finally, while there has been an attempt to use terminology drawn directly from the Bible as much as possible, the nature of theology often requires the use of language that is not found in the Bible, yet is still biblical (for example, “Trinity” or “nature” and “person” in respect to how our trinitarian God is described).

Mission Statement

Girard Bible Church exists to exalt Christ, to grow in Christ through studying the Bible and loving one another, and to make Christ known through participating in the Great Commission.

God

The God of the Bible is the Trinitarian God, indicated in the Old Testament (Gen 1:2, 26–27; 3:22; 11:7; Deut 6:4; Isa 6:8) and fully revealed in the New Testament (John 1:1–3; 14:16–17; Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor 13:14), who is holy, righteous, and just (Exod 34:6–8; Isa 6:1–3; Jer 9:24; Rom 11:33–36; Rev 4:8–11). He prizes His own glory and He will not share it with any other (Isa 42:8; 48:11). His own stated mission for His creation is to fill the earth “with the knowledge of” His glory (Hab 2:14; Isa 6:3; 11:9). Moreover, God reveals Himself by declaration and action to be compassionate, gracious, longsuffering, faithful, and forgiving of sin (Exod 34:6–7a; Isa 6:4–7).

About God’s Attributes: While fully comprehending who God is is impossible for us as limited human beings, God does make Himself known in a variety of ways, and through what He reveals about Himself in His word and in His creation, we can begin to wrap our minds around our awesome Creator and God. An attribute of God, then, is something that describes an aspect of the character of God, something that is true about who He is. In all His attributes, He is completely perfect.

God’s Unique Attributes—those that belong to Him alone—include but are not limited to:

Unchanging (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8), Infinite (Col 1:17; Ps 147:5), Creator (Gen 1:1), Self-Sufficient (John 5:26; Phil 4:13), Omniscient (Matt 6:31–32), Omnipotent (Ps 33:6; Ps 46:1; Job 11:7–11), Omnipresent: (Ps 139:7–10; Jer 23:23–24; Is 41:10), Sovereign (Phil 2:10–11), Eternal (John 3:16), Trinitarian (Matt 28:19).

God's Moral Attributes—those that may be shared with believers—include but are not limited to:

Good (Ps 34:8; Ps 107:1), Just (Deut 32:4; Rom 3:23), Righteous (Rom 5:8), Merciful (Rom 9:15–16; 1 John 1:9), Gracious (Ps 145:8; Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8), Loving (Mark 12:30; 1 John 4:7–8), Holy (Lev 20:26; Rev 4:8; Matt 5:48), Jealous (Ex 20:1–6; Acts 4:12), Wise (Prov 3:5; Rom 11:33), Truthful (Ps 86:11), Faithful (Deut 7:9; Ps 33:4; 2 Tim 2:13).

A wrong understanding of the *attributes* of God could result in:

- Confusion and/or doubt that God is perfect in all His characteristics and He possesses attributes that are unique only to Him.
- Limiting His unique attributes with the intent to make them easier to comprehend with our human finite and limited minds.
- Confusion and/or doubt that believers can possess His moral attributes by the power of the Holy Spirit through sanctification.
- Confusion and/or doubt that He cannot do anything against His holy nature and therefore all that He does is good, just, and right.
- Confusion and/or doubt that He is a loving, merciful, and gracious God and that we can rely on Him to do all things for our good.

Therefore, we teach that, as believers (His chosen, redeemed, and adopted children), we receive many blessings and benefits from God's attributes.

Because of God's Unique Attributes:

We are secure, loved without limits, wonderfully made, God-dependent, known, rescued, never alone, and taken care of. Further, we have eternal life, and a Father, a Savior, and a Helper.

Because of God's Moral Attributes:

We are only “good” through Him. We are sinners in need of saving. We have been made right with God. We are forgiven. We are accepted and adopted. We are loved. We are set apart. We are fulfilled in God. We are led by the Shepherd. We have the truth. And we are blessed.

A failure to have a high view of God leads to a toleration of sin and a focus on man's self-evaluation rather than God's truth. Furthermore, the church will reflect a man-centered ministry that attempts to please peers rather than glorify God.

Therefore, as a church we pursue what God values and prizes. Corporately, this means that sin is not tolerated, the church evaluates itself in light of God's word, and seeks to be God-centered in its ministry in order to glorify God in every area of ministry. Individually, this means we pursue practical holiness (1 Pet 1:14–16; Eph 4:1–3; Phil 1:27) and glorify Him in every area of our lives (Ps 57:5; 96:3; 145:5; 1 Cor 10:31).

The Trinity

We teach that God is one in essence (having one mind, one will, and one power), eternally existing in three coequal and consubstantial (i.e., sharing the same essence) Persons—Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)—each uncreated and distinct, and each equally deserving worship and obedience. Therefore, we teach that the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding (John 5:26); the Son is eternally begotten of the Father (John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 5:26; Ps 2:7); and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26).

Concerning the Triune God's work in the world, the Father is supreme in authority among the Persons of the Godhead, and He is responsible for devising the grand purposes and plans that take place through all of creation and redemption (Eph 1:3, 9–11). The Son is under the Father's authority and seeks always to do the Father's will. Although the Son is fully God, He nonetheless takes His lead from the Father and seeks to glorify the Father in all that He does (John 8:28–29, 42). The Spirit is under both the Father and the Son. As the Son sought to glorify the Father in all He did, the Spirit seeks to glorify the Son, to the ultimate praise of the Father (John 16:14; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11).

God the Father

About His Role: God the Father is the first person of the Trinity, and He orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps 145:8,9; 1 Cor 8:6). He is the creator of all things (Gen 1:1–31; Eph 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps 103:19; Rom 11:36). He works all things for His glory according to the counsel of His will (Ps 33:10–11; Eph 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chr 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Hab 1:13) and thereby does not remove the moral responsibility and accountability of people in their decisions and actions (1 Pet 1:17).

A wrong understanding of the *role* of God the Father could result in:

- Confusion and/or doubt about the origin of the universe and the rightful Owner of all creation (including ourselves)
- Limiting the sovereignty of God over all things, especially pertaining to a perceived libertarian kind of free will belonging to human beings

Therefore, we teach that God the Father is the Supreme Ruler of the universe and He orchestrates His will in all things for all time.

About His Fatherhood: God's fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator, He is Father to all people (Acts 17:26–29; Eph 3:14–15), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Rom 8:14; 2 Cor 6:18). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph 1:4–6). He saves from sin all those who come to Him through Jesus Christ. He adopts as His own all those who come to Him, and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Heb 12:5–9).

A wrong understanding of the *fatherhood* of God the Father could result in:

- Confusion and/or doubt that He is the Father of all men but spiritual Father only to believers

- Confusion and/or doubt that He is a loving and perfect Father who always does what is best for His children
- Confusion and/or doubt about the position of leadership the Father has within the Trinity and throughout the entirety of His universe for all eternity

Therefore, we teach that God's Fatherhood is vital in the work of the Trinity and in the lives of all people, but especially to His chosen children. He is the perfect Father who is a most excellent example to all people of the aspects of being a good father.

God the Son

About His Divinity: Jesus Christ is the second Person of the Godhead and is eternally of the same essence of Being as the Father (John 10:30; 14:9; Heb 1:3). Jesus is called "God" (John 1:1; 20:28; Rom 9:5), "Son of God" in the sense of sameness of nature (John 5:18; 10:33; 19:7), "the Lord" (1 Cor 2:8), "the Holy One" (Acts 3:14 with Isa 48:17), "the First and the Last" (Rev 1:17–18 with Isa 44:6), "the Alpha and Omega" (Rev 1:8; 22:13, 16), and "the Amen" (Rev 3:14). Also, He is especially recognized as Creator, Sustainer, and Savior (John 1:3; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:2; Titus 2:13). The divinity of Jesus is validated by His supernatural and miraculous works of healing, provision, and even raising the dead (John 20:30–31).

About His Humanity: Thoroughly and entirely, Jesus is and eternally remains God in human flesh (1 Cor 15:20–22; Heb 10:5–14). Being the Word of God, He has explained God to us in His life and ministry (John 1:14, 18). The Son of God took upon Himself genuine humanity (Heb 2:9–18) through the incarnation (John 1:14), even taking on the form of a slave (Phil 2:6–7). He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18–25; Luke 1:27, 34–35). He is the Messiah promised by the OT prophets (Matt 11:4–5 with Isa 29:18–19; Luke 4:18–21 with Isa 61:1–2). He thereby is the unique God-Man who consequently is the perfect Revealer (John 1:18), Savior (Titus 2:13), Mediator (1 Tim 2:5), Prophet (Acts 3:22–26), Priest (Heb 5:5–10), King (Rev 19:16), and ultimately the Judge of all men (John 5:27; Acts 17:30–31). Through this loving and obedient act of self-humiliation, He fully accomplished His task of grace (John 1:17; Eph 2:8–9), which culminated in His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection (Isa 52:13–53:12; Rom 1:4; 6:1–11; Phil 2:5–8). This grounds the church's proclamation of the forgiveness of sins for all who repent and believe in Him (Luke 24:46–47; Rom 4:24–25; 1 Pet 2:24–25). His ascension grounds the expectation that He will return in His sovereign lordship to finally deliver His people and execute judgment against the world (Acts 1:9–11; Rev 19:11–19).

A failure to uphold Jesus as the Son of God and exalted Savior produces several negative consequences. These include but are not limited to an appeal to a plurality of saviors for mankind, trusting in something other than His Person and work for salvation, relying upon ourselves for life and ministry, and neglecting to give Him due glory.

Therefore, because Jesus is the Son of God and our exalted Savior, our purpose as a church and as individual believers is to exalt Him (1 Cor 1:30–31). This means that Jesus is the exclusive center and the highest devotion of our lives (Col 3:1–4; Phil 3:7–11). We rejoice that by faith His life and death are counted as ours and He lives in us (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:3–7). Practically, we exalt Him in our lives by abiding in Him through obeying His word, depending upon His strength

which the Holy Spirit provides (John 15:1–5; 14:15–17). We exalt Him as a church by seeking to let His word dwell in our midst by being exposed and submitting to His word, trusting in the Holy Spirit to transform us through His perfect ministry of applying the word in our lives (Col 1:28–29; 2:6–7; 3:16; Eph 6:17; 1 Cor 2:6–16).

God the Spirit

About His Deity: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity; co-equal with the Father and the Son of God. The Holy Spirit possesses all essentials of personhood including intellect (Rom 8:27; 1 Cor 2:10–11), will (1 Cor 12:7,11; Acts 13:2), and emotion (Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit possesses all the incommunicable attributes of deity including eternity, glory, holiness, omnipotence, omnipresence, and truth (Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 4:14; Is 42:8; 48:11; Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10–11; Matt 1:18; Rom 1:4; Gen 1:1–2; Luke 1:35; Rom 1:4; Ps 139:7–10; Jer 23:24; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

A wrong understanding of the divine nature of the Holy Spirit could result in: (a) viewing Him as an impersonal force or mystical influence, which contradicts His personhood and/or (b) the denial that the Holy Spirit is eternal God, which consequently rejects God's trinity.

Therefore, we teach that the Holy Spirit is truly God, co-equal with the Father and the Son, and equally deserving of worship and obedience.

About His work: The Holy Spirit was active in creation (Ps 104:29–30; Gen 1:1–2), the virgin birth (Luke 1:35), and in the inspiration of Scripture (2 Pet 1:20–21; Ps 19:7–10; Acts 13:32–35). The Holy Spirit plays an active role in the process of salvation of every believer, including regeneration (Titus 3:5–6), conviction of sin (John 16:7–8), faith in Christ as Lord (1 Cor 12:3), and sanctification (1 Pet 1:2). At the time of salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes all believers into the Body of Christ (Eph 4:4–6; 1 Cor 12:13), and continues to indwell, empower for service, and seal believers unto the day of redemption (Rom 8:9; Eph 1:13–14; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16).

The Holy Spirit is active in the believer's life through the illumination of Scripture (1 Cor 2:10–13; 1 John 2:27) and guidance in doing what is right as he submits himself to the Spirit's control (Rom 8:4–5; Gal 5:16–17). Every Christian has been commanded to be filled with the Spirit, which involves the confession of sin and the saturation of oneself with the Word of God (Eph 5:18–21; Col 3:16–18).

A wrong understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit may result in the belief that baptism, filling, or indwelling of the Spirit is a result of something an individual does. Such misunderstandings typically result in a lack of assurance of salvation if a believer does not have so-called experiences of "Spirit-filling."

Therefore, we teach that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation and each believer is to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit.

About Spiritual Gifts: The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives diverse spiritual gifts to all believers to be faithfully exercised for the purpose of edifying one another and glorifying God (1 Cor 12:4–11; 14:12; 1 Pet 4:11). These gifts edify believers by promoting spiritual unity and maturity in

the church (Eph 4:11–16). The gifts glorify God when believers use them appropriately as good stewards of God’s grace (1 Pet 4:10). The Spirit’s gifts are to be used in proportion to what the gifts are, meaning that a gift of service is to be exercised in serving or a gift of teaching is to be exercised in teaching (Rom 12:6–8). Love for fellow believers is the motivation of the exercise of all spiritual gifts (1 Cor 13:4–8). Spiritual gifts can be generally categorized into speaking, serving, and sign gifts (1 Pet 4:10–11; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3–4). Sign gifts were given for the unique period of laying the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20; 3:4–10). The divine revelation of salvation through Christ given to the apostles and prophets was validated by God through accompanying signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3–4). Therefore, sign gifts are not to be considered normative in the life of the church at the present time. However, we deny that God is unable to give sign gifts in our time or any other time.

A wrong understanding of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit could result in:

- The belief that spiritual gifts are given to believers based upon some work or effort on their part.
- The belief that Christians gain additional divine revelation beyond Scripture through the sign gifts.
- The belief that spiritual gifts are related to an emotional experience.
- The belief that some gifts are considered inferior to other gifts and therefore are not exercised in the life of the church.
- A lack of assurance of salvation, if a Christian doesn’t exercise sign gifts.
- People being deceived by false prophets claiming to have sign gifts.

Therefore, we teach that the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives spiritual gifts for edification of believers, glorification of God, and the verification of the apostles’ and prophets’ ministry and message. It is essential that every believer exercise their spiritual gifts so that the church may function according to God’s design.

The Bible

We teach that from the creation of the world God has disclosed and revealed Himself to mankind. He did this through the created order (Rom 1:19–20) and through visions/dreams, speaking prophets, and ultimately His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–3). However, at times throughout history, God has used His prophets and apostles to disclose and reveal His actions and messages through written propositions of Scripture (2 Pet 1:20–21). Therefore, the Bible is God’s special revelation of Himself as His complete written word given in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which men wrote under the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), and are verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is absolutely inerrant in its original documents, true in everything that it claims (Ps 19:7–8; 119:142, 151; John 10:35; 17:17; Eph 1:13; 2 Tim 2:15), and infallibly accomplishes God’s purposes and intentions (Isa 55:10–11). The Bible is the only revelation of God that clearly explains man’s sinfulness and His plan of salvation through His Son.

The Bible’s self-testimony consists of four major attributes: authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency. These attributes equally reveal: *God* in all His Triune glory, *man’s rejection of God* and the consequences for that rejection, *God’s saving work* to transform sinners into the glorious

image of Jesus Christ, *the ministry of the local church* during this time of history, and *the great and glorious coming of Jesus Christ* at the end of this age.

These attributes are that the word of God has:

- *Authority*: God's word is unbreakably tied to God Himself so that to not believe or not obey the Bible is to not believe or not obey God. This authority is grounded in the truth that Scripture is a special, verbal revelation of God to us (Acts 1:16; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21; 3:16; 1 Cor 2:10–13; Heb 3:7). It is special because it is distinguished from general revelation that is given to all people through creation (see Ps 19). It is verbal because God used words to convey His revelation to people. It is revelation because no effort of reason, investigation, or contemplation can access what God alone can reveal.
- *Clarity*: Although some things in Scripture are hard to understand (2 Pet 3:16), God's word is written in such a way that, with dependence upon the Spirit's illumination and a willingness to obey what it says, it is able to be understood by all who read and study it (1 Cor 2:6–16; 1 Pet 2:1–3; Ps 119:130; 2 Pet 1:19). One example of the clarity of Scripture is how God saves sinners is simple to understand and accessible to any who will hear or read Scripture with integrity (Rom 10:6–13).
- *Necessity*: God's word is a non-negotiable requirement for knowing specifics about God, His will and character, man and his sinfulness, the saving remedy of the gospel, growth in holiness, the return of His Son, and man's eternal salvation or judgment (Rom 10:13–17; 1 Pet 1:23–2:3; Eph 5:17; Acts 17:30–31). However, it is not necessary for knowing that God exists, or for knowing general truths about His character and moral law, which are revealed in creation (Ps 19:1–2; Acts 14:16–17; Rom 1:19–21; 2:14–15).
- *Sufficiency*: God's word, whether in explicit statement or implicit principle, is relevant and suitable for every situation and circumstance that people encounter (2 Tim 3:15–17; 2 Pet 1:3–4; Luke 16:29, 31).

A failure to recognize the centrality of the Bible in the life of the church will inevitably marginalize its teachings, undermine its clarity, diminish its necessity into negotiable matters, and relegate its message to the sidelines because it is thought to be insufficient to address the contemporary issues that face the church and its members.

The word of God has authority over the church. The church does not have authority over the word. The universal Church was created by the God of the word and sits in judgment over our church's birth, life, trials and troubles, graces and victories. We do not sit in judgment over the word of God. Therefore, we are eager to place the word in an exalted place in the center of our church life and humbly submit to God and His word.

On Interpreting the Bible

How one interprets the Bible will testify to what one believes about the Bible. God reveals Himself through words and the Bible assumes that the meaning of His verbal revelation is accessible to readers (see Gen 1:1–31; Exod 34:6–7). Therefore, rightly interpreting the Bible is a response to the Bible's nature as verbal revelation from God.

The Bible is the product of verbal revelation from God (2 Tim 3:16). The process of producing the Bible involved the harmonious and united confluence of the divine and human authors of each passage (2 Pet 1:21). That is, every word is at the same time divine and human.

This understanding of revelation that is accessible and inspiration as divine-human confluence leads to a conclusion that the meaning of each biblical text is both clear and singular. Meaning refers to the ideas conveyed by the words, grammar, syntax, and context of the author's written text. The meaning is clear, so there is no necessary recourse to an interpretive authority. The meaning is singular, so there is no necessary appeal to a divine meaning that is separate from a human meaning. While meaning is singular, the significance of the biblical text is manifold. Significance refers to the valid repercussions, inferences, or implications that stem from the meaning of the text.

Because interpretation is a response to the nature of the Bible as verbal revelation and inspired, this leads to the use of an interpretive method that follows grammatical-historical principles. The goal of interpretation is to understand the meaning of the text as communicated by the author through his use of genre, words, grammar, and syntax. Thus, interpretation is a discipline of reading for the goal of explaining authorial intent. In this sense, sound interpretation is literal interpretation. The grammatical-historical method allows for such sound interpretation.

Interpreting the Bible also recognizes that God has revealed Himself verbally in history and through historical events. Therefore, sound interpretation will account for the facts of history. Furthermore, because the Bible is true (John 17:17) and its theology is actualized in history (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:7–23; Gal 4:4), the historical events recorded in the Bible correspond with their occurrence in reality. Thus, sound interpretation will acknowledge the connection between the Bible, its theology, and historical fact.

Man and Sin

We teach that man was created as male and female in the image of God on the sixth day (Gen 1:26–27). Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Gen 2:15–25; Jas 3:9). Man was created without knowledge of evil and lived in a sinless relationship with God (Gen 1:26–28, 31; 2:25).

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

We teach that when God created man male and female, He blessed them and told them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen 1:28). This mandate is fulfilled through the marriage of one man and one woman, as within this union children are given as a gift from God (Gen 2:24–25; 1 Cor 7:1–6; Ps 127:3–5). God's intention for marriage includes defined roles for the husband and the wife (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Pet 3:1–7; see section below on sexuality and marriage). At the same time, the husband and wife are dependent upon one another in marriage (1 Cor 11:11–12).

We teach that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God (Gen 2:16–17), man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death (Gen 3:1–19), became subject to the wrath of God (John 3:36), and became inherently corrupt and utterly unable and unwilling to choose or do that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace (Rom 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor 2:14). With no power to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. All men are thus sinners by nature and by choice, and therefore declared guilty before God (Ps 14:1–3; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9–18, 23; 5:12–14). Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 2:1–3; 1 Tim 2:13–14; 1 John 1:8).

A failure to recognize a biblically accurate view of man leads to the following implications:

- Christ will not be seen as the only solution to man's needs.
- People will pursue substitutes that promise fulfillment.
- Ministries will tend to focus on "felt" needs rather than spiritual needs.

Therefore, we teach man has inherent dignity as being created in the image of God and man is thoroughly corrupted by sin resulting in a broken relationship with God. Only God's saving grace can reconcile sinful man to Himself. In Christ, God has taken the initiative to save and redeem sinners who are made in His image.

Statement on Marriage, Gender, Sexuality, and Sanctity of Human Life

We teach that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. (Gen 1:26–27) Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. We teach that Scripture calls us to speak the truth in love at all times (Eph 4:15). Therefore, we teach that we are to avoid any speech that dishonors God's design of His image-bearers as male and female, including referring to a person by a pronoun that is inconsistent with that person's biological sex.

We teach that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one biological man and one biological woman in an exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen 2:18–25). We teach that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Cor 6:18; 7:2–5; Heb 13:4).

We teach that any form of sexual immorality (including, but not limited to, adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, sex with minors, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matt 15:18–20; 1 Cor 6:9–10).

We teach that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19–21; Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 6:9–11).

We teach that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28–31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture.

We teach that God has created mankind in His image and that human life begins at conception. It is God who uniquely forms every human being and gives special dignity, personal freedom, and individual accountability among all the works of His creation. God created each person's inmost being, knitting each person together in the womb of that person's mother (Ps 139:13). As God's individualized and personal creation, each person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14). God has ordained all the days of each person's life before they came to be (Ps 139:16).

Based on Scripture, we therefore teach that from the moment of conception until natural death, every human life is sacred because every human life has been created by God, in His image and likeness. We teach that from the moment of conception every human life must be recognized, respected, and protected as having the rights of a person and the inviolable right to life.

Creation

The Triune God created the universe and everything in it from nothing in six normal, 24-hour days ("evening and morning" in Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). God says that He created the heavens and the earth in six days, and He did it all by the power of His word (Gen 1:1–31; Exod 20:11; Isa 44:24; Heb 11:3). Some Christians today believe that God created the universe over the course of billions of years, and He used evolutionary processes to do it. These two views approach the Bible in divergent ways. The first view allows the words of the Bible to stand at face value, describing the events of the origin of the universe from the perspective of the one eyewitness to those events—God Himself. The second view attempts to reconcile the biblical record with currently prevailing scientific theories about origins.

The issue of origins is important because a failure to understand it according to what is revealed in the Bible will reflect how one views God, the Bible, and mankind.

First, a right view of *the Nature of God* is at stake in the doctrine of creation. The creation displays God's eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:20). God's ability to speak into existence things that did not formerly exist is important evidence of His nature and power. God stakes His own reputation (e.g., His identity as the only true God, His power to rescue people from their enemies, His ability to comfort, and His power to save people from their sins) on His ability to create everything from nothing (Isa 40:12, 22, 25, 26; 42:5, 8; 44:24; 45:6, 7, 12; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:17).

Therefore, we teach that the doctrine of creation from nothing by God's effective word in six normal, 24-hour days is necessary in order to accurately understand what God reveals about Himself, creation, and His saving power.

Second, a right view of *the authorship, authority, trustworthiness, and clarity of Scripture* is at stake in the doctrine of creation. In regard to its *Authorship*, the Bible is the word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself, His self-disclosure. God is the author of the Bible through chosen men who wrote exactly what He intended them to write (2 Pet 1:19–21). God chose to begin His self-disclosure to man in Genesis 1. Only the Triune God was present at the creation of everything, and He has told us how He created it all.

In regard to its *Authority*, because Genesis is God's record of origins, it bears all the authority of God on everything it speaks about. In regard to its *Trustworthiness*, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and God's revelation about origins is in keeping with His character.

In regard to its *Clarity*, God communicated in order to be understood. The Bible is God's revelation to man, which means He *revealed* truth, rather than *concealed* it. Communication is intrinsic to God's being, and He imparted communication to mankind. God communicates in language in order to be understood. To interpret Genesis 1 as teaching something other than that the universe was created in six normal, 24-hour days is a violation of language and an affront to God's ability to communicate clearly.

Therefore, we teach that the Bible, including Genesis 1–2, should be read according to its author's intent. We trust the words of Scripture, as intended by its Divine Author, over and against any other competing sources of information brought to the texts of Scripture from outside the texts of Scripture. There is nothing *in* the texts that would compel one to believe in long creative ages or an old universe. The arguments for an old universe and long creative ages come from *outside* the texts of Scripture.

Third, a right view of *Man Created in the Image of God* is at stake in the doctrine of creation. Genesis 1:26–28 records the intentional deliberation and outcome within the Triune Godhead about the creation of man. God determines to create a creature with the special status of being God's representative over the created order. Man, created male and female, is God's special creature that serves in this capacity. Despite man's fall into sin, men and women retain their special status. For example, man as made in the image of God is the basis for the prohibition against murder (Gen 9:6) and slander (Jas 3:9). The creation of man in the image of God is also the basis for the complementarian order of the home and the church (1 Tim 2:12–13; 1 Cor 11:3, 7–9; Eph 5:22–33). Thus, man continues to exist as God's special creation, although men and women use it in their sinfulness to further their idolatrous rebellion against God (Acts 17:26–29). However, God's plan for man as made in His image is to redeem men and women to the glory of the image of God through the sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:4, 6; Col 1:15). He carries out this plan of salvation through the preaching of the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit transforms men and women from one degree of glory to another according to the image of God's Son (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). Failing to affirm the connection between the doctrines of creation and man as made in God's image results in the degradation of men and women through sinful acts like abortion and false ideologies such as the theory of macro-evolution. Moreover, sins such as murder and slander, and failures in biblical church order on issues such as qualifications for elder leadership and preaching and teaching are the result of a failure to hold fast to the doctrine of creation as taught in Genesis 1.

Therefore, we teach that the doctrine of man's creation in the image of God must be affirmed when it is put in relation to the doctrine of creation from nothing by God's effective word in six, normal 24-hour days.

Finally, a right view of *the Fallen Nature of Man* is at stake in the doctrine of creation. Unbelieving man willfully rebels against God, and he does so by nature (Eph 2:1–3; Rom 8:7–8). According to Romans 1, every human being knows that God exists, recognizing His existence, His nature, and His power from what has been created. However, sinful man does not worship

God as a result of this knowledge. Instead, he suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, professing to be wise, proving himself to be foolish, using the very capacities given to him by God to deny the existence of God (Rom 1:18–23). Current scientific theories of origins that disagree with God’s account, including the theory of evolution, fall into the category of man’s unrighteous truth-suppression. No man (and no scientist) is a merely objective observer of the universe. Sinful humans invent and believe alternatives to God’s record of origins because of their rebellion against God, not because the universe tells us that it is old or that it is the consequence of purely natural forces (Ps 19:1–6). Upholding the truth of the Bible’s record on origins helps to reveal the severity of the fallen state of mankind.

Therefore, we teach that the doctrines of man and sin must be upheld according to the doctrine of creation from nothing by God’s effective word in six, normal 24-hour days. It is necessary to understand that man is in a hopeless state of sin because of the fall of the first man in Genesis 3.

Salvation

Election

We teach that election is the sovereign act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He unconditionally chose in Christ all those whom He would ever graciously regenerate, save, and sanctify (Rom 8:28–30; 9:11–16; Eph 1:4–11; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 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 (Ezk 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18–19, 36; 5:40; Rom 9:19–23; 2 Thess 2:10–12; Rev 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 has elected He will effectually call to Himself. All whom the Father effectually 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; Rom 8:30).

We teach that God’s election of totally depraved sinners is unconditional, grounded only in the sovereign freedom of God’s own will. Election is an expression of God’s unmerited favor and is not related to any initiative of the sinner’s own part. It is not grounded in God’s anticipation of what sinners might do by their own will, nor even in response to their foreseen faith. Rather, election is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Rom 9:11, 16; Eph 1:4–7; Titus 3:4–7; 1 Pet 1:2).

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

Atonement

We teach that the Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He offered up to God through the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14; 10:14), has fully satisfied the justice of God (Heb 2:17; 1 John 4:10), propitiated the wrath of God (Rom 3:25–26; cf. 1:18), procured reconciliation (Rom 5:10), and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven (Heb 9:15) for all those the Father has given to Him (John 6:39; 10:14–15, 28–29; 17:2, 9, 24), for all those who would believe (John 6:37, 47; 11:25–26).

Regeneration

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which a renewed nature and spiritual life are given (John 3:3–7; 2 Cor 5:17; 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; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23). As a result of this divine illumination (2 Cor 4:6), the repentant sinner, so enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith in Christ at conversion (1 John 5:1). Thus, the Spirit transforms sinners from death to life through the new birth (Eph 2:1, 5).

Justification

We teach that justification before God is the act of God (Rom 8:33) in which He declares righteous those who repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:10; cf. Isa 55:6–7), turn to Christ in faith (Acts 16:31; 20:21; Rom 1:16; 3:22, 26; Gal 3:22), and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11).

We teach that the righteousness of justification is not infused into the believer, nor is it attained by any virtue or work of man (Rom 3:20; 4:4–6), but that it is the legal declaration of right standing with God (Rom 8:1, 33–34; cf. Deut 25:1). We teach that justification consists in the imputation of our sins to Christ (Col 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; cf. Rom 5:18–19), through faith alone apart from works (Rom 3:28; 4:4–5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24). In this way, God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

Sanctification

We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart, declared to be holy) unto God at conversion and is therefore identified as a saint, having a holy relationship with God. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification refers to the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Pet 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 into greater conformity with his positional sanctification. Through obedience to the word of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom 6:1–22; 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Thess 4:3–4; 5:23).

In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh—but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is not completely ended until he sees Christ face to face. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Gal 5:16–25; Eph 4:22–24; Phil 3:12; Col 3:9–10; 1 Pet 1:14–16; 1 John 3:2–9).

Security

We teach that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God’s power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37–40; 10:27–30; Rom 5:9–10; 8:1, 31–39; 1 Cor 1:4–8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24). Those who once professed faith and subsequently deny the Lord demonstrate by their going out from us that they were never truly saved in the first place (1 John 2:19).

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

Genuine salvation is manifested by spiritual fruit as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (1 Cor 6:19–20; Eph 2:10; Acts 26:20) and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph 5:17–21; Phil 2:12b; Col 3:16; 2 Pet 1:4–10; Gal 5:22–23). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer’s glorification at Christ’s coming (Rom 8:17; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 3:2–3).

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 will increase (2 Cor 6:14–7:1; 2 Tim 3:1–5).

We teach that, out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate and proclaim our adoring love to God before the world (1 Pet 2:9–12). We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Rom 12:1–2, 1 Cor 5:9–13; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1; 1 John 2:15–17; 2 John 9–11).

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

Glorification

Glorification is God's final removal of sin from the life of the saints, that is, everyone who is saved (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17). The glorification of the saints will occur at the return of Christ for His Church (1 Thess 4:17; 1 Cor 15:52) and at the beginning of the Millennium for Tribulation believers and Old Testament believers (Rev 20:4; Dan 12:2). Our physical body, now showing the effects of sin, will be transformed into conformity with Christ's glorious body (Phil 3:21). This transformation occurs in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52). The ultimate culmination of glorification is that the saints will dwell with Christ forever as inhabitants of the new heavens and new earth (Rom. 8:28–30; 2 Pet 3:13).

A failure to hold to a complementary view of salvation articulated here may result in an absence of or a false assurance of salvation that relies on personal background, works, or position rather than the sufficient work of Christ.

Therefore, we teach that salvation is the sovereign work of God in election, atonement, regeneration, justification, positional sanctification, security, and glorification, and simultaneously the responsibility of man to repent and humbly trust God and separate himself from sin for progressive sanctification.

The Church

Universal Church

We teach that all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church (1 Cor 12:12–13), the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–32; Rev 19:7–8), of which Christ is the Head (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18). While dedicating the church during His earthly ministry (Matt 16:18), Christ began to form His church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–21, 38–47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ to raise and transform His own at the rapture (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:13–18). Thus, the church is a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in the present age (Eph 2:11–3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Cor 10:32; Eph 2:11–16; Rom 11:25–27), a mystery not revealed until this age (Eph 5:32).

Local Church

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

Purpose of the Church

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God through building itself up in the faith (Eph 3:21; 4:13–16), through biblical instruction (2 Tim 2:2, 15; 3:16–17), through fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), through keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38–42), through

advancing and communicating the gospel to the world (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42), and through the saints fulfilling their calling to do the work of ministry (1 Cor 15:58; Eph 4:12; Rev 22:12).

We teach that the church plays a special role in God's program. It exists to exalt God, to edify believers, and to evangelize the lost. First, a church exalts God by being God-centered, not man-centered (1 Cor 10:31; see also 6:20). Corporately, this is accomplished through its gatherings for worship, which is the ultimate priority of the church (Acts 2:42; Rom 12:1–2; see also John 4:23–24). Corporate worship exalts God through Jesus Christ by declaring His glory through words of praise (Heb 12:28; 13:15), prayer (1 Tim 2:1, 8), and preaching (2 Tim 4:1–2).

Second, the church exists to edify believers (1 Thess 5:11; 1 Cor 14:26). This edification includes teaching the word in every area of its ministry so that disciples are made, matured, and equipped to help others be and do the same (Matt 28:19–20; Col 1:28–29; Eph 4:11–16; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 2:2–10). Specifically, edification will include general teaching (Acts 20:20; 1 Tim 4:13) and special training and mentoring (Acts 20:20; 2 Tim 2:2; see also Eph 4:11–12).

Third, the church exists to evangelize the lost through declaring the gospel. The elements involved in evangelism include warning of God's coming judgment (2 Cor 5:11, 20; cf. 2 Pet 3:11–15; Heb 9:27), offering the hope of eternal salvation (Titus 1:2; see also John 3:16; 11:25), and calling for a response to the gospel through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 14:15). Those who trust in Christ become disciples who are baptized and ongoingly taught (Matt 28:19–20). Local churches are also to be involved in planting other churches locally and around the world (Acts 14:21–23; see also Rom 15:18–21). Evangelism is the responsibility of church leaders (2 Tim 4:5), individual Christians (1 Pet 3:15), and the church as a whole (1 Pet 2:9).

Life of the Local Church

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) and all its aspects and functions operate under His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. This includes the role of elders, deacons, and members in carrying out the church's ministry.

Elders: Elders, also called overseers (1 Tim 3:1), shepherds (1 Pet 5:2), and pastor-teachers (Acts 20:17, 28; see also Eph 4:11), are men who are recognized by the church as meeting the biblical qualifications for character and leadership. They reflect the character of Christ by being models for the flock (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:3; Heb 13:7; cf. 1 Thess 2:4–12). Their responsibilities include leading and teaching according to sound doctrine (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:9), which has as its goal the equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12). They also must help the spiritually weak (1 Thess 5:12–14), care for the church (1 Tim 3:5; 1 Pet 5:1–2), protect the church (Acts 20:28–30), and train other men to lead the church (2 Tim 2:2). Their authority is not something to be lorded over the church (1 Pet 5:3) or exercised for personal gain (1 Pet 5:2). Instead, this authority is delegated to them by the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). The church is called to obey and be submissive to its leaders because of their responsibility to care for their souls (Heb 13:17).

Deacons: The position of deacon, meaning servant, constitutes a second identified and labeled role in the life of the local church (1 Tim 3:8; Phil 1:1). They are known by their godly character,

speech, conduct, and leadership in the home (1 Tim 3:8–10, 12). While there is no passage that dictates how deacons fulfill their ministry in the church, it can be generally observed that they serve the church in two overall ways. First, they provide oversight for ongoing needs of the church. Second, they provide oversight for occasional needs of the church (see Acts 6:1, 3). This oversight of service helps to ensure that a church’s elders are relieved of certain burdens so that they are able to prioritize their time around prayer and the ministry of the word of God (see Acts 6:2, 4), as well as provide responsible care for the welfare of the flock under their shepherding care (1 Pet 5:2). Because of the lack of specific biblical direction for the ministry of deacons, a local church is free to organize and direct its deacon ministry in ways that fulfill its needs.

Members: The members of a local church are those who willingly and intentionally come under the ministry and oversight of that church and its elders (see Acts 2:41, 47b; 5:14; 16:5; Rom 16:1; Col 4:10–17; 1 Tim 5:9–10). Church membership was a practice of the early church, as demonstrated by Christians organizing themselves into local churches (Acts 11:20–26) and leaders planting churches in various places (Acts 14:21–23). There are also indications that it was an expected responsibility for Christians to become members of a local church (see Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1–2; 1 Cor 5:12; 12:21). Further indications of church membership include the existence of church government (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:2–4), the exercise of church discipline (Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:1–13; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10–11), mutual exhortation (see “one another’s” below), the elders of a church knowing who they are responsible for in the exercise of their oversight (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), individual Christians and a church body knowing who they are responsible for in submitting to spiritual oversight (Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 5:17), and Christians excluding false believers from a church’s fellowship (1 Cor 5:13; 1 John 2:19; Titus 3:10).

The benefits of being a member of a local church include the care and accountability given by the local church (1 Cor 5:12; “one another” commands), the oversight of specific shepherds who care for the souls of those under their watch (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1–2; Acts 20:28–32), the formal commitment that believers make to care for one another and help them progress in spiritual maturity (see Rom 12:10; 1 Cor 16:15; Gal 6:2; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28–29; 1 Tim 5:10), and the encouragement that comes from a church body affirming one’s profession of faith by being received into the church’s membership (see 1 Cor 5:1–13; 1 John 2:19; Gal 6:1).

With dependence upon the enablement of the Holy Spirit, the responsibilities of being a member of a local church are many. They include exercising love, honor, esteem, and prayer for fellow members and for the church’s shepherds (Col 3:12–17; 1 Thess 5:11–14); maintaining the purity and peace of the church (Eph 4:1–3); putting on humility toward fellow members (Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 5:5) and submitting to the authority and discipline of the church’s shepherds (Matt 18:15–18; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10–11; Heb 13:17); prayerfully and personally participating in the work of ministry according to their God-given gifts, abilities, and resources (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:12–26; 14:12; 2 Cor 9:7; Eph 4:11–16; Col 4:3; 1 Tim 5:17–18; 6:17–19; 1 Pet 4:10–11); teaching biblical truth, evangelizing, and making disciples as God gives the opportunity to do so (Matt 28:18–20; Col 4:3); and willingly supporting the ministry of the church with regular attendance at worship services (Heb 10:23–25) and participating in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26).

The ministry of the church may be summarized by the “one another” commands: love one another (Rom 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7,

11-12; 2 John 5); live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16; 15:5; cf. Gal 5:26; 1 Thess 5:13); welcome one another (Rom 15:7; cf. Rom 16:16); admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16); care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25); serve one another (Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10); carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); be patient with one another (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13); be kind to one another (Eph 4:32); forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13); sing praises with one another (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); regard one another as more important than oneself (Phil 2:3); speak truth to one another (Col 3:9); encourage one another (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25); exhort and comfort one another (1 Thess 5:14; see also Rom 12:1–13); seek good for one another (1 Thess 5:15); stir up one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24; see also 1 Tim 6:17–18); confess sins to one another (Jas 5:16); pray for one another (Jas 5:16); be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9); and be humble toward one another (1 Pet 5:5).

Spiritual Gifts

We teach the need of the church to cooperate with God as he accomplishes His purposes in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:7–12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Rom 12:5–8; 1 Cor 12:4–31; 1 Pet 4:10–11). For more on what we teach about spiritual gifts, see the section under the Holy Spirit above.

Church Discipline

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

There are two vantage points from which to view church discipline. First, self-examination ought to be practiced consistently by each church member (Luke 6:41–42). Second, church discipline (Matt 18:15–17) is a necessary part of a healthy and God-glorifying local church because if God is the author of salvation, and has done everything necessary to secure the salvation of the believer, and has supplied that believer with His grace and strength to live an obedient life, then the brother or sister who is caught in the snare of sin can be won back.

If the brother or sister refuses to repent, Matt 18:15–17 provides the necessary instructions for the church in patiently, humbly, and intentionally dealing with members who are in unrepentant sin. If the brother or sister persists in refusing repentance, the church must take steps to protect itself and its doctrine because the unrepentant “brother” appears to be devoted to his sin more than he is devoted to Jesus and his testimony is no longer credible. In cases of extreme sin, it may be necessary to remove the unrepentant member from the church in a shorter period of time (Titus 3:10–11; cf. 1 Cor 5:1–5). Where the unrepentant sin of an elder is involved, after an accusation is received on the basis of two or three witnesses, a public rebuke is in order so that the entire church will fear the consequences of pursuing sin (1 Tim 5:19–20). Perhaps God will use this discipline to awaken the so-called “brother” so that he may be restored to God and the church family.

While many sins are of a private nature that call for forbearance and personal accountability rather than corporate discipline (see Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:25–26), there are two general categories of sins that call for the steps of church discipline. First, sins against the corporate unity of the church call for church discipline. The unity of the church’s ministry is associated with the doctrinal teaching of the church (Eph 4:11–16). Warnings about threats to the church are regularly given in doctrinal or teaching terms (Rom 16:17–18; Titus 1:10–11; 3:10–11; 2 John 10). Thus, the promotion of teaching that is contrary to our church’s doctrinal positions and is deemed divisive warrants the initiation of church discipline. Second, sins against the corporate purity of the church call for church discipline. The church has been purified by the Lord Jesus in preparation for a future day of presentation as His bride (Eph 5:25–27). To stain the church’s purity with sin that is public in nature or threatens to bring reproach against Christ’s name are sins that call for the steps of public church discipline (see 1 Cor 5:1–8). Carrying out such discipline will also have the edifying effect of warning the rest of the congregation about the importance of purity and unity in the church and the devastating consequences of sin.

When a brother or sister who has fallen into sin and has been called to repentance through church discipline takes the steps of repentance identified by the church and its elders, restoration is the joyful responsibility of the church (Gal 6:1). Restoring a fallen brother or sister to fellowship in the church involves the public expressions of forgiveness, comfort, and reaffirmation of love for him or her (2 Cor 2:7–8).

Ordinances of Church

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism (Acts 2:38; Matt 28:19) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26; Luke 22:14–20). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36–39) is the solemn and joyful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Rom 6:1–11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41–42). The Lord’s Supper is to be practiced by all believers for the commemoration and proclamation of Christ’s death until He comes, and should always be preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Cor 11:28–32).

Church Polity

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 biblical churches may 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 lead the church in all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well (Acts 15:19–31; 20:28; 1 Cor 5:4–7, 13; 1 Pet 5:1–4).

A failure to correctly understand the purpose of the church leads to:

- A local church leaving its first love (Rev 2:4);

- Superficial and counterfeit ministry, resulting in disunity, where “program success” is glorified rather than God;
- People become passive spectators rather than active participants;
- The church becomes an organization, run by men and programs, rather than an organism of committed believers empowered by the Spirit of God and according to the word of God;
- The church will cultivate an indifference toward missions, evangelism, and disciple-making.

Therefore, we teach the church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. The universal church consists of everyone, everywhere in the present age, who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through repentance and faith. The local church is a local body of believers where believers can fully apply the “body” principles of encouraging, teaching, and building up one another in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament teaches that it is God’s will for believers to be committed to a local church for spiritual maturity, brotherly love, encouragement, and serving and instructing one another. The local church intentionally includes itself in joining with the universal church in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Eschatology

The doctrine of last things (eschatology) is a notoriously difficult issue because understanding it requires attention to nearly everything else in the Bible. As revealing the fulfillment of God’s promises, eschatology expresses a believer’s confidence about the future. Moreover, it provides motivation for faithful living today. Thus, while a difficult and sometimes controversial doctrine, what the Bible teaches about the last things carries with it a tremendous cause for hope in life and death. Finally, while the history of the church has shown widespread agreement that eschatology includes the return of Christ, the resurrection of believers unto glory and unbelievers unto judgment, and the restoration of the present world and the creation of a new heavens and new earth, we teach that a careful attention to the details of the relevant passages referenced in this section produces a robust eschatology.

Death and Resurrection

We teach that physical **death**, while involving no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Rev 6:9–11), results in the separation of soul and body at death for redeemed and unredeemed. We teach the bodily **resurrection** of all men, the redeemed to eternal life (John 6:39; Rom 8:10–11, 19–23; 2 Cor 4:14), and the unredeemed to judgment and everlasting punishment (Dan 12:2; John 5:29; Rev 20:13–15).

Death and Resurrection for the redeemed: We teach that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Phil 1:21–24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thess 4:13–17), which initiates the first resurrection (Rev 20:4–6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:35–44, 50–54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:8).

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

The Last Days and the Second Coming

We teach an overall framework of eschatology that the Bible describes as the Last Days. The Last Days is the overarching period of the climax and fulfillment of God’s plan and promises. This period is prophesied in the OT (Gen 49:1; Deut 4:30; Isa 2:2; Ezk 38:16; Jer 48:47; Dan 10:14; Hos 3:5) and inaugurated in the NT (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Jas 5:3). At the end of the Last Days is the Second Coming of Christ. The Second Coming is a network of events also known as the Day of the Lord. The Second Coming begins with the rapture of the church to meet Christ in the air, which includes the Bema judgment of believers. The Second Coming continues with the Tribulation. The Tribulation ends with the descent of Christ to the earth and Armageddon, where all Christ’s enemies are defeated. Following Armageddon is the resurrection of Tribulation and OT saints and the Millennial reign of Christ. At the end of the Millennium, Satan is released for a time to deceive the nations before he is defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire. The end of the Second Coming is the Great White Throne judgment where all the unbelieving dead are raised, judged, and cast into the Lake of Fire.

The Rapture of the Church

We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven-year tribulation to translate His church from this earth to meet Him in the air (John 14:1–3; 1 Thess 4:14–17; 5:1–2, 9–10; Rev 3:10). At this time the bodily resurrection and transformation of church-age believers occurs so that we will be with Him always (1 Cor 15:51–53; 1 Thess 4:17).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

We teach that after the rapture all believers will be subject to the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their lives and be recompensed for their deeds, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:9–10; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:13–15). This judgment is not for the condemnation of sin but for believers’ evaluation and reward, and the manifestation of the glory of God’s mercy in their eternal salvation (2 Tim 4:8, 18; Eph 2:4–9).

The Tribulation Period

We teach that this period is the seventieth week prophesied by Daniel (Dan 9:24–27). This seven year period begins with the antichrist making a covenant with Israel but breaks it in the middle, which begins a time of unparalleled destruction and devastation (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15–31; 25:31–46). Revelation 6–16 follows the pattern set by Daniel, revealing also that the tribulation is a seven year period (Rev 11:3; 12:6) wherein the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls that execute the righteous judgments of God against the unbelieving world (Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1).

These judgments will be climaxed by the coming of Christ in glory to the earth (Matt 24:27–31; 25:31–46; 2 Thess 2:7–12). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan 12:2–3; Rev 20:4–6).

The Millennial Kingdom

We teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matt 25:31; Luke 1:31–33; Acts 1:10–11; 2:29–30) and establish His messianic kingdom for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1–7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him on the earth (Ezk 37:21–28; Dan 7:17–22; 1 Thess 4:16–17; Rev 2:26; 20:4). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Dan 7:17–27; Rev 20:1–3).

We teach that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel (Isa 65:17–25; Ezk 37:21–28; Zech 8:1–17) to restore the nation to the land that they forfeited through their disobedience (Deut 28:15–68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matt 21:43; Rom 11:1–26), but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jer 31:31–34; Ezk 36:22–32; Rom 11:25–29). Israel is destined to fulfill a role of service and leadership to the other nations of the world (Gen 12:2–3; Isa 2:2–4). Because Christ is on the throne the prosperity of Israel results in blessing to the nations (Isa 52:13; 27:6).

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

The Judgment of the Lost

We teach that following the release of Satan after the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Rev 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city Jerusalem, at which time Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Rev 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10), and Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22; Acts 17:30–31), will resurrect and judge the unrighteous according to their deeds at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11–15). This judgment is the ultimate manifestation of God’s righteous justice against the wicked and disobedient (2 Thess 1:8–9; Rom 2:9–12).

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

New Heavens and New Earth

We teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thess 1:9; Rev 20:7–15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the heavens will pass away and the elements of this earth are to be dissolved and replaced with new heavens and new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:10–13; Eph 5:5; Rev 20:15; 21:22–27). Following this, the heavenly city will come down

out of heaven (Rev 21:1–2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (Rev 22:1–5). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father, that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Cor 15:24–28).

A failure to believe in the eschatological views as described and detailed above can result in:

- A non-literal interpretation of Old Testament and New Testament prophecies regarding end times events;
- Potential non-literal interpretations of other key biblical concepts such as creation and election;
- A misunderstanding of the nature of the fulfillment of God’s promises to the elect nation of Israel;
- A misunderstanding of the nature of the fulfillment of God’s promises to the church;
- A misunderstanding of the distinction between the nation of Israel and the church;
- A lack of confident assurance in how future events will unfold.

Therefore, we teach that the order of last things is as follows:

- Rapture of the church
- A literal seven-year Tribulation (immediately following the Rapture)
- Second Coming of Christ (at the end of the Tribulation)
- Millennial Kingdom (a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth; God fulfills His promises to national Israel)
- Final defeat of Satan, final judgment of unbelievers (Great White Throne Judgment)
- New heavens and new earth (New Jerusalem)

Eschatology is intended to promote assurance and hope about the future, along with motivation for holy living. What we teach about eschatology accomplishes this intention.