

# Constitution of



The  
**Field** Church

Adopted January 23, 2023

## **CONSTITUTION**

We, the members of THE FIELD CHURCH, do ordain and establish the following Constitution to which we voluntarily submit.

### **PREAMBLE**

The Field Church hereby enacts this Constitution to govern the body of Christ decently and in order in accordance with I Cor. 14:40.

### **AUTHORITY**

The Board of Elders is the governing body of this church.

### **ARTICLE I: MISSION STATEMENT**

Glorifying God through Faithfulness to His Word

### **ARTICLE II: VISION STATEMENT**

Glorifying God through joyfully treasuring Christ, genuinely loving each other, passionately equipping the church, and actively reaching the world according to His Word.

### **ARTICLE III: PURPOSE OF THE FIELD CHURCH**

We exist to joyfully treasure Christ, genuinely love each other, passionately equipping the church, and to actively reaching the world

### **ARTICLE IV: NAME**

The name of this church shall be "THE FIELD CHURCH". The word "church" as used in this Constitution shall refer to The Field Church, whereas the word "Church" shall refer to the Body and Bride of Christ.

### **ARTICLE V: ADDRESS**

2480 HWY 190 Mandeville, LA 70448

## ARTICLE VI: Statement of Faith & Doctrinal Distinctives

### The Holy Scriptures

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16).

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

### God

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

## God the Father

We teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as His own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

## God the Son

We teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

We teach that God the Father created everything according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2).

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

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

We teach that in His incarnation, Christ fully possessed His divine nature, attributes, and prerogatives (Colossians 2:9; cf. Luke 5:18-26; John 16:30; 20:28).

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

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross, and that His death was voluntary, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24).

We teach that, on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; that he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Romans 3:25; 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

We teach that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead, and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates as our Advocate and High Priest (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

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

We teach that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46)
- Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15)

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body, the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

## **God the Holy Spirit**

We teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity, including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternality (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalms 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 10:15-17).

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7).

We teach that the work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost, when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 2:22).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).

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

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

We teach, in this respect, that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today, and that speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were never intended to be characteristic of the lives of believers (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:1-4).

## **Man**

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).

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

We teach that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 John 1:8).

We teach that, because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalms 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

## **Salvation**

We teach that salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

## **Regeneration**

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24) when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12b; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

## **Election**

We teach that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

We teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part or to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Romans 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God

in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

## **Justification**

We teach that justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

## **Sanctification**

We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification, declared holy, and identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. Being sanctified as one who is "set apart" has to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that there is also, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 5:23).

In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh—but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is impossible, but the Holy Spirit provides victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

## **Eternal Security**

We teach that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24).

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

## **Separation**

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

We teach that, out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).

We teach that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

## **The Church**

We teach that the Holy Spirit immediately places all who place their faith in Jesus Christ into one united spiritual Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the Bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

We teach that the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We teach that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1-6; 5:32).

We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation must submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

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

We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should also determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the

ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

We teach the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12).

We teach the need of the church to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

We teach that there were two kinds of gifts given the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). Satan can even counterfeit miraculous gifts to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:12; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8).

We teach that no one possesses the gift of healing today, but that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It also signifies fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42).

We teach that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). We also teach that, whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, participation in the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ, who indwells

every believer, and so is present, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

## **Angels**

### **Holy Angels**

We teach that angels are created beings and are not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

### **Fallen Angels**

We teach that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-15).

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

## **Last Things**

### **Death**

We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).

We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Romans 8:10-11, 19-23; 2 Corinthians 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 20:13-15).

We teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:13-15), when the soul and the resurrection body will be united (John 5:28-29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), cut off from the life of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

## **The Rapture of the Church**

We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven-year tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Titus 2:13) to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11) and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

## **The Tribulation Period**

We teach that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 16), and that the return of Christ will climax these judgments in glory to the earth (Matthew 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). At that time, the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised, and the living will be judged (Daniel 12:2-3; Revelation 20:4-6). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:15-31; 25:31-46).

## **The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign**

We teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for 1,000 years on the earth (Revelation 20:1-7). During this time, the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezekiel 37:21-28; Daniel 7:17-22; Revelation 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet and by the removal of Satan from the world (Daniel 7:17-27; Revelation 20:1-7).

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

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

## **The Judgment of the Lost**

We teach that following the release of Satan after the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city, at which time Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10), whereupon Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne Judgment.

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

## **Eternity**

We teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15; 21:1-27; 22:1-21). Following this, the heavenly city will come out of heaven (Revelation 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Revelation 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), that in all spheres, the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

# **Doctrinal Distinctives**

## **The Sovereignty of God**

No doctrine is more despised by the natural mind than the truth that God is absolutely sovereign. Some say, due to the reality of suffering (related to the issue of theodicy), that God is either not sovereign, or not good. However, God is sovereign, God is good, and God has a morally sufficient reason for what is brought about.

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

But that is, after all, precisely what Scripture teaches. Even faith is God's gracious gift to His elect. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65). "Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Therefore no one who is saved has anything to boast about (Eph. 2:8-9). "Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Lordship Salvation**

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

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

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

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

## **The Distinctives of Lordship Salvation**

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

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

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

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

teaches that faith might not last and that a true Christian can completely cease believing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Sufficiency of Scripture**

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

This is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. There certainly is a crucial need for biblically-sound counseling ministries within the Church, and this need is met by those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others. In fact, one of the very problems that has led to the current plague of bad counsel is that churches have not done as well as they could in equipping people with those

kinds of gifts to minister effectively. In addition, the complexities of this modern age have made it more difficult to take the time necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy health and vitality.

Churches have looked to psychology to fill the gap, but it isn't going to work. Professional psychologists are no substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel that psychology offers cannot replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Moreover, psychology tends to make people dependent on a therapist, whereas those exercising true spiritual gifts always turn people back to all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.

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

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

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

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

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

In verse 8, David adds a third statement about Scripture's sufficiency: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." Rather than simply indicating what is right as opposed to wrong, the word translated "right" has the sense of showing someone the true path. The truths of Scripture lay out the proper path through the difficult maze of life. That brings a wonderful confidence. So many people are distressed or despondent because they lack direction and purpose, and most of them seek answers from the wrong sources. God's Word not only provides the light to our path (Ps. 119:105), but also sets the route before us.

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

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

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

In Psalm 19:9 David uses the term "fear" as a synonym for God's Word: "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." This "fear" speaks of the reverential awe for God that compels believers to worship Him. Scripture, in this sense, is the divine manual on how to worship the Lord. The Hebrew word "clean" speaks of the absence

of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. Scripture is without sin, evil, corruption, or error. The truth it conveys is therefore absolutely undefiled and without blemish.

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

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

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

The sufficiency of Scripture, for instance, must be trusted in regards to church practice. Often, the modern church claims to hold to this doctrine, yet it often focuses on some of the Bible's basic principles and then veers off into pragmatic strategies for success. However, God has regulated how the church will accomplish His ends. The church, then, must simply focus on faithfulness to God's Word; diligently following God's revealed will and principles. God, then, will accomplish His ends, through His means, through His church. This is a practical example of trusting in the sufficiency of Scripture.

### **Biblical Counseling**

We believe that the idea of counseling originates in God since He Himself is referred to as Wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6) and The Counselor (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). We believe that biblical counseling is an action God Himself undertakes via His Word through His Spirit to all people. Biblical counseling, then, is the personal

discipleship ministry of God's people to other people, believers and nonbelievers (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; 1 Chronicles 27:32-33; Matthew 28:19-20), under the oversight of Christ's church (Ephesians 4:4-16), dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God's Word (Psalm 119:24) through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). We believe that biblical counseling is commanded in the Holy Scriptures to be exercised by believers and offered to all mankind who has been created in the image of God (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8b; Galatians 6:9-10).

We believe biblical counseling seeks to reorient disordered thoughts, desires, affections, behaviors, and worship to restore people to a right fellowship with God, with self, and with others (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Psalm 19:7-14; 1 Samuel 15:22-24; Colossians 3:2). This is accomplished by speaking the truth in love and applying Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance (Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 4:8; Proverbs 24:5-6; 27:5; 28:13; 29:18), thus making them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ (John 14:15; 15:9-11).

## **Biblical Eldership**

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

### **The Office of Elder**

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

[poimainō] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopēo] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.” The different terms indicate various features of the same ministry, not varying levels of authority or separate offices, as some churches espouse.

## **A Plurality of Elders**

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

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

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

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

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

## **The Qualifications of Elders**

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

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

The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be "above reproach." He must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. An elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, social life, business life, and spiritual life. In this way, he is to be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call the congregation to follow his example (Phil. 3:17). All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skills, only amplify that idea.

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

## **The Functions of Elders**

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

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

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

## **Church Discipline**

On occasion a Christian will wander away from the fellowship of other believers and find himself ensnared by sin through ignorance or willful disobedience. It then becomes necessary for the church, and particularly its shepherds, to actively seek the repentance and restoration of that Christian. As shepherds of the flock, the elders love the sheep and are also held accountable by God for their spiritual welfare, including that of the wandering sheep. As in Jesus' parable in Luke 15:3-8, it is a time of joy, both in heaven and within the church, when the wandering Christian truly repents.

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

## The Purpose of Discipline

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

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

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

## The Process of Discipline

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

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

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

confirmed” (v. 16b). In other words, the witnesses are present not only to confirm that the sin was committed but, in addition, to confirm that the sinning brother was properly rebuked and that he has or has not repented.

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

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

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

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

It has been the custom at The Field Church, upon enacting this third step, to clearly indicate to the congregation that they are to pursue the person aggressively and plead with him to repent before the fourth step becomes necessary. That crucial and

potent procedure often draws the sinner to repentance and obedience. If repentance does take place, the sinning believer is forgiven and restored.

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

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

This means that if the erring member refuses to heed the warnings of the Elders and the church, he or she shall be dismissed from the church pursuant to the Scriptures and treated as an unbeliever. There shall be no appeal of the discipline process or the dismissal to any court. The congregation shall be encouraged to pray for the repentance and restoration of the erring member.

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

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

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

In all cases where there is no repentance, it is clearly understood that the discipline process will continue to conclusion whether the erring member leaves the church or otherwise seeks to withdraw from membership.

## **Church Membership**

In a day when commitment is a rare commodity, it should come as no surprise that church membership is such a low priority to so many believers. Sadly, it is not uncommon for Christians to move from church to church, never submitting themselves to the care of elders and never committing themselves to a group of fellow believers.

To neglect—or to refuse—to join a church as a formal member, however, reflects a misunderstanding of the believer's responsibility to the body of Christ. And it also cuts one off from the many blessings and opportunities that flow from this commitment. It is essential for every Christian to understand what church membership is and why it matters.

## **The Definition of Church Membership**

When an individual is saved, he becomes a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Because he is united to Christ and the other members of the body in this way, he is therefore qualified to become a member of a local expression of that body.

To become a member of a church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes. These purposes include receiving instruction from God's Word (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, when one becomes a member of a church, he submits himself to the care and the authority of the biblically-qualified elders that God has placed in that assembly.

## **The Basis for Church Membership**

Although Scripture does not contain an explicit command to formally join a local church, the biblical foundation for church membership permeates the New Testament. This biblical basis can be seen most clearly in (1) the example of the early church, (2) the existence of church government, (3) the exercise of church discipline, and (4) the exhortation to mutual edification.

## **The Example of the Early Church**

In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches. In the case of the few written to individuals—such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus—these individuals were leaders in churches. The New Testament epistles themselves demonstrate that the Lord assumed that believers would be committed to a local assembly.

There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Tim. 5:9), there may also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-2).

In the book of Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of formal church membership. Phrases such as “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17), all suggest recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (also see 1 Cor. 5:4; 14:23; and Heb. 10:25).

## **The Existence of Church Government**

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that a plurality of elders is to oversee each local body of believers. The specific duties given to these elders presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care.

Among other things, these godly men are responsible to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), to labor diligently among them (1 Thess. 5:12), to have charge over them (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17), and to keep watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Scripture teaches that the elders will give an account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:3).

Those responsibilities require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership in the local church. Elders can shepherd the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are; they can provide oversight only if they know those for whom they are responsible; and they can fulfill their duty to shepherd the flock only if they know who is part of the flock and who is not.

The elders of a church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are primarily responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders, and this is done through church membership.

Conversely, Scripture teaches that believers are to submit to their elders. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them." The question for each believer is, "Who are your leaders?" The one who has refused to join a local church and entrust himself to the care and the authority of the elders has no leaders. For that person, obedience to Hebrews 13:17 is impossible. To put it simply, this verse implies that every believer knows to whom he must submit, which, in turn, assumes clearly defined church membership.

## **The Exercise of Church Discipline**

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlines the way the church is to seek the restoration of a believer who has fallen into sin—a four-step process commonly known as church discipline. First, when a brother sins, he is to be confronted privately by a single individual (v. 15). If he refuses to repent, that individual is to take one or two other believers along to confront him again (v. 16). If the sinning brother refuses to listen to the two or three, they are then to tell it to the church (v. 17). If there is still no

repentance, the final step is to put the person out of the assembly (v. 17; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

The exercise of church discipline according to Matthew 18 and other passages (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 5:20; Titus 3:10-11) presupposes that the elders of a church know who their members are. For example, the elders of The Field Church have neither the responsibility nor the authority to discipline a member of the church down the street. The Bible's teaching on church discipline assumes church membership.

## **The Exhortation to Mutual Edification**

The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that God has called every member to a life devoted to the growth of the body. In other words, Scripture exhorts all believers to edify the other members by practicing the "one-anothers" of the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 10:24-25) and exercising their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Mutual edification can only take place in the context of the corporate body of Christ. Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal way to make that commitment.

## **Conclusion**

Living out a commitment to a local church involves many responsibilities: exemplifying a godly lifestyle in the community, exercising one's spiritual gifts in diligent service, contributing financially to the work of the ministry, giving and receiving admonishment with meekness and in love, and faithfully participating in corporate worship. Much is expected, but much is at stake. For only when every believer is faithful to this kind of commitment is the church able to live up to her calling as Christ's representative here on earth. To put it simply, membership matters. Because of the importance of church membership, The Field Church has adopted an annual renewal of membership. Such renewal procedures shall be adopted and approved by the Board of Elders.

## **Marriage & Sexuality**

We teach that God gave marriage as part of His common grace and that it has no meaning other than as He has provided (Gen. 2:18–24). We teach that marriage is subject to the curse of the Fall but that believers living in obedience to the Scripture and under the control of the Holy Spirit can begin to experience peaceful, productive, and fulfilled marriage as intended by God (Gen. 3:16; 1 Peter 3:7).

We teach that the marriages of believers are to illustrate the loving relationship of Christ and His church, with the husband loving his wife as Christ loves the church and the wife responding to her husband's loving leadership as the church responds to Christ (Eph. 5:18–33).

We teach that as believers' marriages are to illustrate Christ's relationship with His church, believers should choose to marry those who share their faith and regenerate life (2 Cor. 6:14).

We teach that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: marriage sanctioned by God, which joins one biological, chromosomal man and one biological, chromosomal woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in scripture (Gen. 2:23–24).

We teach that marriage is always a public, formal, and officially recognized covenant between a man and a woman. We teach that prolonged conjugal cohabitation does not establish, and is not equivalent to, marriage (John 4:18).

We teach that where no such covenant exists or can be discerned between a cohabiting couple before coming to faith in Christ, family units should be preserved to the extent possible and, if otherwise appropriate, solemnization encouraged.

We teach that where a valid marriage has been established before coming to faith in Christ, the couple should remain married (1 Cor. 7:24).

We teach that God hates divorce, permitting it only where there has been unrepentant sexual sin (Mal. 2:14–16; Matt. 5:32, 19:9) or desertion by an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12–15). We teach that remarriage is permitted to a faithful partner, but only when the divorce was on biblical grounds. More about Divorce and Remarriage

We teach that men and women have been directly created by God and made distinct from one another with a fixed gender, as evidenced by one's chromosomal and biological makeup at conception (Genesis 1:27-31; 2:3-25; 17:10-12). Thus, we believe that gender and human sexuality are objectively fixed by God at birth as either male or female and not subjectively determined by an individual.

We teach that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We teach that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged outside a marriage between a man and a woman (Heb. 13:4).

We teach that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life. (Ps. 139.)

We teach that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, pornography, any attempt to change one's sex or disagreement with one's biological sex, is sinful and offensive to God (Lev. 18:1–30; Matt. 5:28; Rom. 1:26–29; 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:1–8). We teach that God's holy intention for men and women is to identify with their objective, chromosomal, biological makeup because He has created them with that makeup.

We teach that homosexuality, in particular, is subject to God's wrath of abandonment, a matter of choice and not inherited status, and epitomizes man's ungrateful rebellion against God (Genesis 19:4-15; Rom. 1:18–28; Deuteronomy 22:5; Leviticus 20:13).

We teach that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture or the doctrines of the church. We teach that the faithful proclamation of the Scripture, including the call to repentance, does not constitute hate speech or hateful and harassing behavior but is instead a fundamental part of the church's loving mission to the world (Matt. 28:16–20; 2 Cor. 5:11–20; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1–2).

We teach that God offers redemption and forgiveness to all who confess and forsake their sin, including sexual sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We teach that His forgiveness is total and complete (Ps. 103:11–12, 130:3–4; Is. 43:25, 44:22; John 5:24; Col. 2:13–14) and that God imputes the complete righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21) to the believing sinner. We teach that the forgiven sinner has been cleansed from the guilt of sin, set apart unto God, or made holy and justified before Him (1 Cor. 6:9–11). We teach that any man or woman receiving that forgiveness is in Christ and is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

## **Divorce & Remarriage**

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

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

### **The Grounds for Divorce**

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

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving mate does not desire to live with his or her believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Because "God has called us to peace" (v. 15), divorce is allowed and may be preferable in such situations. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, perhaps

because of lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believer is in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill. Because “the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor. 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing the displeasure of God.

## **The Possibility of Remarriage**

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

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

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

## **The Role of the Church**

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

however, reasonable time should be allowed for the possibility of the unfaithful spouse returning because of the discipline.

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

### **Pre-conversion Divorce**

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

### **Repentance and Forgiveness**

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

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed (Mark 10:11-12). God forgives that sin immediately when repentance occurs, and there is nothing in

Scripture to indicate anything other than that. From that point on, the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.

## **Divorce and Abuse**

In cases where threats of sexual abuse or physical abuse exist within a marriage, separation is recommended for the safety of those abused. The Bible is clear that we must protect the weak from harm (Deuteronomy 27:19, Psalm 12:5, Proverbs 24:11-12, Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24, Zechariah 7:10). Once the abused party is safe under temporary separation, then repentance is required. Reconciliation can occur under close supervision of the church's elders and any other authorities that may be necessary, depending on the nature of the offense (Romans 13:1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-17; 5:15, Hebrews 13:17). The length of separation may vary depending on each situation. The goal is to ensure genuine repentance and long-term safety for the glory of God and the good of all involved (2 Corinthians 7:8-12). In such cases, we hope to see the marriage restored, which is possible through repentance and forgiveness through the power of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

If there is no repentance, then the church should proceed with church discipline during the time of separation (Matthew 18:15-17). If the abusing party refuses to repent, the church would consider them unbelievers. In such cases, the elders may recommend divorce based on the willful abandonment of an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Even if the abusing spouse refuses to leave in such a case, the abused spouse may still divorce the abusing spouse on the basis of not "consenting to live" in a safe and peaceable manner.

## **The Role of Women**

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

## **The Old Testament and Women**

In the creation account of Genesis 1, God's first word on the subject of men and women is that they were equally created in the image of God (v. 27). Neither received more of the image of God than the other. So the Bible begins with the

equality of the sexes. As persons, as spiritual beings standing before God, men and women are absolutely equal.

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

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

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

## **Jesus and Women**

In the midst of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, which viewed women almost on the level of possessions, Jesus showed love and respect for women. Though Jewish rabbis did not teach women and the Jewish Talmud said it was better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman, Jesus never took the position that women, by their very nature, could not understand spiritual or theological

truth. He not only included them in His audiences but also used illustrations and images that would be familiar to them (Matt. 13:33; 22:1–2; 24:41; Luke 15:8–10) and specifically applied His teaching to them (Matt. 10:34ff.). To the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), He revealed that He was the Messiah and discussed topics such as eternal life and the nature of true worship with her. He also taught Mary and, when admonished by Martha, pointed out the priority of learning spiritual truth even over “womanly” responsibilities like serving guests in one’s home (Luke 10:38).

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

## **The Epistles and Women**

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

## **The Family**

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

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

## **The Church**

From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (Acts 1:12–14; 9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and leadership in the churches was entrusted to men.

Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side-by-side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.

Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. However, without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God.

## **The Gift of Tongues**

The Gift of Tongues was a divinely bestowed supernatural ability to speak in a human language that had not been learned by the one speaking. According to the Apostle Paul, when believers exercised the gift of tongues in church, they were to speak one at a time, and only two or three were to speak in a given service (1 Cor. 14:27). Furthermore, when tongues were spoken in the church, they were to be interpreted by someone with the gift of interpretation so that the others might be edified by the God-given message (1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 27). In this way, tongues did not

serve as a private prayer language, but rather—like all spiritual gifts—as a means by which one might serve and edify the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

## **Tongues "Will Cease"**

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul made an interesting, almost startling, statement: “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.” In the expression “love never fails,” the Greek word translated “fails” means “to decay” or “to be abolished.” Paul was not saying that love is invincible or that it cannot be rejected. He was saying that love is eternal—that it will be applicable forever and will never be passé. Tongues, however, “will cease.” The Greek verb used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 means “to cease permanently,” and implies that when tongues ceased, they would never start up again.

Here is the question that this passage poses for the contemporary charismatic movement: if tongues were supposed to cease, has that already happened, or is it yet future? Charismatic believers insist that none of the gifts have ceased yet, so the cessation of tongues is yet future. Most non-charismatics insist that tongues have already ceased, passing away with the apostolic age. Who is right?

It should be noted that 1 Corinthians 13:8 itself does not say when tongues were to cease. Although 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 teaches that prophecy and knowledge will cease when the “perfect” (i.e., the eternal state) comes, the language of the passage—particularly the middle voice of the Greek verb translated “will cease”—puts tongues in a category apart from these gifts. Paul writes that while prophecy and knowledge will be “done away” (passive voice) by “the perfect,” the gift of tongues “will cease” in and of itself (middle voice) prior to the time that “the perfect” arrives. When did this cessation of tongues take place? The evidence of Scripture and history indicate that tongues ceased in the apostolic age.

## **Evidence from Scripture**

What biblical or theological evidence is there that tongues have ceased? First, the gift of tongues was a miraculous, revelatory gift, and the age of miracles and revelation ended with the apostles. The last recorded miracles in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58, with the healings on the island of Malta (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle was recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in 1

Corinthians, an early epistle. Two later epistles, Ephesians and Romans, both discuss gifts of the Spirit at length—but no mention is made of the miraculous gifts. By that time miracles were already looked on as something in the past (Heb. 2:3-4). Apostolic authority and the apostolic message needed no further confirmation. Before the first century ended, the entire New Testament had been written and was circulating through the churches.

***Charismatic believers insist that none of the gifts have ceased...***

***Non-charismatics insist that tongues have already ceased....***

***Who is right?***

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

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

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

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

## **Evidence from History**

The evidence of history also indicates that tongues have ceased. It is significant that tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the New Testament. Paul wrote at least twelve epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues; neither did Jude. Tongues appeared only briefly in Acts and 1

Corinthians as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the church was established, tongues were gone. They stopped. The later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again, and neither did anyone in the post-apostolic age.

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

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

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

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

Then in the early nineteenth century, Scottish Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving and members of his congregation practiced speaking in tongues and prophesying. Irvingite prophets often contradicted each other, their prophecies failed to come to pass, and their meetings were characterized by wild excesses. The movement was further discredited when some of their prophets admitted to falsifying prophecies and others even attributed their "giftedness" to evil spirits. This group eventually

became the Catholic Apostolic Church, which taught many false doctrines, embracing several Roman Catholic doctrines and creating twelve apostolic offices.

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

### **Roman Catholicism**

In today's spirit of ecumenism, many evangelicals have called for the Protestant Church to lay aside its differences with Rome and pursue unity with the Catholic Church. Is that possible? Is Roman Catholicism simply another facet of the body of Christ that should be brought into union with its Protestant counterpart? Is Roman Catholicism simply another Christian denomination?

While there are many errors in the teaching of the Catholic Church (for example its belief in the transubstantiation of the communion wafer and its view of Mary), two rise to the forefront and call for special attention: its denial of the doctrine of sola Scriptura and its denial of the biblical teaching on justification. To put it simply, because the Roman Catholic Church has refused to submit itself to the authority of God's Word and to embrace the gospel of justification taught in Scripture, it has set itself apart from the true body of Christ. It is a false and deceptive form of Christianity.

### **The Doctrine of Sola Scriptura**

In the words of reformer Martin Luther, the doctrine of sola Scriptura means that "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed." Roman Catholicism flatly rejects this principle, adding a host of traditions and Church teachings and declaring them binding on all true believers—with the threat of eternal damnation to those who hold contradictory opinions.

In Roman Catholicism, "the Word of God" encompasses not only the Bible, but also the Apocrypha, the Magisterium (the Church's authority to teach and interpret divine truth), the Pope's ex cathedra pronouncements, and an indefinite body of church tradition, some formalized in canon law and some not yet committed to

writing. Whereas evangelical Protestants believe the Bible is the ultimate test of all truth, Roman Catholics believe the Church determines what is true and what is not. In effect, this makes the Church a higher authority than Scripture.

Creeds and doctrinal statements are certainly important. However, creeds, decisions of church councils, all doctrine, and even the church itself must be judged by Scripture—not vice versa. Scripture is to be accurately interpreted in its context by comparing it to Scripture—certainly not according to anyone’s personal whims. Scripture itself is thus the sole binding rule of faith and practice for all Christians. Protestant creeds and doctrinal statements simply express the churches’ collective understanding of the proper interpretation of Scripture. In no sense could the creeds and pronouncements of the churches ever constitute an authority equal to or higher than Scripture. Scripture always takes priority over the church in the rank of authority.

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, believe the infallible touchstone of truth is the Church itself. The Church not only infallibly determines the proper interpretation of Scripture, but also supplements Scripture with additional traditions and teaching. That combination of Church tradition plus the Church’s interpretation of Scripture is what constitutes the binding rule of faith and practice for Catholics. The fact is the Church sets itself above Holy Scripture in rank of authority.

## **The Doctrine of Justification**

According to Roman Catholicism, justification is a process in which God’s grace is poured forth into the sinner’s heart, making that person progressively more righteous. During this process, it is the sinner’s responsibility to preserve and increase that grace by various good works. The means by which justification is initially obtained is not faith, but the sacrament of baptism. Furthermore, justification is forfeited whenever the believer commits a mortal sin, such as hatred or adultery. In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, then, works are necessary both to begin and to continue the process of justification.

The error in the Catholic Church’s position on justification may be summed up in four biblical arguments. First, Scripture presents justification as instantaneous, not gradual. Contrasting the proud Pharisee with the broken, repentant taxgatherer who smote his breast and prayed humbly for divine mercy, Jesus said that the taxgatherer “went down to his house justified” ([Luke 18:14](#)). His justification was instantaneous, complete before he performed any work, based solely on his repentant faith. Jesus also said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment,

but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). Eternal life is the present possession of all who believe—and by definition eternal life cannot be lost. The one who believes immediately passes from spiritual death to eternal life, because that person is instantaneously justified (see Rom. 5:1, 9; 8:1).

Second, justification means the sinner is declared righteous, not actually made righteous. This goes hand in hand with the fact that justification is instantaneous. There is no process to be performed—justification is purely a forensic reality, a declaration God makes about the sinner. Justification takes place in the court of God, not in the soul of the sinner. It is an objective fact, not a subjective phenomenon, and it changes the sinner’s status, not his nature. Justification is an immediate decree, a divine “not guilty” verdict on behalf of the believing sinner in which God declares him to be righteous in His sight.

Third, the Bible teaches that justification means righteousness is imputed, not infused. Righteousness is “reckoned,” or credited to the account of those who believe (Rom. 4:3–25). They stand justified before God not because of their own righteousness (Rom. 3:10), but because of a perfect righteousness outside themselves that is reckoned to them by faith (Phil. 3:9). Where does that perfect righteousness come from? It is God’s own righteousness (Rom 10:3), and it is the believer’s in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ’s own perfect righteousness is credited to the believer’s personal account (Rom. 5:17, 19), just as the full guilt of the believer’s sin was imputed to Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). The only merit God accepts for salvation is that of Jesus Christ; nothing man can ever do could earn God’s favor or add anything to the merit of Christ.

Fourth and finally, Scripture clearly teaches that man is justified by faith alone, not by faith plus works. According to the Apostle Paul, “If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6). Elsewhere Paul testifies, “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9, emphasis added; see Acts 16:31 and Rom. 4:3–6). In fact, it is clearly taught throughout Scripture that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28; see Gal. 2:16; Rom. 9:31–32; 10:3).

In contrast, Roman Catholicism places an undue stress on human works. Catholic doctrine denies that God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5) without first making them godly. Good works therefore become the ground of justification. As thousands of former Catholics will testify, Roman Catholic doctrine and liturgy obscure the essential truth that the believer is saved by grace through faith and not by his own

works (Eph. 2:8-9). In a simple sense, Catholics genuinely believe they are saved by doing good, confessing sin, and observing ceremonies.

Adding works to faith as the grounds of justification is precisely the teaching that Paul condemned as “a different gospel” (see 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6). It nullifies the grace of God, for if meritorious righteousness can be earned through the sacraments, “then Christ died needlessly” (Gal. 2:21). Any system that mingles works with grace, then, is “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6), a distorted message that is anathematized (Gal. 1:9), not by a council of medieval bishops, but by the very Word of God that cannot be broken. In fact, it does not overstate the case to say that the Roman Catholic view on justification sets it apart as a wholly different religion than the true Christian faith, for it is antithetical to the simple gospel of grace.

As long as the Roman Catholic Church continues to assert its own authority and bind its people to “another gospel,” it is the spiritual duty of all true Christians to oppose Roman Catholic doctrine with biblical truth and to call all Catholics to true salvation. Meanwhile, evangelicals must not capitulate to the pressures for artificial unity. They cannot allow the gospel to be obscured, and they cannot make friends with false religion, lest they become partakers in their evil deeds (2 John 11).

### **What It Means to Be a Christian**

Being a Christian is more than identifying yourself with a particular religion or affirming a specific value system. Being a Christian means you have embraced what the Bible says about God, mankind, and salvation. Consider the following truths found in Scripture:

#### **God Is Sovereign Creator**

Contemporary thinking says man is the product of evolution, but the Bible says we were created by a personal God to love, serve, and enjoy endless fellowship with Him. The New Testament reveals that Jesus Himself created everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Therefore, He also owns and rules everything (Psalm 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives, and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship.

#### **God Is Holy**

God is absolutely and perfectly holy (Isaiah 6:3), therefore, He cannot commit or approve of evil (James 1:13). God requires holiness of us as well. 1 Peter 1:16 says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

## **Mankind Is Sinful**

According to Scripture, everyone is guilty of sin: "There is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). That doesn't mean we're incapable of performing acts of human kindness. But we're utterly incapable of understanding, loving, or pleasing God in and of ourselves (Romans 3:10-12).

## **Sin Demands a Penalty**

God's holiness and justice demand that all sin be punished by eternal death (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). Simply changing our behavior patterns can't solve our sin problem or eliminate its consequences.

## **Jesus Is Lord and Savior**

The New Testament reveals that Jesus Himself created everything (Colossians 1:16). Therefore, He owns and rules everything (Psalm 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives and that we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Even though God's justice demands death for sin, His love has provided a Savior who paid the penalty and died for sinners (1 Peter 3:18). Christ's perfect life and death satisfied the demands of God's holiness and justice (2 Corinthians 5:21), thereby enabling Him to forgive and save those who place their faith in Him (Romans 3:26).

## **The Character of Saving Faith**

True faith is always accompanied by repentance from sin. Repentance is agreeing with God that you are sinful, confessing your sins to Him, and making a conscious choice to turn from sin (Luke 13:3,5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) and pursue Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; John 17:3) and obedience to Him (1 John 2:3). It isn't enough to believe certain facts about Christ. Even Satan and his demons believe in the true God (James 2:19), but they don't love and obey Him. True saving faith always responds in obedience (Ephesians 2:10).

## ARTICLE VII: CHURCH ORDINANCES

We believe that the ordinances of the Church given by our Lord, are Baptism and the Lord's table (Communion).

Terms explained:

1. **Baptism:** Baptism is commanded of all believers and it is an act of obedience signifying the believer's death, burial and resurrection "in Christ" (Rom. 6:3,4; Acts 18:8; 1 Peter 3:21). The disciples were commanded to see to it that baptism was a part of their ministry (Mat. 28:19,20; 16:16) and the pattern of the book of Acts (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12,13,36,38) indicates the widespread practice of full-immersion water baptism for believers. This church does not believe in baptismal regeneration, nor do we hold that baptism is necessary for salvation.
2. **Lord's Table (Communion):** On the night of His arrest, Jesus instituted what is known as the Eucharist, or Communion service, which symbolizes and calls our attention to the atonement. This celebration is one in which we look back to the finished work of Christ and also forward to the yet to be completed consummation of our redemption (Mat. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-30; 2 Peter 2:13).

## ARTICLE VIII: CHURCH UNITY

When THE FIELD CHURCH members disagree or their interpretations differ, we pray that the love of Christ guard our attitudes toward one another so that we exhibit a genuine concern for the building up of all God's people in an atmosphere of love. When members disagree or their interpretations differ, all members are encouraged to discuss their differences with the Elders of the church.

## ARTICLE IX. AMENDMENTS

The Constitution, Articles of Incorporation, and Bylaws of THE FIELD CHURCH may be amended at any Elder meeting by a unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration provided that both the text of such an amendment and the basis for its consideration has been communicated to all Church Members at least (30) days in advance of any said

amendment through either Member text message or Member email.

If necessary, Church Members, who are not currently under church discipline, may have any and all objections to said amendment heard by the Elder board within the (30) day period.

Members must state in written form the biblical grounds for their objections with supporting verses from Scripture and turn in said objection to the Office of Executive Pastor

# Bylaws of



The  
**Field** Church

Adopted January 23, 2023

## **PREAMBLE**

THE FIELD CHURCH hereby enacts these Bylaws to govern the body of Christ decently and in order in accordance with I Cor. 14:40.

## **ARTICLE I. CHURCH GOVERNANCE**

The church shall be Elder led. The Elder Board is the final authority for all matters of self-government of the church. The church shall remain free from the control or supervision of any other ecclesiastical or denominational body or government control or influence but may cooperate, through association or otherwise, with other churches and ministries of like faith and practice.

## **ARTICLE II. STATEMENT OF FINAL AUTHORITY FOR MATTERS OF BELIEF AND CONDUCT**

The Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. 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. For purposes of the church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Elder Board is the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's application.

## **ARTICLE III. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

### **SECTION 1. Becoming a Church Member**

THE FIELD CHURCH defines what it means to be a member in our doctrinal distinctive entitled, "Church Membership".

Other requirements for inclusion into THE FIELD CHURCH are as follows:

- Participation in Baptism, defined as full water immersion done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a symbol (outward, public declaration) of the redeeming work that God has done in the life of the prospective member.
- Regular attendance to Sunday morning service
- Completion of THE FIELD CHURCH membership course with 100% attendance to all course meetings.
- Completion of the THE FIELD CHURCH membership application

- Participation in an interview with a member of the Elder Board concerning membership at THE FIELD CHURCH
- Agreement with our Statement of Faith and Doctrinal Distinctives.
- Approval through the unanimous vote of a quorum of Elders.
- Upon approval, agreement to participate in and pay for a background check to be performed by a qualified third party designated by the Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH
- Agreement, signing, and adherence to THE FIELD CHURCH Covenant Membership Agreement

## **SECTION 2. Reception of Church Members**

Upon the completion of all requirements outlined in Article III Section I, membership into THE FIELD CHURCH shall be ratified. The ratification of membership necessitates all of the following:

1. Upon signing THE FIELD CHURCH Covenant Membership Agreement membership status is considered active by the Elder Board of said church.
2. Assignment of the member to an Elder for the express purposes of caring for, praying for, shepherding, leading, and overseeing the soul of the new member. Notification of this assignment shall accompany the notification of membership and include ways the new member can contact their assigned Elder.
3. Addition to THE FIELD CHURCH membership roster and all other applicable rosters such member texts and contact lists shall occur upon inclusion to membership.
4. Notification of the new member to the church at the next quarterly member meeting as outlined in Article IV Section II.

## **SECTION 3. Expectations of Church Members**

1. To walk together in Christian love
2. To gather regularly in-person on the Lord's Day Service
3. To exercise Christian care and watchfulness over one another;
4. To pray with and for one another, sharing our burdens, sorrows, and joys;
5. To be thoughtful and courteous to one another, to be slow to take offense, and to be quick to forgive and to seek forgiveness;
6. To guard the spiritual and Scriptural purity, peace, and prosperity of the Church, and to promote its usefulness as a witness to the saving grace of God

and Christ Jesus;

7. To assist, through the gifts of the Spirit, in the work of the Church and to promote its usefulness as a witness to the saving grace of God and Christ Jesus;
8. To contribute, as the Lord directs, to the financial support of the Church, the relief of the needy, and evangelism of all people;
9. To love and to pray for all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ;
10. To engage regularly in personal Bible reading and prayer, and to establish family devotions where possible;
11. To bring up such children as may be entrusted to our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;
12. To walk circumspectly in the world, to provide things honest in the sight of all men, to be faithful in engagements, exemplary in deportment, denying ungodliness and worldly lust;
13. To endeavor by example, by work, and by prayer, to win others to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;
14. To purpose that when we remove ourselves from this place, we will as soon as possible, unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this Covenant and the principles of God's word.

#### **SECTION 4. Termination of Church Membership**

The Elders of The Field Church will inform the body of members when Church Membership has been terminated. Membership in the church may be terminated as follows:

- Transfer of letter to another church of like faith and practice;
- A member's written request to withdraw membership;
- Reasonable evidence that a member has united with another church;
- Death; or
- Exclusion by church discipline.

#### **SECTION 5. Reinstatement of Church Membership**

Reinstatement for Membership for all cases other than a geographic move and subsequent return will require the potential Member to go through the entire membership process again. [Amendment approved at the Elder Board meeting on October 8, 2023]

## **SECTION 6. Statement on Church Discipline**

The threefold purpose of church discipline is to glorify God by maintaining purity in the local church (1 Cor. 5:6), to edify believers by deterring sin and promoting purity (1 Tim. 5:20), and to promote the spiritual welfare of the offending believer by calling him or her to return to a biblical standard of doctrine and conduct (Gal. 6:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted the local church with the authority and responsibility to discipline members for flagrant sin or serious doctrinal error, with the goal of the restoration of the offender. This discipline is entrusted to the Elders and is to follow the biblical pattern as set forth in Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:7-8; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 3:10-11; and 2 John 7-11. Any member of this church who practices or affirms a doctrine or conduct that, in the judgment of the Elders, is opposed to the teaching of the Word of God, or is threatening to the testimony of this church, or is divisive to the body, shall be subject to church discipline.

Discipline will follow the said biblical pattern and is an effort to bring the individual to repentance and protect the church from unrepentant sin. Discipline may involve exclusion from participation in ministry and communion, as well as dismissal from the fellowship of this church. An individual may be disciplined by the Elders short of dismissal from the fellowship, as they deem appropriate for the specific circumstance (for example, an individual may remain in certain circumstances a member of this church but be denied the privilege of serving in a particular ministry).

The process of discipline will follow the biblical pattern as laid out in Matthew 18:15-20, and stated within the “Church Discipline” Distinctive, under “The Process of Discipline.” If/when the process proceeds to “Step Four,” the following steps will be followed by the Elders,

1. The member being excommunicated will receive a letter (via postal mail and email) informing them of the decision to be excommunicated from the fellowship. This letter will include a brief explanation of the biblical principles supporting this decision, as well as a plea to repent and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This letter will notify the person that they are then freed from accountability to The Field Church Elders (Hebrews 13:7), and the Elders are free from being accountable to the Lord for their soul (Hebrews 13:7, 1 Peter 5:2).
2. The excommunicated member will be removed from all aspects of church life. Ministry leaders over areas in which the former member has served will be

notified to remove him/her from their rotation and communication. The former member will be removed from all member texts, emails, and will no longer be allowed to participate in member meetings.

3. The body of members will be informed about this excommunication at the next member meeting.

Reinstatement of membership for an excommunicated member is possible through the following steps:

1. There is genuine recognition of sin, and repentance in all ways and to all persons the Elders deem relevant, according to Scripture, for true godly repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8-11), proving to be a believer in Christ, obedient to Christ, and not a threat to the body of Christ (Matthew 7:15-20)
2. There is a completion of the full process of becoming a member as outlined in Article III Section 3.

## **SECTION 7. Statement on Mediation**

Each Church member should seek to resolve all conflicts with other members in accordance with Scripture. As such, members of the church agree to submit any legal dispute with the church for mediation before a mutually agreed-upon mediator, or if none can be agreed upon, one selected by The Elders of The Field Church. Lawsuits between believers, or threats of lawsuits between believers, are a matter of grave concern for the church, are contrary to biblical and church teaching, and mediation is an effort to resolve disputes in a biblical fashion (1 Cor. 6: 1-7). Neither the opinion, nor any communications exchanged in the mediation process, will be admissible for any purpose in any subsequent legal proceeding.

## **SECTION 8. Covenant Membership Renewal**

There shall be an annual renewal of membership. Such renewal procedures shall be adopted and approved by the Elders. Failure to renew Covenant Membership will result in said Member automatically entering into an evaluation process with the Elders of The Field Church. The aim of this process is to ascertain the issue at hand and to shepherd said Member back towards fellowship with the Body of Christ.

## **ARTICLE IV. CHURCH MEETINGS**

### **SECTION 1. Worship Services**

Worship services are to be regulated by Scripture, consisting only of what is prescribed by Scripture, to ensure this worship is pleasing to the Lord (John 4:23). In an orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:40) the worship service will consist of reading the Bible (1 Timothy 4:13), preaching the Bible (2 Timothy 4:2), praying according to the Bible (Matthew 21:13), singing biblical truth (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16), giving (1 Corinthians 9:14, 16:1-2, Acts 2:42-47), vows/oaths/fasts/thanksgivings (1 Kings 8), and the two ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's supper (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38-39, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Colossians 2:11-12).

Worship services will be overseen by, and be primarily led by, the Elders (1 Peter 5:2). The services will be conducted weekly, on Sunday (Hebrews 10:25, Acts 2:42-47, 1 Corinthians 11:20, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2). Additional worship services may be offered throughout the week, and must follow the same guidelines.

### **SECTION 2. Elder and Member Meetings**

#### **Quarterly Member Meeting**

Quarterly Member Meetings shall be held for purposes of providing: an avenue of Christian fellowship, financial updates concerning the stewardship of member offerings, updates on new additions to church membership as well as cases of church discipline, and any other necessary and scriptural reasons for gathering.

#### **Special Member Meetings**

Special Member Meetings are additional meetings that are necessary for unexpected events that require the attention of church membership. These meetings may be called as often as necessary in order to ensure the functioning of THE FIELD CHURCH according to sound doctrine. For notice on these meetings see Article IV Section 3.

#### **Regular Elder Meetings**

The Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH are its primary leaders and decision makers as defined by our Doctrinal Distinctives on "Biblical Eldership" and "Church Membership". As such, regular Elder meetings are vital to the lawful and scriptural functioning of THE FIELD CHURCH. Elder Meetings will be held monthly and as

frequently as necessary to ensure proper management of Christ's Church.

### **SECTION 3. Notice for Member and Elder Meetings**

Notice for Quarterly Member Meetings shall be given in a timely and reasonable fashion by announcement at church services and by Member Text Message, within the first quarter of each calendar year, and subject to change if necessary, for reasonable and just purposes.

Notice for Special Member Meetings shall be given in a timely and reasonable fashion, given no less than one (1) week in advance of the meeting by announcement at church services and by Member Text, and is subject to change if necessary, for reasonable and just purposes

Notice of Regular Elder Meetings shall be given in a timely and reasonable fashion by Elder text message and email, within the first week of each month during the calendar year, for the purposes of gathering the Elders together weekly or bi-weekly, to address the issues of the THE FIELD CHURCH as necessary.

### **SECTION 4. Quorum for Elder Meetings**

Fifty percent of the Elders must be present to constitute a quorum at any Elder meeting.

### **SECTION 5. Voting at Elder Meetings**

Unless otherwise provided in these Bylaws, the act of a unanimous vote by the Board of Elders at the time of said vote constitutes an act of the church.

### **SECTION 6. Order of Business**

All matters pertaining to the faithful functioning and conduct of THE FIELD CHURCH shall be discussed, as necessary, at all Quarterly Member Meetings, including but not limited to:

- Financial updates of the church's management of member funds, the members status concerning tithes and offerings, the church's present or future plans for structural improvements and/or additions to the property owned by THE FIELD CHURCH
- Information concerning current Church Discipline related to erring

- members
- Information concerning subsidiary ministries that THE FIELD CHURCH oversees, financially supports, or in other ways supports

## **SECTION 7. Elder and Member Meeting Minutes**

The Executive Pastor or authorized designee shall ensure that minutes of all Elder and Member meetings are prepared and secured in a safe place.

## **ARTICLE V. DIRECTORS**

### **SECTION 1. In General**

For purposes of the legal requirement of Louisiana, the Directors shall be the legal representatives of the Church. The Directors of The Field Church shall consist of the Elders.

The Directors may not exercise any power inconsistent with the church's Statement of Faith, Constitution and Bylaws, or the laws of Louisiana (so long as such laws are not contradictory to the church's Statement of Faith).

The Directors shall approve all matters requiring action by the Directors on behalf of the church. After such approval, the President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer may execute any legal instrument on behalf of the church, unless additional approval by church membership is expressly required by the Bylaws.

The Directors shall employ outside auditors to conduct a church audit from time to time, as the Directors see fit.

## **ARTICLE VI. ELDERS**

### **SECTION 1. Role, Title, and Duties**

THE FIELD CHURCH defines the roles and duties of an Elder under the Biblical Eldership section of the Statement of Faith and Doctrinal Distinctives.

Titles relating to specific areas of oversight will be determined by the Elders, and based upon the specific way in which each particular Elder serves the church.

### **SECTION 2. Qualifications**

The biblical qualifications for the office elder are found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. As these qualifications are prescribed by God, they must be met in order

to serve in the office of Elder.

Functional qualifications for the office of Elder at THE FIELD CHURCH include:

1. Elders must unreservedly agree to our Statement of Faith, Doctrinal Distinctives, and Constitution of THE FIELD CHURCH
2. Completion of XL Ministries internship and training
3. Approximately 30 years old
4. Any additional training the Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH determine to be beneficial
5. Undergraduate and Graduate degrees related to Ministry are not necessary but are helpful

### **SECTION 3. Nomination and Selection**

Nomination of any man to the office of Elder ultimately must be made by an Elder of THE FIELD CHURCH. God's Word is clear that Elders appoint Elders (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23) and that the man to be nominated must desire to serve in the office of Overseer (1 Timothy 3:1). He must meet the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Any nomination put forth by an Elder must be met by the approval of the unanimous agreement of the Elders.

If the qualifications are met and the training is completed, satisfactory to the Elders, before his appointment, he will be presented to the congregation in a member meeting, and a period of two weeks will be allowed for the congregation to bring forth objections to the ordination of the man. Any objections will be assessed by the Elders, who will determine whether the ordination needs to be further evaluated, canceled, or can proceed.

The final appointment/ordination of an elder must be approved unanimously by the Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH.. The appointment shall be performed in a worship service by the symbol of laying on of hands (1 Timothy 5:22).

### **SECTION 4. Removal**

Removal of a Pastor may occur according to the following processes, depending on the reason for the removal.

1. **Disqualification:** If the removal is due to sin, the Elder will be removed from his position due to the fact that he no longer meets the qualifications for an Elder as described in Article VI Section 2 in this

document. At the same time the process of church discipline will be followed as is outlined in the “Church Discipline” document under “The Process of Discipline.” In addition to this, the matter will be made public to the congregation at a called member meeting, due to the public nature of his role, whether or not the church discipline process reaches “step four.” If the process does not require excommunication, the man is able to continue his membership in the church.

Sin in this instance includes, but is not limited to, sins of character, causing division in the body, teaching doctrinal error, or sinning against others.

2. **Failure in ability:** If the removal is due to a less than adequate ability to perform in the ways necessary for the role, as described in Article VI Section 1 in this document, the Elders may remove an Elder through unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration.
  
3. **Church needs:** If the removal is due to the Elders deciding to move in a direction as a church which no longer requires the services of that Elder, or deeming that the church must allocate the associated funds to a different need, the Elders may remove an Elder through unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration.

## **SECTION 5. Meetings**

See Article IV Section 2.

## **SECTION 6. Notice of Elder Meetings**

See Article IV Section 3.

## **SECTION 7. Quorum for Elder Meetings**

See Article IV Section 4.

## **SECTION 8. Voting for Elder Meetings**

Unless otherwise provided in these Bylaws, the act of a majority of the Elders constitutes an act of the Board of Elders.

## **ARTICLE VII. DEACONS**

### **SECTION 1. Role and Duties**

Deacons are formal assistants to pastor-elders. Deacons best assist the Elders by helping them keep their focus on their own supremely important tasks of feeding, leading, and protecting God's flock by God's Word, the Scriptures. Certainly, having qualified helpers enables the Elders to provide God's church with better pastoral care, protects the elders from unhealthy overwork, and frees them to concentrate more effectively on prayer and "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Duties of deacons are outlined by the Board of Elders.

### **SECTION 2. Qualifications**

Qualifications for deacons are prescribed by God's Word in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. THE FIELD CHURCH interprets verse 11 of that same passage, in light of its wording and context, along with other passages of Scripture (ie. Romans 16:1) to allow for women to serve in the role of deacon.

Functional qualifications for the office of Deacon at THE FIELD CHURCH include:

1. Deacons must unreservedly agree to our Statement of Faith, Doctrinal Distinctives, and Constitution of THE FIELD CHURCH
2. Completion of XL Ministries training
3. Any additional training the Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH determine to be beneficial

### **SECTION 3. Nomination and Selection of Deacons**

Deacons must meet certain biblical qualifications that are similar to the qualifications for the overseers/elders (1 Tim. 3:8-10,12).

Deacons, like the Elders, must be publicly examined as to their qualifications and fitness for office prior to entrance into the office (1 Tim. 3:10).

This public examination process will occur once the Nominee (Deacon under consideration) has completed the training assigned under Article VII Section 2 of

this document.

This public examination process shall consist of, if the qualifications are met and the training is completed, satisfactory to the Elders, his/her presentation to the congregation in a member meeting, and a period of two weeks will be allowed for the congregation to bring forth objections to the installment of the man/woman. Any objections will be assessed by the Elders, who will determine whether the installment needs to be further evaluated, canceled, or can proceed.

#### **SECTION 4. Removal of Deacons**

Removal of a deacon may occur according to the following processes, depending on the reason for the removal.

**Disqualification:** If the removal is due to sin, the deacon will be removed from his/her position due to the fact that he/she no longer meets the qualifications for a Deacon as described in Article VII Section 3 in this document. At the same time the process of church discipline will be followed as is outlined in the “Church Discipline” Distinctive under “The Process of Discipline.”

**Failure in ability:** If the removal is due to a less than adequate ability to perform in the ways necessary for the role, as described in Article VII Section 1 in this document, the Elders may remove a deacon through unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration.

**Church needs:** If the removal is due to the Elders deciding to move in a direction as a church which no longer requires the services of that deacon, the Elders may remove a deacon through unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration.

### **ARTICLE VIII. CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

#### **SECTION 1. Qualifications**

As God's servants and stewards, staff members and volunteers shall be persons who:

- Meet the qualifications as given in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-15; 5:19-25; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 6:3-6);

- Staff must unreservedly agree to our Statement of Faith, Doctrinal Distinctives, and Constitution of THE FIELD CHURCH
- soundness in the faith and whose ability to serve has been examined and approved by the membership of THE FIELD CHURCH.

## **SECTION 2. Selection**

Potential Staff Members shall submit a resume to the Executive Pastor's office for review by said Pastor. The Executive Pastor shall then bring qualified applicants' resumes to the next scheduled Elder Meeting in order to be considered for employment by the Elder Board. Upon approval from the Elder Board, said applicant shall be notified by either phone call or email as to their start date.

Opportunities for service shall be provided through announcements from the pulpit, through Membership email, or other necessary avenues throughout each year as the need arises. Volunteers for any and all ministries conducted within THE FIELD CHURCH shall be approved by the individual ministry Deacon and/or Elder who is conducting oversight of said ministry.

## **SECTION 3. Removal**

Removal of Staff and Volunteers shall be for any reason stated in Article III Sections 4 and 5 or any reason stated in our Doctrinal Distinctives on "Church Membership" and "Church Discipline".

Removal of Staff may occur for repeated violations of "TFC Workplace Policies" or for lack of performance of duty.

Removal shall be communicated by Elder in direct oversight over the particular ministry of Staff or Volunteer.

# **ARTICLE IX. VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES**

## **SECTION 1. PURPOSE**

Members of THE FIELD CHURCH are encouraged to pursue the calling of God to serve one another, to mutually edify one another, and to evangelize the lost through the appropriate means as stated in Scripture, in accordance with said church's Doctrinal Distinctives "Church Membership" and doctrinal statement under "Church".

## **SECTION 2. PROCESS OF VOLUNTEER MINISTRY CREATION**

Members of THE FIELD CHURCH, who are not currently under the process of church discipline, who desire to create a volunteer ministry must create a proposal document that:

- clearly articulates the purpose of desired ministry
- provides clear plan of action for said ministry, including but not limited to: when said ministry will meet, what said ministry will do when meeting, how said ministry will accomplish stated purpose
- how said ministry's purpose aligns with the express purposes of Holy Scripture as well as the statement of faith and doctrinal distinctives of THE FIELD CHURCH.
- expresses the understanding that any ministries created underneath the oversight of THE FIELD CHURCH must be composed of only Members of said church and also conform to the statement of faith, the doctrinal distinctives, the Constitution and Bylaws of said church
- provides an annual budget for said ministry if any resources of THE FIELD CHURCH will be used in accomplishing said ministries express purpose
- provides clear plan for replacing the resources of THE FIELD CHURCH that are used in accomplishing the express purpose of said ministry
- provides explanation on how any special certifications necessary to accomplish express purpose of said ministry will be obtained and maintained

This proposal document must be submitted to the office of Executive Pastor via email and/or written format within (60) days of any planned action of said ministry and is subject to approval by the Elders of THE FIELD CHURCH before said ministry can begin operations with the support of said church.

## **ARTICLE X. INDEMNIFICATION**

THE FIELD CHURCH will indemnify and hold harmless any and all officers, directors, Elders, Ministers, Pastors, and business administrators for any expenses actually and necessarily incurred in connection with any action, suit or proceeding against said officers, directors, Elders, Ministers, Pastors, and business administrators. This indemnification shall include costs for attorney fees. The

indemnification shall occur as the expenses are incurred and in advance of the final disposition of the action, suit, or proceeding, on receipt of the officers, directors, Elders, Ministers, Pastors, or business administrators' promise: (1) to repay the amount advanced if it is proved by clear and convincing evidence in court that the officers', directors', Elders', Ministers', Pastors', and business administrators' conduct involved a deliberate intent to injure the corporation's best interests, (2) to reasonably cooperate with the corporation in connection with the action, suit or proceeding.

This indemnification shall be available to any officer, director, Elder, Minister, Pastor, and/or business administrator which is made or thereafter to be made a part to any action, suit or proceeding because of the person's relationship with the corporation. Persons who are officers, directors, Elders, Ministers, Pastors, and/or business administrators at the time of being made a party, or threatened with being made a party to any action, suit or proceeding, or were officers, directors, Elders, Ministers, Pastors, and/or business administrators shall be allowed indemnification. Indemnification will also be available in criminal actions only if it is found that the officer, director, Elder, Minister, Pastor, or business administrator had no reasonable cause to believe that the subject acts were unlawful.

## **ARTICLE XI. PROPERTY, ASSETS, AND DISSOLUTION**

THE FIELD CHURCH shall have the power to receive, either by gift or purchase, and so hold such real, personal, or mixed property as is authorized by the laws of the State of Louisiana and is deemed necessary for the functioning of THE FIELD CHURCH, and shall have the power to dispose of such property by mortgage, bill of sale, deed, or otherwise. All property shall be held in the name of said church.

In case of division of THE FIELD CHURCH caused by conflict (from which we pray God by His mercy to preserve us), all property and assets of THE FIELD CHURCH shall belong to those who abide by its Constitution.

In case of dissolution of the church organization, the property and all assets shall be sold, either through private or public sale. From the proceeds, firstly all current and long term obligations of the church shall be paid. Secondly, all remaining funds shall be directed to such one or more Christian organizations qualified under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, for the benefit of the church's supported missionaries and/or such other Christian endeavors as the congregation shall determine. THE FIELD CHURCH shall be considered dissolved if so decided by the Elders, or when THE FIELD CHURCH has not held a quarterly meeting for three years, or when less than six church members remain.

Any Sale or other disposition of THE FIELD CHURCH'S main property located at 2480 HWY 190 Mandeville, LA 70448, shall be approved by unanimous vote of a quorum of the Elders.

## **ARTICLE XII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

It's the policy of THE FIELD CHURCH that every Elder, Deacon, Director, Employee, Volunteer, or Member shall abstain from involvement, whether by voting or otherwise participating in the decision-making process, in those situations where they have or may have a conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest exists where:

- The person(s) has a substantive interest, whether direct or indirect, in the matter at hand OR
- The other party(ies) involved;
- The person(s) is either an Elder, Deacon, Director, Employee, Volunteer, or Member of the other party(ies) involved, OR
- The person(s) has/have a spouse, children, parent or siblings in substantive relationships with the other party(ies) involved.

In those situations where a conflict of interest does exist or has the potential to exist, any Elder, Deacon, Director, Employee, Volunteer, or Member aware of such shall notify the Board of Elders.

Elders, Deacons, Directors, Employees, Volunteers, or Members are encouraged to participate actively in community and professional activities. Because Elders, Deacons, Directors, Employees, Volunteers, or Members may not always be fully aware of all interagency involvement(s), they should inform the Board of Elders of any intentions to participate in any activity that could potentially give rise to a conflict of interest.

## **ARTICLE XIII. LEGAL**

For legal purposes, the church is organized as a religious non-profit corporation.

The Registered Office of the church is 2480 HIGHWAY 190 MANDEVILLE, LA 70448.

The Registered Agent of the church is SAM CIRRINCIONE.

The fiscal year of the church is January 1st through December 31st.

If any portion of these Bylaws shall be held to be invalid or inoperative, then, so far as is reasonable and possible, the remainder of these Bylaws shall be considered valid and operative, and effect shall be given to the intent manifested by the portion held invalid or inoperative.

These Bylaws and other documents referred to herein shall be construed and

enforced in accordance with, and governed by, the laws of Louisiana.

No part of the assets or net earnings of the church shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributed to any member, director, or officer of the church, or any private individual, except that reasonable compensation may be paid for services rendered to or for the church affecting one or more of its purposes and benefits may be conferred that are in conformity with said purposes. No member, director, or officer of the church, or any private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of the church assets on dissolution of the church.

No substantial part of the activities of the church shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.

#### ARTICLE XIV. AMENDMENTS

The Constitution, Articles of Incorporation, and Bylaws of THE FIELD CHURCH may be amended at any Elder meeting by a unanimous agreement among all the Elders serving at the time of consideration provided that both the text of such an amendment and the basis for its consideration has been communicated to all Church Members at least (30) days in advance of any said amendment through either Member text message or Member email.

If necessary, Church Members, who are not currently under church discipline, may have any and all objections to said amendment heard by the Elder board within the (30) day period.

Members must state in written form the biblical grounds for their objections with supporting verses from Scripture and turn in said objection to the Office of Executive Pastor.

**Amendment I:** Added Section 5 of Article 3. Ratified October 8, 2023

**Amendment II:** Changed wording on the fourth bullet of Article 12 for clarity.

Changes made at the request of the Elder Board, June 26, 2024.

**Amendment III:** Removal of Article VII Deacons Section 5: Meetings; Section 6: Notice of Deacon Meetings; Section 7: Quorum of Deacon Meetings; Section 8: Voting for Deacon Meetings

**Amendment IV:** addition of language to Article III Church Membership

- Section 3: Expectations of Church Members - "To gather regularly in-person on the Lord's Day Service"
- Section 4: Termination of Church Membership - "Elder's will inform the body of members when Church Membership has been terminated."
- Section 7 Statement on Mediation - removal of "Mediation will be governed by the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation (ICC Rules), unless modified as stipulated by the parties. In particular, subject to the more detailed provisions of the ICC Rules, mediator(s) will attempt to assist us in reaching a voluntary settlement of any disputes through mediation. The confidentiality of the mediation process will be protected and these matters will not be discussed with people who do not have a necessary interest in them. If settlement can

be agreed upon, the conciliators may, at their discretion, issue an advisory opinion.” and “Peacemaker Ministries” replaced by “The Elders of The Field Church”.

- Section 8: Membership Renewal - section title changed to “Covenant Membership Renewal”. Text added, “Failure to renew Covenant Membership will result in said Member automatically entering into an evaluation process with the Elders of The Field Church. The aim of this process is to ascertain the issue at hand and to shepherd said Member back towards fellowship with the Body of Christ.”
- **Amendment V:** Changes to language to Article IV Church Meetings
  - Section 1: Worship Services - changed the word “sacraments” to “ordinances”
  - Section 2: Regular Elder Meetings - changed “bi-weekly” section to “monthly”
  - Section 5: Voting at Elder’s Meeting - changed language “the act of a majority vote that constitutes a quorum of the Elders constitutes an act of the church.” to “Unless otherwise provided in these Bylaws, the act of a unanimous vote by the Board of Elders at the time of said vote constitutes an act of the church.”

## **ARTICLE XV. CONFIDENTIALITY OF CHURCH RECORDS**

No member shall have the right to inspect the church records as to (i) the disciplining of any member, (ii) the hiring or firing of any employee, (iii) the need or problems of any member or employee, (iv) the financial contributions of any member, or (v) any other records which the Board of Elders may determine to be in the best interests of THE FIELD CHURCH to keep confidential.

## Clarity Regarding Agreement

Per our Constitution & Bylaws:

1. The only requirement for church membership is conversion displayed through baptism. We set the bar high for membership to best confirm that conversion, and to show evidence that the person can be led.
2. There are some core beliefs to which a person must agree because they are foundational to truly understanding the Gospel. Disagreements must be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine if they are foundational.
3. Other doctrines are **what we teach**, to which a person may hold disagreements and still be a member of the church, yet that person must:
  - i. acknowledge that they understand what TFC teaches
  - ii. abide by that teaching
  - iii. agree that they will not teach, either publicly or privately, those beliefs that are contrary
  - iv. continue to strive for doctrinal unity by seeking counsel from God's Word and working with TFC Elders to address these differences in beliefs, as they abide by TFC's Constitution & Bylaws.

At the time the TFC Constitution & Bylaws were implemented, no change was made regarding:

1. our doctrine or teaching; they are simply more clearly outlined
2. our high bar for membership
3. our understanding that there must be agreed-upon beliefs
4. what we believe
5. what we teach
6. our oversight of what is taught within the congregation

As a church, we must strive for unity. We encourage you to take some time to read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

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Covenant Membership Agreement

Having been led by the Spirit of God to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord, Savior, and the supreme Treasure of my life, and having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I do now solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with The Field Church, as one body in Christ,

- to walk together in Christian love;
- to exercise Christian care and watchfulness over one another;
- to pray with and for one another, sharing our burdens, sorrows, and joys;
- to be thoughtful and courteous to one another, to be slow to take offense, and to be quick to forgive and to seek forgiveness;
- to guard the spiritual and Scriptural purity, peace, and prosperity of the Church, and to promote its usefulness as a witness to the saving grace of God and Christ Jesus;
- to assist, through the gifts of the Spirit, in the work of the Church and to promote its usefulness as a witness to the saving grace of God and Christ Jesus;
- to contribute, as the Lord directs, to the financial support of the Church, the relief of the needy, and evangelism of all people;
- to love and to pray for all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ;
- to engage regularly in personal Bible reading and prayer, and to establish family devotions where possible;
- to bring up such children as may be entrusted to our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;
- to walk circumspectly in the world, to provide things honest in the sight of all men, to be faithful in engagements, exemplary in deportment, denying ungodliness and worldly lust;
- to endeavor by example, by work, and by prayer, to win others to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;
- to purpose that when I or my family remove ourselves from this place, I/we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this Covenant and the principles of God's word.

**By signing, I acknowledge that I have received, read, understood, and willfully agree to abide by all things contained in The Field Church's Statement of Faith, Doctrinal Distinctives, Constitution, and Bylaws.**

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_