



The Grace Community Church at Bigelow

Statement of Faith

The Benefits and Limitations of a Statement of Faith

Although the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice, a statement of faith can serve as an excellent summary of what we believe the Bible teaches. Many people claim to believe the Bible, yet disagree on vital issues. A statement of faith provides necessary definitions. It also serves as a helpful teaching tool by providing a concise summary of biblical truth. We recognize that any statement of faith is a fallible, human attempt to summarize the riches of God's revelation and should therefore be open to further revision in the light of Holy Scripture.

Our statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. Therefore, in accordance with the Scripture's authority, our Board of Elders will bear the responsibility of interpreting and applying God's Word for the purposes of church doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline. The following is a summary of what is taught as Biblical truth at The Grace Community Church at Bigelow:

What We Teach

I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's complete written revelation, and the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit, constitute the plenary (inspired in all parts) word of God and

cannot be added to or subtracted from (1Co. 2:7-14; 2Pe. 1:20-21; Rev. 22:19; Prov. 30:6).

We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1Co. 2:13; 1 Th. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2Ti. 3:16), infallible, and absolutely inerrant in the original manuscripts. We also hold to a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Gen. 1:31; Ex. 31:17).

We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice, being fully sufficient for every human need and all that pertains to life and godliness. (Mat. 5:18; 24:35; Jn. 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1Co. 2:13; 2Ti. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 2Pe. 1:3, 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 (2Pe. 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Mat. 5:18; 2Ti. 3:16).

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true contextual and/or prophetic interpretation. The precise meaning is to be found as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation under the leading of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1Co. 2:7-15; 1Jo. 2:20). It is the responsibility of all believers to give themselves to the diligent study of the word of God in order to be able to ascertain the true intent and meaning of the Scripture, recognizing that proper, accurate application is binding on all generations. Yet, the truth of Scripture always stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

II. GOD

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5-7; 1Co. 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes and substance, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19; 2Co. 13:14; Isa. 48:12-16), each equally deserving worship and obedience.

A. God the Father

We believe that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps. 145:8, 9; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1–31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator, He is Father to all men (Eph. 4:6), but He is Spiritual Father only to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chr. 29:11). In His sovereignty, He is neither author nor approver of sin (Hab. 1:13), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pet. 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4–6); He saves from sin all 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).

B. God the Son

We teach that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, being co-equal, consubstantial,

and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 10:30; 14:9).

We teach that God the Father created all things according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom, and for whom, all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Cor. 8:6).

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

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

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

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

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, a payment for the penalty of sin,

substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24).

We teach that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is efficacious. That is, Christ's death accomplished its intended purpose which is freedom from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day, the very presence of sin; and that the believer, at the point of saving faith, is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Rom. 3:25; 5:8,9; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; 1 Pet. 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 intercedes as our Advocate and High-Priest (Matt. 28:6; Luke 24:38,39; Acts 2:30,31; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

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

We teach that Christ will return in His own way and His own time to establish His kingdom (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind, both the saved and unsaved in every generation, at the Great White Throne Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; John. 5:22-23; Rev. 20:11-15).

As the mediator between God and man (1Ti. 2:5), the head of His body, the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), and the coming universal King who will reign on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who are not trusting in Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31, Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-13).

C. God the Holy Spirit

We teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, eternal, not created, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity including intellect (1Co. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1Co. 12:11), eternality (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Psa. 139:7-10), omniscience (Isa. 40:13-31), omnipotence (Rom. 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13).

In all the divine attributes, He is co-equal and having the same substance with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1Co. 12:4-6; 2Co. 13:14; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-17).

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to His elect. We also recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Matt. 1:18), the written revelation (2Pe. 1:20-21, John 14:25-26), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7; 6:63).

We teach that the Holy Spirit was given by the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to complete the building of the body of Christ, which is His Church (1Co. 12:13; Eph. 2:21-22). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, issuing the call of God in the hearts of men, effecting the regeneration and conversion of the elect, and transforming believers

into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Rom. 8:29; 2Co. 3:18; Eph. 2:22).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion (1Co. 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers for service, and seals the saints of God unto the day of redemption (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13; 1Pe. 1:3-5).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the divine teacher who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they were moved to write God's revelation, the Bible. Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18; 2Pe. 1:19-21; 1Jo. 2:20, 27).

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts, but glorifies Christ by revealing Him to His people, implementing His work of redeeming the lost, and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1Co. 12:4-11; 14; 2Co. 3:18).

III. MAN

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created in all spiritual, moral, and physical perfection, with a rational nature, intelligence, emotion, will, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Gen. 2:7, 15-25; Jam. 3:9).

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

We teach that in Adam's disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, which is sin, 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. Man has no recuperative powers that enable him to recover himself, and thus he is hopelessly lost. Man will never seek after God on his own (Rom. 3:10-11), he is a slave to sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:17), spiritual things are complete foolishness to him (1Co. 1:18; 2:14), his heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) and will only do evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Therefore, man's salvation is nothing of himself, but wholly by the sovereign act of God through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:13; 6:44-45; Eph. 2:1-9; 2Pe. 1:1; 2Ti. 1:8-9; 2:25; Acts 13:48; 1 Jn. 1:8).

We teach that because all men were in Adam, his guilt was justly imputed to every man, and a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception (Rom. 5:18-19). All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

IV. SALVATION

We teach that salvation is wholly of God, by grace, on the basis of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, in the merit of His shed blood,

and not on the basis of human merit or works (Jn. 1:12-13; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5; 1Pe. 1:18-19).

A. Election

We believe that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4-11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 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 (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18,19,36; 5:40; 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 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 believe that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not in any way dependent on any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Eph. 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:2).

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

We teach that the Christian does not know who God has elected to salvation, therefore it is the responsibility of every Christian to evangelize or share the gospel with as many people as he has opportunity to share with. God has established the Christian's duty and privilege to evangelize, because He has elected some to salvation, and He has determined to save sinners through the preaching of the gospel. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:13-17; 1Co. 1:18-21, 1 Thess. 2:13-14). The gospel therefore should be offered to all people indiscriminately (Matt. 28: 19-20).

B. Atonement

God's good pleasure to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God. It was the justice of God that required the demands of the law to be met and His love that provided a way of escape for lost sinners. The atonement is the only means for the salvation of sinful man (Luke 24:26; Gal. 3:21-24; Heb. 2:10; 9:11-14; 10:1-14). If there were any other way to satisfy the justice of God, it would have been rendered (Acts 4:12; John 8:23-24; 14:6).

The atonement made propitiation to God, reconciling God to chosen sinners by the removal of the wrath of God through the substitutionary work of Christ. The Scripture sets forth the atoning work of Christ as a propitiation (Rom. 3:21-26), a canceling of the penalty of sin (Heb. 7:26-27; 9:6-15), reconciliation (Rom. 5:10; 2Co. 5:18-19), and redemption (Matt 20:28; Rom. 3:24; 1Co. 1:30; Eph. 1:7), thereby fully accomplishing its intended purpose.

C. Regeneration

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the soul is quickened and divine life is imparted (John 3:3-7; Tit. 3:5). It is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Word of God (John 5:24; Rom. 10:13-17, 1 Peter 1:23). Having been regenerated, the sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, is brought to repentance and responds in faith to the gospel. (1Jn. 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29).

Genuine regeneration will manifest itself in fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct (1Co. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:17-25; Eph. 2:10) as the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit, in all areas of life, through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:16; 2Pe. 1:4-11).

This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (2Co. 3:18). Such conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4; 1Pe. 1:3-5; 1Jo. 3:2-3). It is impossible for man to achieve sinless perfection in this life, but holiness will be the primary direction of his life and is a basis of his assurance (Heb. 6:11-12; 1 Jo. 1:8).

D. Justification

We teach that the justification of sinners is an instantaneous act of God (Rom. 3:21-26; 8:33) by which He legally declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Isa. 55:6-7; Luke. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 5:1; 2Co. 7:10) and confess Him as Sovereign Lord (Rom. 10:9-10; 1Co. 12:3; 2Co. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of

man (Rom. 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Col. 2:14; 1Pe. 2:24), the forgiveness of our sins, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1Co. 1:30; 2Co. 5:21). By this means, God is enabled to be “just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

E. Sanctification

We teach that there are two distinct aspects of sanctification, the first one being positional and the second one being progressive. We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous, having to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition, and should not be confused with progressive sanctification (Acts 20:32; 1Co. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2Th. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 10:10; 13:12; 1Pe. 1:2).

We teach also a progressive sanctification, beginning at the point of conversion, by which the practice of the believer is continually brought closer to the position he enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Spirit, the believer is both enabled and compelled to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 6:1-22; 8:29; 12:2; 2Co. 3:18; 1Th. 4:3-5; 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). Yet, 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. The total eradication of sin in this life is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:20-24; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9-10; 1Pe. 1:14-16; 1 Jo 3:5-9). Hence, we do not teach a sinless perfection, but we do teach that the believer's life will necessarily be characterized by the pursuit of holiness (1Co. 5:9-13; Tit. 1:16; 1Jo. 2:3-6; 3:9-10).

F. Security

We believe 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. 1:4-9; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:4,5; Jude 24).

1. Preservation

We teach that all who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and, thus, are preserved to the end. Therefore, salvation is wholly dependent upon God whom has willed so save those whom He gave to His dear Son. Their salvation can never be lost, because the elect are kept by God's power, through faith, and nothing can separate them from His love.

2. Perseverance of the Saints

We teach that they, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, will neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.

3. Christian Liberty

We believe 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 excuse for sinful living and carnality (Rom. 6:15-22; 13:13, 14; Gal. 5:13,16,17,25,26; Titus 2:11-14).

We teach that the following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

- a. Fear of God- As servants of Christ, all actions should be motivated by love for God, and all objects are to be used for His glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which Scripture clearly forbids (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:15-16).
- b. Love for the Brethren- Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect the believer's decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:21-23).
- c. Compassion for the Unconverted- Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and the behavior chosen should always be that which is likely to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-22).
- d. Watchfulness over the Soul- Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts.

Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to Scripturally persevere (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

G. Separation

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

We believe 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 any association with 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 the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:17-24; Heb. 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness demonstrated by a continual pursuit of holiness (Matt. 5:2-12; Rom. 12:1-2; 2Co. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; Tit. 2:11-14; 1Jo. 3:1-10). However, we also teach that a believer is not to withdraw in isolation from the world, because the world is his God-ordained place of ministry (Matt. 5:13-16, John 17:15; 1Co. 5:9-10). Therefore, he is to expose the deeds of darkness as one who is in the world but not of the world (Eph. 5:1-17).

V. THE CHURCH

A. The Makeup of 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 (1Co. 12:12-13), which is the Bride of Christ (2Co. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-8), and of which Christ is the head. We teach that the church is a unique spiritual body designed and built by Christ, made up of men and women in every age who have been saved by grace through faith (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; Col. 1:18).

We teach that the establishment, autonomy, and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1Th. 1:1; 2Th. 1:1) and that the members of the Church Universal are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies for edification, worship, prayer, and the ministry of the Word (1Co. 11:18-20; Heb. 10:25).

We teach the obedient submission of believers to the leaders God has appointed over them (Heb. 13:7, 17), the necessity of discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20; 2Ti. 2:2), the mutual accountability of all believers to one another (Matt. 18:5-14), and the practice of church discipline in accordance with the standards of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1Co. 5:1-13; 2Th. 3:6-15).

We teach the autonomy of the local church with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any external hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Tit. 1:5). Churches are to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the one true faith. However, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, each local church

should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1Co. 5:4-7, 12-13; 1Pe. 5:1-4).

We teach that God uses the church as His primary instrument to accomplish His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:7-12). He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5-8; 1Co. 12:4-31; 1Pe. 4:10-11).

B. The Leaders of the Church

We teach that the one, supreme authority for the church is Christ (1Co. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders or bishops, men called to the primary responsibilities of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). The role of pastor/teacher is a specific function within the office of an elder (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11). Additionally, God has also appointed deacons to the operational and administrative leadership responsibilities of the body. Men functioning in these offices must meet the spiritual qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (1Ti. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1Pe. 5:1-5).

We also believe that because of the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the qualifications of an elder and deacon, these offices are restricted to men only. This does not mean that any man can be an elder simply because of his gender, but that he must also meet the rest of the qualifications as provided in Scripture (1 Tim. 3.1-13; Tit.1.5-9). Women are not restricted from all teaching but are restricted from both offices of the church where no clear example is

given in Scripture of a woman functioning in those offices. Subsequently, women are to engage in other meaningful ministries e.g. preaching the gospel to non-believers, which would include missionary work and is the call of all believers at varying degrees (Mt. 28.19; Act. 1.8; 18.24-26); assisting the leaders of the church (Rom. 16.1); mercy ministries (Jam. 1.27); teaching the younger women (Tit.2.3); engaging in teaching one another in the common body life of the church wherein there is no necessary exertion of authority (Eph. 4.25; Col. 3.16; Heb. 3.13); teaching children, especially in the context but not limited to one's own home, (2 Tim. 1.5; Eph. 6.4); exercising spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 11.5; Joel 2.28; Acts 21.9); engage in corporate prayers as well as assisting (but not leading) in congregational worship (1 Cor. 11.5; Acts 2.42; 4.27; 12.12). The list above is by no means an exhaustive list on the sphere of women's ministry. We believe that women who follow the pattern of Scripture will find an abundance of opportunity to serve and impact the world for the kingdom of God.

C. Spiritual Gifts

We believe that God has given the church many spiritual gifts for the edification of the body (Rom. 12.3-8; 1 Cor. 12.1-11; Eph. 4. 11-12). We believe that believers are given a great diversity of gifts, making the body of Christ consist of believers with diverse talents, callings, and gifts (Rom.12). We believe that every member of the body of Christ is called to use his or her gift(s) according to each individual gifting, calling, and faith for the mutual edification of the saints (Rom. 1.11-12; 12.3-8). We believe in the Sovereignty of the Spirit over all things pertaining to the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12.11). We do not believe that the spiritual gifts should be a point of division or the test for Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 13.1-2; 14. 40).

D. Ordinances

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:36-42).

1. Believer's Baptism

Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the visible demonstration 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 new life (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:11-12). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42), and is a pledge in the presence of God and His saints, to live a life of good conscience before Him (1Pe. 3:21). Baptism has absolutely no saving merit or regenerative power; salvation is entirely the work of Almighty God in accordance with the eternal decree of the Father (Eph. 1:3-6), as accomplished on the cross by the Son (Rom. 5:9-10), and applied by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5).

2. The Lord's Supper

We teach that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of Christ's death until He comes. The Lord's Supper is reserved for those who have been born of the Spirit of God and must always be preceded by sober self-examination (1Co. 11:28-32). The Lord's Supper is an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way in fellowship with His people (1Co. 10:16). However, the elements of communion are nothing more than a representation of the flesh and blood of Christ.

E. The Mission of the Church

1. Exalting the Lord

We teach that it is the primary mission of the church to bring glory to God. Therefore, the corporate meeting of the church is for the exaltation of God in worship: expressed in prayer, music, and the reading and preaching of God's word (Rom. 11:36; 1Co. 14:23-25; Eph. 3:21, Psalm 150, Col. 3:16).

2. Edifying the Saints

We teach that the saints are edified through the means of grace; by the instruction of the Word (Eph. 4:13-16; 2Ti. 2:2, 15; 3:16-17; 4:1-2), by biblical fellowship (Acts 2:46-47; Heb. 10:25; 1Jo. 1:3), and by the corporate observance of the ordinances (Lk. 22:19-20; Acts 2:38-42).

3. Evangelizing the Lost

We teach that Jesus Christ has given the church an enduring commission to evangelize the lost, with this responsibility extending to every believer. Biblical evangelism must involve both the spoken word and the unspoken testimony of a life transformed by the grace of God in Christ (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 1 Th. 1:2-10; Tit. 3:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-4, 15). We believe that the work of evangelism should not just be local but that we should endeavor to obey the great commission, which extends the purpose of the church regarding evangelism to the whole world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

VI. ANGELS

A. Holy Angels

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

B. Fallen Angels

We believe that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Is. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1-15). We believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Is. 14:13, 14; Matt. 4:1-11; Rev. 12:9, 10), the prince of this world who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, (Rom. 16:20) and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Is. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

VII. LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

Since no one knows the day or hour of the Lord's return, not even Christ Himself in His humanity (Matt. 25:13; Mark 13:32), the timing of the return of Christ, (1Th. 4:15-17) and the millennial debate between the various positions among premillennialists and non-premillennialists, should not be made a test of Christian fellowship in and of themselves. While the Lord's return is undeniable, the conviction regarding its timing together with the millennial issue is subject to one's presuppositions and the particular interpretive principles applied to unfulfilled Bible

prophecy. As such, Peter's instruction and admonition sets forth an important principle for the saints. When serious consideration is given to the return of Christ and the cataclysmic destruction that will characterize the impending Day of the Lord, the exhortation to Christians is sobering:

"Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

A. Death

We teach the historical orthodox Baptist view of death, which is physical death involving a separation of soul and body with no loss of immaterial consciousness. The souls of the redeemed are made perfect in holiness (Heb. 12:23) and pass immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2Co. 5:8), while the souls of the unsaved are held in torment awaiting final judgment (Luke 16:19-26).

We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Rom. 8:10-11, 19-23; 2Co. 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:11-15). Believers shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the Day of Judgment (Matt. 10:32) and made perfectly blessed in both body and soul unto the full, eternal enjoyment of God. The unsaved shall be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) and cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41-46), where they will be cut off from the life of God, abiding under his undiminished wrath forever (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41-46; 2Th. 1:6-9).

B. The Day of the Lord

We teach that God will pour out the full fury of His wrath upon an unbelieving world (1 Thess. 4:15- 5:1-10; Jer. 30:7; Dan.12:1; Zep. 1:7-18; Rev. 14:13-16:21), and these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory with His saints and His holy angels to judge all those living upon the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 2Th. 2:7-12; Rev. 19:11-21).

C. The Kingdom

We teach that the Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age (Gen. 1:1; Is. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 3:2; 4:8-10, 23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Rom. 5:17; 8:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 1:13; Heb. 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; 4:13; Rev. 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22)

D. Last Things

We teach that God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the

Lord (Is. 2:4; 11:9; Matt. 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Cor. 5:10; Philip. 3:20-21; Col. 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thess. 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:27-28; Jam. 5:8; 2 Pet. 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.).