

Constitution of
Bethany Community Church
of Washington, Illinois

Adopted April 7, 2019

ARTICLE I: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION

We believe that God has called together the members, leaders, and staff of Bethany Community Church of Washington, Illinois to glorify God as we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare His people to worship Him forever. This document is intended to be a statement of how we believe we have been led of God, by the Holy Scripture, and by the Spirit, to organize our effort to pursue this purpose. It neither supersedes nor stands equal to the Holy Scriptures as a rule of authority. It also does not supersede that authority that God has delivered to the Body of Believers that make up the local assembly referred to as Bethany Community Church of Washington, Illinois. As the Lord may lead, or as our growth in knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the Will of God increases, it is expected that this Constitution may require amendment to reflect that increase in knowledge and understanding. Amendment shall occur as described in Article V of this document.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this local church shall be Bethany Community Church of Washington, Illinois.

ARTICLE III: PURPOSE AND VALUES OF MINISTRY

Bethany Community Church exists to glorify God as we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare His people to worship Him forever.

We are committed to...

The Worship of the Living God. We believe that worship is the heart of the life of the church (1 Cor. 10:31; John 4:23-24; Matt. 22:34-40; Phil. 2:1-4).

The Authority of the Scriptures. We believe that the Bible is sufficient and authoritative as God's inerrant Word to depend upon to do the work of the ministry (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

The Proclamation of the Gospel. We believe that the unsaved are important to God and that the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Matt. 9:36-38; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 1:16).

The Teaching of the Disciples. We believe that the church has been given the incredible task of teaching the believers the faith once for all delivered to the Saints (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Jude 3).

The Unity of the Body. We believe that every believer is equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts that they are to use to bring the church to greater maturity (Eph. 2:10; 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

The Prayers of the Saints. We believe that prayer is the foundation of dependence necessary to all of God's work (1 Tim. 2:1; Eph. 6:18; Matt. 9:36-38).

ARTICLE IV: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, STAFF, OFFICERS, AND MEMBERSHIP

The organizational structure of Bethany Community Church of Washington, Illinois, the makeup of its staff and officers, the requirements and responsibilities of staff and officers, the requirements for membership and means of handling disputes and discipline within Bethany Community Church, and the rules and regulations for finances in Bethany Community Church shall be as defined in the Bylaws of Bethany Community Church and supplemented by its Policies and Procedures Manual.

ARTICLE V: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended or replaced when the need for change is recognized by the Elders and the members of the Church. At the time such need is believed to be present, the Elders, after consultation with the Church, shall make provisional modification in light of Scripture and all other essential information on this matter. This proposed amendment shall be communicated to the congregation in written form, providing adequate time for study and response. A date will be proposed for acceptance of the revisions at a Family Meeting. The congregation will then vote to see if there is a unity of acceptance and understanding of the amendments. For the purposes of amendment, a quorum of the Church body shall be present. This quorum shall be determined as being forty (40) voting members. Sufficient unity of purpose shall be declared to be present when the amendment receives a three-quarters vote (75%) of the quorum present.

Bylaws of
Bethany Community Church
of Washington, Il

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ARTICLE III – AFFILIATION

This Church shall be affiliated with CB North Central, headquartered in Blaine, Minnesota.

ARTICLE IV – STATEMENT OF FAITH

See Addendum

The Statement of Faith shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Elders to the Church. For the purposes of amendment, a quorum of the Church shall be present. This quorum shall be determined as being forty (40) voting members. Sufficient unity of purpose shall be declared to be present when the amendment receives a three-quarters vote (75%) of the quorum present.

ARTICLE V – TEACHING STATEMENT

See Addendum

The aim of the Teaching Statement is to preserve the unity of the church and to maintain a commitment to biblically sound doctrine. Elders and anyone who teaches at Bethany Community Church are to be aware of and teach in accordance with the contents of the Teaching Statement. If an element violates the teacher's conscience, it should be discussed with the Elders. The Teaching Statement shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Elders to the Church. For the purposes of amendment, a quorum of the Church body shall be present. This quorum shall be determined as being forty (40) voting members. Sufficient unity of purpose shall be declared to be present when the amendment receives a three-quarters vote (75%) of the quorum present.

ARTICLE VI – MEMBERSHIP

When we welcome someone in to membership, we are publicly affirming his or her profession of faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Therefore, church membership is the church affirming a person's profession of faith and committing to love and shepherd that person. It is also that person committing to gather with the church, love its people, submit to its authority where appropriate, and use his or her spiritual gifts to care for the flock. Throughout this document, the term "Church" refers to those who are members of Bethany Community Church.

SECTION 1: Becoming a Member

- (a) Only believers baptized after conversion shall be eligible for membership.
- (b) Each candidate for membership shall be required to attend the membership instruction class(es).
- (c) There is no age restriction on church membership but voting privileges are limited to those 18 years of age and older.
- (d) Each candidate for membership shall be interviewed by two Elders and must agree to the Statement of Faith and to abide by the Bylaws of the church.
- (e) The Elders will approve the candidate for membership and announce potential members to the church prior to a Family Meeting.
- (f) If any member of the church has concerns about a candidate's potential membership, they should bring those concerns to the Elders. If there are biblical grounds for denying membership, the candidate will not be presented to the church for affirmation.
- (g) Candidates recommended by the Elders may be presented at any duly called meeting of the church. After affirmation of the members present, they shall be granted membership and given the right hand of fellowship.

SECTION 2: Membership Termination

Membership shall be terminated due to death, request for membership termination, joining another church, absence, or exclusion (see Article VII). The church should be informed of all membership terminations at the next available Family Meeting.

SECTION 3: Requesting Membership Termination

Membership termination may be granted to a member at his or her request by vote of the Elders. Membership shall cease when the request is granted.

SECTION 4: Removing Absent Members from Membership

- (a) The Elders have the authority to review the membership periodically and to remove members who have been absent for an extended period of time. The Elders will seek to contact the member before taking any action. The Elders may also elect to pursue church discipline if appropriate. If possible, the member shall be notified of any action in writing by an elder.
- (b) The membership termination of absent members must be communicated at a church Family Meeting.

SECTION 5: Provisional Membership

- (a) Provisional Membership is a means of allowing people who are temporarily removed from a locale to participate in fellowship with a church in their new location while maintaining their membership at their home church. For example, a student or professional may temporarily leave our area and wish to join in membership at another church. Conversely, a student or professional may attend Bethany Community Church while living temporarily in our community and wish to become a member here while maintaining their membership at their home church. Provision is hereby made that, with the approval of the Board of Elders, such persons as indicated in the above examples or in similar circumstances may become Provisional Members.
- (b) Provisional Members at Bethany Community Church must meet the requirements for membership as enumerated in the bylaws.
- (c) Provisional Members will not have voting privileges, nor may they hold office at Bethany Community Church in any position where election to such office is voted upon by the church.
- (d) Upon return to the local area and application to the Elders, full membership may be restored. The Provisional Member roll shall be reviewed periodically by the Elders to ensure that those whose names are listed still wish to remain in membership or still plan to return to the area. Provisional Members may be dropped from the roll by decision of the Elders and the Church will be informed at the next Family Meeting.

ARTICLE VII – DISCIPLINE

If membership is the church's public affirmation of a person's profession of faith, church discipline is the public removal of that affirmation. In church discipline, the church is saying it can no longer affirm a person's testimony due to his or her persistent refusal to live in a manner consistent with a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. There are several purposes of church discipline, such as protecting the flock from sin; protecting the purity, doctrine, and unity of the church; glorifying the name of Christ; and demonstrating love to those who have been deceived

by sin. In those circumstances where discipline has to be enacted, the prayerful hope is always for the full repentance and restoration of the individual. In this sense, church discipline can also be called “spiritual restoration” (Gal. 6:1-2).

SECTION 1: Administration of Discipline

The Elders shall handle all disciplinary matters following the instruction given by God in passages such as Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1-2, and I Corinthians 5:9-13.

SECTION 2: Denial of the Statement of Faith

Following the recommendation of the Elders, membership of a member may also be terminated for denying any of the Statement of Faith.

ARTICLE VIII – OFFICERS

The officers of this Church shall be: Senior Pastor; Associate Pastor(s); Elders; Associate Minister(s); Church Treasurer; Assistant Treasurer; Deacons; and Financial Secretary.

SECTION 1: ELDERS

The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor(s), and Lay Elders all comprise the Elder Board, which throughout this document is usually referred to simply as the “Elders.” When referring specifically to elders who are not paid members of the Pastoral Staff, this document will use the term “Lay Elder.”

- (a) Senior Pastor: Upon the recommendation of the Elders, the Senior Pastor shall be approved and called at any duly called Family Meeting of the Church by a three-fourths majority (75%) of the ballots cast. The engagement between the Senior Pastor and the Church shall be for an indefinite period. The Senior Pastor must subscribe to the Bylaws of the Church and the Statement of Faith and agree to support the Teaching Statement. He will be installed in his ministry as Senior Pastor following the laying on of hands by the Elders at a Worship Service. The Senior Pastor shall be expected to unite with the Church as soon as reasonably possible following his installation. Elders shall vote, if necessary, on the advisability of a vote of confidence in the Senior Pastor. If they should feel such a vote of confidence is needed, they shall recommend such action to the Church. Retention of the Senior Pastor shall require a three-fourths majority (75%) of the ballots cast. Should the Church desire to dissolve the relationship with the Senior Pastor, it may do so by giving a two (2) month notice at any duly called Family Meeting. Should the Senior Pastor desire to leave, he may do so by giving a two (2) month’s written notice. This provision may be waived if agreed upon by both parties. The Senior Pastor will cease in the office of Elder once his resignation is accepted or the Church has voted to remove him.
- (b) Associate Pastor(s): Upon the recommendation of the Elders, the Associate Pastor(s) shall be approved and called at any duly called Family Meeting of the Church by a three-fourths majority (75%) of the ballots cast. The engagement between Associate

Pastor(s) and Church shall be for an indefinite period. The Associate Pastor must subscribe to the Bylaws of the Church and the Statement of Faith and agree to support the Teaching Statement. He will be installed in his ministry as Associate Pastor following the laying on of hands by the Elders at a Worship Service. The Associate Pastor shall be expected to unite with the Church as soon as reasonably possible following his installation. Elders shall vote, if necessary, on the advisability of a vote of confidence in the Pastor. If they should feel such a vote of confidence is needed, they shall recommend such action to the Church. Retention of the Associate Pastor shall require a three-fourths majority (75%) of the ballots cast. Should the Church desire to dissolve the relationship with the Associate Pastor, it may do so by giving a two (2) month notice at any duly called Family Meeting. Should the Associate Pastor desire to leave, he may do so by giving a two (2) month's written notice. This provision may be waived if agreed upon by both parties. The Associate Pastor will cease in the office of Elder once his resignation is accepted or the Church has voted to remove him.

(c) Lay Elders

(1) Number of Lay Elders

There shall be at least one more Lay Elder than there are Pastoral Staff (Senior Pastor plus Associate Pastor[s]). In the event that an elder's resignation or removal from office brings the total number of Lay Elders below the required minimum, the Elders will seek to fill that vacancy quickly while also being careful not to lay hands hastily (1 Tim. 5:22). There will be no maximum number of Elders.

(2) Qualifications of Lay Elders

In order to be considered for the ministry of a Lay Elder, a man must be an active member of the Church for at least two years prior to selection, meet the biblical qualifications for office (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Pet. 5:1-4), and be actively involved in shepherding. These qualifications, as well as passages such as 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-15 precluding women from teaching ministries, limit the office of elder to men.

(3) Process of Becoming a Lay Elder

A prospective elder candidate may be brought to the attention of the Elders by an elder, a member of the congregation, or the prospective elder himself. The Elders may decide to ask the man to begin meeting regularly with an elder mentor as they prayerfully consider his calling to elder ministry. The prospective elder will be given the opportunity to teach and other elders will have the opportunity to assess his teaching abilities. The Elders will then interview the candidate to discern his competency for the ministry of elder. If the Elders determine to recommend him, the Church will be informed, and a thirty day "testing" period will take place. Included in this testing period is the opportunity to meet the elder candidate and ask him questions. Any concerns regarding the candidate may be expressed to the Elders. A congregational vote will be held at a duly called Family Meeting, with a three-fourths majority (75%) required to affirm the calling to serve as an elder.

(4) Tenure of a Lay Elder

Lay Elders will serve terms of 4 years. There is no mandated limit to the number of consecutive terms an elder may serve.

(5) Process of Seeking an Additional Term as a Lay Elder

Following the completion of his term, a Lay Elder may elect to not serve an additional term. If an elder continues to feel called by God to serve as an elder, he will indicate that desire to the Elders. If the Elders concur, the congregation will have the opportunity to affirm his calling at a duly scheduled congregational meeting. If an elder who is currently on the board receives less than 75% on a vote of affirmation, the congregation will be informed and there will be a period of thirty days in which anyone may submit to the Elders biblical reasons for the elder to not be considered for an additional term. If reasons are submitted, the Elders will investigate them and report their findings to the Church. The Church will then have a second opportunity to participate in a vote of affirmation. If the elder still receives less than 75% votes of affirmation, he will not be reinstated for an additional term.

(6) Resignation and Removal of Elders

A Lay Elder may offer his letter of resignation to the Elders at any time. Also, an elder may be removed from his ministry by a decision of the majority of the Elders. If the Elders make the decision to remove an elder, they will inform the congregation at a regularly scheduled Family Meeting in accordance with 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

SECTION 2: ASSOCIATE MINISTERS

Upon the recommendation of the Elders, the Associate Minister(s) shall be approved and called at any duly called Family Meeting of the Church by a three-fourths majority (75%) of the ballots cast.

SECTION 3: OTHER OFFICERS

Terms of office shall begin on May 1st of each year. Officers shall be at least 21 years of age and shall be active members of the Church for at least one year prior to selection and shall continue to be active during their term of office. No person shall hold more than one office unless an exception is made because of extenuating circumstances. Vacancies occurring during the year may be filled at any Family Meeting called by the recommendation of the Elders:

- (a) Deacons for a term of three (3) years.
- (b) A Treasurer for a term of one (1) year.
- (c) An Assistant Treasurer for a term of one (1) year.
- (d) A Financial Secretary for a term of one (1) year.

SECTION 4: Trustees

The Elders shall appoint from among the Lay Elders a Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary who will be designated as Trustees and in addition to their regular duties shall act as required under laws of the State of Illinois. These Trustees shall hold legal title to all Church property.

ARTICLE IX- DUTIES OF OFFICERS

SECTION 1: SENIOR PASTOR

- (a) It shall be his duty to preach and administer the ordinances of the Church and perform such other duties as are incumbent upon his office. The Senior Pastor shall be a member of the Elders and member ex-officio of all committees of the Church. He may delegate some of these responsibilities to the Associate Staff.
- (b) Details affecting his personal schedule shall be determined by consultation with, and action by, the Elders.
- (c) All salaried employees shall be under the supervision of the Senior Pastor.

SECTION 2: ASSOCIATE PASTOR(S)

The duties of the Associate Pastor(s) shall be those agreed upon by the Senior Pastor and Elders. Associate Pastors shall be Elders and participate in the process of reaching consensus, except on those issues related to staff benefits or where other conflicts of interest may arise.

SECTION 3: ELDERS

- (a) Elders serve as shepherds of the Church. Their responsibilities include leading with gentleness (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:2-5), protecting (Acts 20:28), teaching (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2), praying (Acts 6:4), and providing oversight for the finances of the Church (Acts 11:29-30).
- (b) In addition to the duties described elsewhere in the bylaws, Elders shall be authorized to spend monies to the extent of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per incident without vote of the Church. They shall prepare for approval a Church budget for the ensuing year in the month preceding the annual Family Meeting.
- (c) The Chairman of the Elders or his delegate shall serve as Moderator of official Church Family Meetings. The Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary of the Elders will be elected among the Lay Elders annually at the first meeting of the Elders.

SECTION 4: ASSOCIATE MINISTERS

The duties of the Associate Minister(s) shall be those agreed upon by the Senior Pastor and the Elders.

SECTION 5: DEACONS

- (a) The Deacons exist to equip the body to care for the Church's physical needs (Acts 6:1-6).

- (b) Deacons will meet regularly for strategy and accountability and will regularly provide a copy of the Deacon minutes to the Elders.
- (c) The Elders will be responsible to accord the Deacons such powers and authority as may be required to perform these various tasks and duties. Funds will be budgeted by the Elders to perform the tasks and duties and managed by the Deacons. Any expenditure of over ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) that has not been specifically budgeted must be presented to the Elders and approved by the Church.

SECTION 6: TREASURER

The Treasurer shall make disbursement of funds as authorized and shall give regular reports to the Elders and Church. The Treasurer shall transfer to his or her successor all funds, record, and property at the expiration of the term.

SECTION 7: FINANCIAL SECRETARY

- (a) The Financial Secretary shall receive all income of the Church and shall deposit such funds in depositories authorized by the Trustees. Funds shall be properly safeguarded, and deposits made promptly.
- (b) The Financial Secretary shall keep a record of the income of the Church, including a record of giving through the envelope system, and shall be prepared to furnish receipts to contributors for tax purposes as needed.
- (c) All monies shall be counted by the Financial Secretary or any officers with the assistance of at least one other person authorized by the Elders.

SECTION 8: SELECTING ASSISTANTS

Officers shall have the right to appoint such assistants as they may need, subject to the approval of the Elders.

ARTICLE X – MEETINGS

SECTION 1: WORSHIP

The Church will gather weekly on Sunday morning for the purpose of corporate worship, teaching, fellowship, and the collection of offerings. Additional meetings for worship, instruction, or fellowship may be designated by the Elders. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper shall be observed regularly on approximately a monthly basis.

SECTION 2: CHURCH FAMILY MEETINGS

- (a) The purpose of Church Family Meetings is to provide an opportunity for the Church to gather to discuss the ministry of the Church and handle administrative issues. These meetings shall be scheduled at least quarterly by the Elders, unless a need arises that requires rescheduling.

- (b) Special Family Meetings may be called by the Elders. Said meeting and its purpose must be announced at least one (1) Sunday immediately preceding the called meeting. Only announced business shall be considered at any special Family Meeting.
- (c) To ensure decisions made by the Church are legally binding, only members 18 years of age or over shall have the right to vote on all regular business and matters of a corporate nature. A three-quarters majority (75%) vote shall decide all matters of business unless otherwise specified.
- (d) The fiscal year of the Church shall begin on May 1st and end on April 30th. All organizations of the Church shall cause their fiscal year to correspond to that of the Church.
- (e) The quarterly meeting in April will include the adoption of budgets and the approval of officers. Within two months of the close of the fiscal year, a report will be issued by the Elders that includes an annual financial report along with any other reports the Elders or Staff deem relevant. This report will be discussed at a regularly scheduled Church Family Meeting.
- (f) Times and dates of all Church Family Meetings shall be announced at least one (1) Sunday immediately preceding the meeting and on the Sunday of the meeting.

ARTICLE XI – FINANCES

All Church funds shall be raised only by direct freewill offerings. It shall be the duty of every member either to use the envelope system or to give in some other systematic manner. Ministries within the Church may raise funds by other means only when approved by the Board of Elders. At the request of the Board of Elders, an external firm or licensed CPA from the Church membership shall be asked to review the financial records of the Church not less than once in every five years.

ARTICLE XII – ORGANIZATIONS

SECTION 1: Use of Church Name

No organization, the membership of which shall be constituted wholly or in part of members of the Church, shall use the name of the Church in any manner designed to further their objective without first having secured approval of the Elders. The bylaws of such organizations, as they exist or as amended from time to time, shall be subject to the approval of the Elders, and copies of the bylaws of such organizations shall be kept on file at the Church.

SECTION 2: Membership of Teachers and Officers

All teachers and officers of organized ministries within the Church shall be members of the Church except by special approval of the Elders.

ARTICLE XIII – AMENDMENTS

These Bylaws may be amended, altered, or revised at any regular Family Meeting or at a special Family Meeting called for that purpose. Notice of the proposed amendment must be given, in

writing, at a regular or special Family Meeting held at least one-quarter year prior to action thereon. A three-fourths (75%) vote of the members present shall be necessary for adoption.

Statement of Faith

Scripture: We believe that Scripture is inspired by God, authoritative in all matters of faith and conduct, and inerrant in the original manuscripts. We believe that because of the unique nature and purpose of Scripture, we can be confident that it is completely sufficient to provide for all our spiritual needs. (Ps. 19:7- 11; Isa. 66:2; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)

The Trinity: We believe in the one true God who is one in His essence, yet eternally exists as three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that each person is equal in every divine perfection, executing distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence, and redemption. (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; John 5:19; 14:26; Acts 5:3-4; 10:38; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 1:8-10; James 2:19)

God the Father: We believe in God the Father, from whom every good and perfect gift comes, who sent His Son Jesus Christ, and who rescues from death and adopts into His family all who come to Him through Christ. (Luke 10:21-22; Matt. 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:3-14; I Tim. 1:1-2; 2:5-6; James 1:17; I Pet. 1:3; Rev. 1:6)

Jesus Christ: We believe in Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man. We believe that He is the only begotten Son of God the Father, miraculously born of a virgin. We believe that He lived a sinless life and died on a cross, shedding His blood and offering Himself in our place as a perfect sacrifice and the propitiation for our sins. We believe that He rose bodily from the grave, ascended to heaven, was seated at the right hand of God, and now serves as the only mediator between God and man. (Isa. 9:6; Luke 2:7; John 1:1, 18, 26-38; 4:6; 19:28; Rom. 3:25; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 4:15; 5:8; 7:26-28)

Holy Spirit: We believe in the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world of sin, works to bring about salvation, baptizes all believers into the Body of Christ at the moment of salvation, indwells all believers, is given to believers as a seal guaranteeing their future inheritance, and labors in the process of their sanctification. We believe that He bestows gifts upon all believers, enabling them to work for the building up of Christ's church. (John 3:8; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 2:11, 13; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:11ff; 5:18; Titus 3:5)

Creation: We accept the Genesis account of creation literally, in its entirety, and believe that man came by direct creation of God and not by the process of evolution. (Gen. 1:27; 2:7; Ps. 33:6; John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2; 11:3)

Humanity & Sin: We believe that man was created in the image of God but became separated from Him due to Adam's sin. We believe that each human being is born with a sin nature and has chosen to continue in rebellion to God. We believe that before faith in Christ, they are dead in their trespasses and sins and are in danger of experiencing eternal judgment in hell. (Rom. 5:12-21; Eph. 2:1-3; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15)

Salvation: We believe that human beings are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We believe that the work of Christ on the cross at Calvary was necessary to provide the satisfaction for our sin, to provide us righteousness from God, to redeem us, to

reconcile us to God, and to demonstrate God's love for us. We believe that those who repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ are regenerated, justified, adopted into God's family, and receive eternal life. We believe that their sin has been imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to them. We believe that Scripture assures us that believers are no longer slaves to sin, having died to it, and are now called to present the members of their body as instruments to God for righteousness. (Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:12-21; 6:1-14; Rom. 1-3; 3:21-25; 5:7-10; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5)

Angels: We believe that angels are spirit beings created by God for the purpose of ministering to Him and the saints. We believe that Satan is a fallen angel who led a rebellion against God, taking a large number of angelic beings with him. He currently works to deceive, accuse, and destroy believers. We believe that despite Satan's power, the believer is empowered by God to resist Satan's attacks. (Gen. 19:1-26; Ezek. 28:12-16; Isa. 14:12-17; Dan. 9:21-23; 10:4-21; Luke 1:26-38; Eph. 6:12-17; 1 Tim. 3:6; Heb. 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; James 4:7; Rev. 5:11-12; 12:4-10; 14:6-20)

The Church: We believe that the church exists to glorify God as we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare His people to worship Him forever. We believe that all Christians are part of the church, which is called to be unified, to be holy and to be in conformity to the teachings of the apostles and prophets as found in Scripture. We believe that the church has been commanded to baptize believers and administer the Lord's Supper. (Matt. 28:19-20; John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:18-26; Eph. 1:4, 22-23; 2:20; Col. 1:28-29)

Human Sexuality and Marriage: We believe that marriage is the joining of one naturally-born man and one naturally-born woman for life. Marriage was created by God and is a holy and divinely established covenant between man and woman to be a representation of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. We believe that God created sexual intimacy to be enjoyed exclusively between one man and one woman who are married to one another. We believe that any form of deviation from this—such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, premarital sexual intimacy, cross dressing, sexting, any wrongful attempt to change one's gender, or disagreement with one's biological gender—is sinful and offensive to God. We also believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24; 19:5, 13; 26:8-10; Lev. 18:1-30; Matt. 15:19; 19:3-9; Mark 10:7; Rom. 1:22-29; 7:2; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9, 12-20; 7:10; Eph. 5:22-23, 31; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4; 1 John 1:9)

The Future: We believe that the souls of all people will exist forever and that while unbelievers will experience eternal, conscious torment, believers will spend eternity with Christ. We believe that Christ will return again to reign over His kingdom and that there is a future inheritance for the believer. We believe that these truths should motivate the believer to live a godly life now in this present age. (Matt. 8:12; 24; Mark 9:43; Luke 16:28; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:16-18; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Rev. 22:10-21)

Bethany Community Church Teaching Statement

At Bethany Community Church, we believe our ultimate authority is Scripture. We believe Scripture is God’s Word, in which He reveals knowledge of who He is, and that knowledge of God enables us to place our faith in Him, love Him, and walk in obedience to Him.

This document, of course, is not God’s Word. It is an attempt to help our community of faith understand, believe, and love God’s Word. It describes what we believe about major doctrines and how we believe Scripture would have us live our lives of worship to God. For Christians who may be thinking of joining our fellowship, this document will help them understand where we stand on key issues. For those who are newer to the faith, this document may help them grow in their understanding of the faith. For teachers in the Church, it provides them with a resource to help them articulate and defend major truths of Scripture. For all of us, this document should help us remember and be excited about the foundational truths of the gospel and our faith as we seek to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare His people to worship Him forever.

Like any document attempting to explain what a church believes and teaches, this document has shortcomings. It is not a comprehensive statement of our beliefs. What we have included—and even the manner and tone in which we communicate it—is affected by the time in which we minister.

Furthermore, not every doctrine mentioned in it is of equal “weight.” Some doctrines we hold to be absolutely essential for teachers to articulate correctly and precisely, such as the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In other areas we ask our teachers to refrain from teaching anything contrary to this statement, but we believe it is permissible for them to have views that differ from those in this document. We do ask, however, that teachers communicate with the elders if they find themselves in disagreement with any portion of this document.

Ultimately, we believe it is the elders of the Church who are entrusted by God with the responsibility of “holding firm the trustworthy word as taught” and “giving instruction in sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9). When disputes arise within the body regarding whether teaching in the Church is in conformity with Scripture, this document is to be consulted but, ultimately, we trust the Spirit working in conjunction with our shepherds to determine the validity and permissibility of any given teaching and the soundness of any individual teacher.

There is a list of recommended resources that we are including with the Teaching Statement that are not an official part of the statement or Constitution and Bylaws. This list is designed to be an aid for those wishing to study issues in greater detail but may be updated or amended by the Elders at any time.

By His Grace,

The Elders

What We Teach About Scripture

We teach that Scripture is God's special revelation to man. How can we know who God is and how to be in relationship with him? Apart from God's grace, such knowledge would be impossible. Fortunately, God *is* gracious and reveals Himself to us. To help us describe how God reveals Himself to humanity, we sometimes use the terms "general" revelation and "special" revelation. General revelation refers to "the knowledge of God's existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity."¹ Special revelation "refers to God's words addressed to specific people."² General revelation includes both an internal³ and external⁴ declaration by God of His divine nature to all humanity.⁵ Every human being has access to this type of revelation. Men and women can look around them and know truths about God. This general revelation, however, is not sufficient to save them because instead of receiving God's general revelation, mankind chooses to suppress it.⁶ Our response to His general revelation makes us guilty of rejecting Him.⁷ Scripture is distinct from the general revelation of God. It is part of His special revelation, in which He reveals Himself and His glorious plan of salvation and all we need to know for life and godliness. In the following paragraphs, we will describe what we believe about this special revelation from God Himself.⁸

We teach that Scripture is authoritative. Scripture is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. "The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."⁹ Because Scripture is the Word of God, and God cannot lie,¹⁰ it is a trustworthy revelation of what God has prescribed for us to do. The Lord asserts His supreme authority and the right response of man to the revelation of that authority: "'For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'"¹¹

We teach that Scripture is inspired. Inspiration is "that extraordinary, supernatural influence...exerted by the Holy Spirit on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and therefore, perfectly infallible."¹² This teaching is sometimes called "verbal plenary inspiration," meaning all the words of Scripture are God's words. Paul tells Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God" or "God-breathed."¹³ God used a variety of methods to communicate His special revelation, including in some places dictating every word,¹⁴ but inspiration does not necessarily mean that God always dictated words to the

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 122.

² Grudem, 123.

³ Rom. 1:19

⁴ Rom. 1:20

⁵ Ps. 19:1-6

⁶ Rom. 1:18

⁷ Rom. 1:30

⁸ 2 Tim. 3:16; Deut. 29:29

⁹ Grudem, 73.

¹⁰ Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18

¹¹ Isa. 66:2

¹² Adapted Warfield, quoted in Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 70.

¹³ 2 Tim. 3:16

¹⁴ e.g., Jer. 30:2; Exod. 32:16

human authors. Instead, it means He superseded the process of their writing in such a way that the very words they used are the words of God but still may reveal the personality and style of the original authors.

We teach that Scripture is inerrant. Inerrancy means that Scripture is completely free from errors in its original manuscripts.¹⁵ We proclaim along with Christ that God’s Word is truth.¹⁶ Inerrancy protects the truth that Scripture proclaims in Psalm 119:89, “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.” This does not mean that our interpretation of Scripture is always infallible. Our challenge is to rightly interpret the Bible in such a way that we understand the author’s message to the original audience, within the context of the entirety of Scripture’s redemptive message, and rightly apply it to ourselves and others.¹⁷

We teach that Scripture is sufficient. As we affirm the inerrant, authoritative, God-inspired text, we must not neglect understanding *why* special revelation exists. When we say Scripture is “sufficient,” we are saying it contains all we need for life and godliness.^{18 19} Furthermore, we believe that “at all times in redemptive history, Scripture has been sufficient for God’s people.”²⁰ All general revelation must be filtered through the special revelation of Scripture. God gives us His Word so that we “may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”²¹

We teach that Scripture is understandable. A word sometimes used to describe our ability to understand the Scripture is “perspicuous.” The perspicuity of Scripture means that even though not all things in Scripture are easily understood,²² those things that are essential to know, believe, and obey for salvation are so evident throughout Scripture that all of us can understand them.²³ The doctrine of illumination helps us understand how this is possible. The great truths of Scripture are plain for all men and women who the Spirit enables to understand them. “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple,” says the psalmist.²⁴ And Paul tells us, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”²⁵ The Holy Spirit gives us hope that we can understand and apply the Word of God.

We teach that Scripture is confined to the sixty-six books of the Bible. The canon—the books

¹⁵ This has far-reaching implications. For instance, this understanding of inerrancy demands that when one reads in Scripture that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch (Mark 7:10; 10:5; Luke 16:29; 24:27, 44; John 1:17, 45; 7:19; Rom. 10:5, 19), we believe the testimony of the biblical authors and affirm Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

¹⁶ John 17:17

¹⁷ 2 Tim. 2:15

¹⁸ 2 Pet. 1:3

¹⁹ “The Bible is sufficient, revealing all we need to know for salvation and godly living (Isa. 8:20; Luke 16:29-31; Eph. 2:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Nothing must be taken away from Scripture and nothing added to it. The Bible alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice; our consciences are bound by it alone, not by any council, creed, individual or supposed new revelation (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Isa. 8:20; Matt. 15:1-9; 22:29-32; Acts 17:11; 28:23-25; Rev. 22:18-19).” *The Sola 5 Confession of Faith*, 2.3.

²⁰ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1129.

²¹ 2 Tim. 3:16

²² 2 Pet. 3:16

²³ This is a paraphrase of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

²⁴ Ps. 19:7

²⁵ 1 Cor. 12:2

that make up Scripture—was not determined by the church but by God. The church, therefore, did not *decide* the canon but rather *recognized* it. The Old Testament canon is testified to us not only by the Jewish nation, who preserved God’s Word, but also the testimony of Christ and the apostles themselves who quoted from the Old Testament and asserted its authority.²⁶ Regarding the New Testament canon, we see that early in the history of the church, certain writings were being recognized as Scripture. Paul prefaces a quote from Luke 10:7 with “the Scripture says.”²⁷ Peter implies that Paul’s writings are Scripture.²⁸ As heretics and other enemies of the faith began to propose their own canons, the church was forced to proclaim exactly what she believed about the nature and extent of the canon. Ultimately, we rely not only on the authority of the church but on the witness of the Spirit who testifies to us that Scripture is God’s Word.²⁹ The ultimate revelation of God is in His Son Jesus Christ.³⁰

What We Teach About God

We teach that there is one God who eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and each person is fully God.³¹ God is one in essence, there are not multiple gods who comprise the Trinity.³² Scripture affirms the deity of God the Father,³³ God the Son,³⁴ and God the Holy Spirit.³⁵ Even though there are three persons, because they are one they do not act independently of one another. For example, Jesus’ desires and God’s desires are the same.³⁶ We see the unity of these three persons and the distinct roles they maintain in passages such as 2 Corinthians 13:14 where Paul concludes his epistle with these words, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”³⁷

We teach that God is unique. There is no creature who can say they share all of the attributes of God—or any of His attributes in their fullness apart from Him. For example, He alone is omnipresent. The psalmist writes:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.³⁸

Another example is God’s eternity. Though we who place our faith in Christ receive eternal life, we will never be eternal in the way that God is, existing from before and outside. The

²⁶ Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:25; 2 Tim. 3:14-15

²⁷ 1 Tim. 5:18

²⁸ 2 Pet. 3:16

²⁹ 1 Cor. 2:12; John 14:26

³⁰ John 1:1, 14; Heb. 1:1-2

³¹ Grudem, 226-227

³² Deut. 6:4; James 2:19

³³ 1 Cor. 8:6

³⁴ Heb. 1:8-10

³⁵ Acts 5:3-4; cf. Ps. 139:7-8; John 1:1-4; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 2:10-11

³⁶ John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10

³⁷ See also: Matt. 28:19; John 1:1-2; 14:26; 17:24; Acts 10:38; 1 Pet. 1:2

³⁸ Ps. 139:7-10

psalmist declares, “From everlasting to everlasting you are God.”³⁹ Other unique attributes include His omniscience,⁴⁰ unchangeableness,⁴¹ invisibility,⁴² and sovereignty.⁴³

We teach that God is the Creator of the Universe. There are certain truths we believe all Christians must affirm about creation. These include that God created the universe from nothing;⁴⁴ the purpose of His creation was to bring Him glory;⁴⁵ and that He created man and woman in a special act of creation in His own image.⁴⁶ We also teach that God’s creative work consisted of six literal days⁴⁷ and that He rested on the seventh day.⁴⁸

We teach that we are to strive for holiness and to imitate our Heavenly Father. God is perfectly holy. By “holy” we mean “absolute, permanent, exclusive, pure, irreversible, and fully expressed devotion.”⁴⁹ God is perfectly devoted to Himself, and we should be as well! Our desire is to, as Paul tells the church at Ephesus, “become imitators of God.”⁵⁰ In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul tells the believers to imitate him as he imitates Christ. As we consider the attributes of God that we are to imitate, we recognize that God is forgiving,⁵¹ righteous,⁵² holy,⁵³ good,⁵⁴ merciful,⁵⁵ trustworthy,⁵⁶ and loving.⁵⁷

We teach that God is sovereign. God has complete and authoritative rule over all of His creation. God’s providence is related to His sovereignty and means that He “is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.”⁵⁸

We teach that God is knowable. In His grace, God has decreed that some should come to know Him. Though we cannot know God fully, we can know Him truly. For example, we cannot perfectly understand His mercy toward us, yet we can confidently proclaim that He is merciful. In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prays, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only

³⁹ Ps. 90:2

⁴⁰ Heb. 4:13

⁴¹ Mal. 3:6; James 1:17

⁴² John 4:24; 1 Tim. 6:16

⁴³ Eph. 1:11

⁴⁴ Gen. 1:1-31

⁴⁵ Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ps. 104:31; Rom. 11:36, Rev.4:11

⁴⁶ Gen. 1:26-27

⁴⁷ Ex. 20:11

⁴⁸ Gen. 1:1-2:3

⁴⁹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Devoted to God*, 129-130 (Kindle Location).

⁵⁰ Eph. 5:1; cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 2:14

⁵¹ Ps. 32

⁵² Ps. 145:17; Nah. 1:2-8

⁵³ Ps. 5:4-6

⁵⁴ Ps. 25:8

⁵⁵ Luke 6:36; Eph. 2:4

⁵⁶ Deut. 32:4

⁵⁷ John 3:16; Rom. 5:8

⁵⁸ Grudem, 315.

true God, and Jesus whom you have sent.”⁵⁹ Tragically, most have chosen not to know God. Though He has revealed Himself to them, they have rejected the righteousness offered by Him and sought to establish their own righteousness.⁶⁰

What We Teach About Jesus Christ

We teach that Jesus Christ is truly God. There are several ways Scripture reveals that Jesus Christ is God. For example, sometimes Scripture directly affirms His deity by using the word “God” to refer to Jesus Christ. The first chapter of John has some of the boldest claims in all of Scripture as John explicitly tells us, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”⁶¹ Jesus Himself declares He is God so blatantly that the Jews try to stone Him for blasphemy.⁶² In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah is called “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father.” Another way Scripture reveals that Jesus is God is by telling us that Jesus possesses attributes that are uniquely divine. As God, Jesus has existed eternally,⁶³ created all things⁶⁴, and sustains His creation.⁶⁵

We teach that Jesus Christ is truly man. There are many passages that confirm the humanity of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born like every man.⁶⁶ He had a human body that could grow tired or thirsty.⁶⁷ He was able to increase in wisdom and stature in His human nature.⁶⁸ Furthermore, those around Jesus recognized that He was a man,⁶⁹ and a display of His heavenly glory caught His disciples completely off guard.⁷⁰

We teach that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son to be born of the virgin Mary.⁷¹ “We believe that when the eternal Son became flesh, He took on a fully human nature, so that two whole, perfect and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one Person, without confusion or mixture. Thus the Person, Jesus Christ, was and is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ and the only Mediator between God and man.”⁷²

We teach that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, and rose from the dead. We affirm that the gospels’ account of Christ’s life is completely accurate. He was baptized by John the Baptist⁷³ and was obedient to the Father.⁷⁴ He “lived without sin,

⁵⁹ John 17:3

⁶⁰ Rom. 10:2

⁶¹ John 1:1; cf 1:18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1

⁶² John 8

⁶³ Col. 1:16

⁶⁴ John 1:3, Col. 1:15-17, Heb. 1:2

⁶⁵ Col. 1:17

⁶⁶ Luke 2:7

⁶⁷ John 4:6-7; 19:28

⁶⁸ Luke 2:52

⁶⁹ Matt. 13:53-58

⁷⁰ Luke 9

⁷¹ Gal. 4:4

⁷² *The Desiring God Affirmation of Faith*, 8.

⁷³ John 1:29-34

⁷⁴ Heb. 4:15; 5:8; 7:26

though He endured the common infirmities and temptations of human nature.”⁷⁵ His perfect obedience to the Father qualifies Him to be our perfect sacrifice, the complete satisfaction for our sin that obliterates the need for any further sacrifice.⁷⁶ We believe Jesus suffered in His life and death as part of God’s plan for our salvation and “died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, [and] that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scripture.”⁷⁷

We teach that Jesus Christ is the perfect Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, Christ is the very word of God,⁷⁸ the One who was prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18.⁷⁹ His prophetic office reveals the Father to those who believe.⁸⁰ As Priest, Christ offered Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice.⁸¹ He redeemed believers through His death and reconciled them to God.⁸² He currently sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.⁸³ As King, there is an “already/not yet tension” to His work.⁸⁴ In one sense, He already reigns as king⁸⁵ yet in another sense, the recognized reign of Christ over all creation is yet to come.⁸⁶

What We Teach About the Holy Spirit

We teach that the Holy Spirit is God. We see the deity of the Holy Spirit confirmed in Scripture in numerous ways. He is identified with God in His title.⁸⁷ He knows the thoughts of God in a way that only God Himself could.⁸⁸ The Spirit of God is omnipresent,⁸⁹ eternal,⁹⁰ and holy.⁹¹ The deity of the Holy Spirit is also seen as we consider the things that He does. He was involved in the creation,⁹² wrote the Scripture,⁹³ and brought us to life.⁹⁴

We teach that the Holy Spirit has a personality. The Holy Spirit is not an “it.” He has a distinct being and, therefore, personality. We see His intellect in 1 Corinthians 2:10 as the Spirit “searches everything, even the depths of God.” The emotions of the Holy Spirit are observed in passages such as Ephesians 4:30 where the church at Ephesus is told not to grieve the Holy

⁷⁵ *The Desiring God Affirmation of Faith*, 8.

⁷⁶ Heb. 7:27-28

⁷⁷ 1 Cor. 15:3b-4

⁷⁸ John 1:1-18

⁷⁹ Cf. Acts 3:22

⁸⁰ Matt. 11:27; cf. John 3:34, 14:26, 16:12-14.

⁸¹ Heb. 7:26; 10:12

⁸² Rom. 5:10; Gal. 3:13

⁸³ Heb. 7:25

⁸⁴ Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:24-25 reveals this tension

⁸⁵ Eph. 1:20-21

⁸⁶ Phil. 2:10; Rev. 19:16

⁸⁷ Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:11

⁸⁸ 1 Cor. 2:11

⁸⁹ Ps. 139:7-10

⁹⁰ Heb. 9:14

⁹¹ Eph. 1:13-14

⁹² Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6-7, Ps. 104:3

⁹³ 2 Pet. 1:21

⁹⁴ Titus 3:5-6

Spirit. The will of the Holy Spirit is exercised in Acts 16:6 where He tells Paul not to preach in Asia and instead to go to Europe.

We teach that the Holy Spirit's work is essential for regeneration and justification. It is through the Spirit that we receive life. By the will of God the Father, God the Holy Spirit regenerates us at the time of conversion.⁹⁵ At the time of conversion, we experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. At the time of baptism, we are also sealed with the Holy Spirit “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.”⁹⁶

We teach that the Holy Spirit's work is essential for sanctification. The Holy Spirit indwells us at the moment of conversion as a pledge of our future inheritance.⁹⁷ He continues His work in our lives in a number of ways. His indwelling ministry is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise to give us a helper who will be with us forever.⁹⁸ The promise of Scripture is that the indwelling Holy Spirit will continue to sanctify us: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”⁹⁹ This process of sanctification takes place as the Holy Spirit convicts of sin,¹⁰⁰ lets us know the things given by God,¹⁰¹ illumines the Word of God,¹⁰² helps in prayer,¹⁰³ gives assurance,¹⁰⁴ and fills us with Himself.¹⁰⁵ This filling is not a “second baptism” but is a process by which we continue to yield ourselves to His work in and through us.

We teach that the Holy Spirit's work is essential for Christ's Church. The Holy Spirit works in the church in numerous ways, many of these have already been touched upon, such as the way in which the Holy Spirit has given the church God's Word. One further word should be said about the work of the Holy Spirit in the giving of spiritual gifts.¹⁰⁶ These gifts are given by the Spirit in order to edify the church¹⁰⁷ and are given to every believer.¹⁰⁸

What We Teach About Humanity

We teach that man was created by God. Scripture is clear concerning the origin of humanity. God formed the first man, Adam, in a special act of creation from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life.¹⁰⁹ The first woman, Eve, was also created in a special act of

⁹⁵ Ezek. 36:26-27; John 3:8; Titus 3:5

⁹⁶ 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14

⁹⁷ 2 Cor. 1:22

⁹⁸ John 14:16; cf. Acts 1:8

⁹⁹ Rom. 8:11

¹⁰⁰ John 16:8-11

¹⁰¹ 1 Cor. 2:12-13

¹⁰² John 14:26

¹⁰³ Rom. 8:26

¹⁰⁴ Rom. 8:16

¹⁰⁵ Eph. 5:18; Acts 2:4

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor. 12:14

¹⁰⁷ Eph. 4:11ff

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 12:1-8; for further discussion, see “What We Teach About the Church,” pp. 32-35.

¹⁰⁹ Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7; see also “What We Teach About God,” pp. 20-22.

creation, formed from the rib of man by God Himself.¹¹⁰ Adam and Eve, therefore, are the parents of the human race. The Bible uses the term “man” to refer to both male and female human beings. The biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve renders any sort of evolutionary explanation for the origin of humanity incompatible with Scripture’s testimony.¹¹¹

We teach that man was created by God for His glory. It is essential to understand that the purpose of our existence is to glorify God.¹¹² We were not created to glorify ourselves or seek the exaltation of our own name. As the Westminster Confession famously puts it, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Committing to the pursuit of this purpose—the glory of God—radically changes the course of our lives as we turn from selfish pursuits to the only pursuit that can truly bring joy: the exaltation of God’s name in all things!

We teach that man was created in the image of God. Affirming that we are created in God’s image¹¹³ has tremendous implications for “theology, psychology, ministry, and Christian living. Ramifications of [bearing God’s image] embrace issues of human dignity and value, personal and social ethics, relations between the sexes, the solidarity of the human family...and racial justice.”¹¹⁴ Being made in God’s image means we are like Him. Like God, we possess a personality—with a mind, will and emotions—and a spirit. We also have the ability to reflect God’s moral likeness. The fall distorted our ability to reveal God as His image bearers.¹¹⁵ However, in Christ we become new creatures:¹¹⁶ our spirit becomes alive,¹¹⁷ and we can reflect who God is as we become more like Christ.¹¹⁸

We teach that there are both material and nonmaterial parts of man. There is more to our existence than just a physical body. The material part of our being was formed from the dust of the ground and will return to the ground.¹¹⁹ It is important that we do not see our physical body either as something evil or as an object to be worshipped.¹²⁰ The body is rather to be viewed as a partner with the soul in glorifying God.¹²¹ Paul exhorts us to “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”¹²² This indicates

¹¹⁰ Gen. 2:21-22

¹¹¹ For more regarding what we teach about gender and marriage, see “What We Teach About Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family,” pp. 30-32.

¹¹² Isa. 42:6-9; 43:7

¹¹³ Gen. 1:27

¹¹⁴ Beck and Demarest, quoted in *Biblical Doctrine*, 409, MacArthur and Mayhue, eds.

¹¹⁵ Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 3:10

¹¹⁶ 2 Cor. 5:17

¹¹⁷ Rom. 8:10

¹¹⁸ Rom. 8:29; 12:1-2; James 1:2-4

¹¹⁹ Gen. 2:7; 3:19

¹²⁰ God describes all of his creation, including the human body as “very good” in Gen. 1:31

¹²¹ Some teach that human beings consist of three parts: soul, spirit, and a body (a “trichotomy”). We teach that Scripture generally uses the terms “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably (Gen. 35:18 vs. Ps. 31:5; John 12:27 vs. John 13:21; Luke 1:46-47; 1 Cor. 7:34; 1 Pet. 1:22 vs. 2 Cor. 7:1). It seems better to understand two aspects of humanity’s being: body and soul (a dichotomy). This has important implications for how we disciple and minister to individuals who suffer. Many believe that Heb. 4:12-13 teaches a trichotomist view of man; however, “all we have here is a poetic statement of the power of God’s word to pierce the human personality to its very depths.” R. Kent Hughes’ commentary on Hebrews, Vol. 1, page 121.

¹²² Rom. 6:13

a dichotomist, whole-person dedication to serving the Lord. Furthermore, as Scripture discusses the resurrection, it plainly states that our spirit is made to be joined with a physical body.

We teach that man is a sinner. Sin is “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”¹²³ This means that sin is more than just what we do or don’t do. Sin is the fruit of a heart that fails to conform to God’s absolute holiness.¹²⁴ Sin entered the human race at the fall in the Garden of Eden¹²⁵ since, as our representative, Adam’s fall became the fall of all of his descendants “in such a way that corruption, guilt, death, and condemnation belong properly to every person.”¹²⁶ This understanding of how we are sinners from the beginning of our existence is sometimes called “original sin” or “inherited sin.”¹²⁷ This does not absolve us from responsibility for our personal sin. Scripture makes it clear that we deserve punishment for the sins which we have personally committed.¹²⁸ Another term sometimes used to describe man and sin is “total depravity.” This means sin has affected every aspect of our being.¹²⁹ It does not mean we are *utterly* depraved, doing every bad thing we possibly could! Both God’s common and restraining grace extend to all people, preventing them from being as wicked as they would be if left without His grace.¹³⁰

We teach that in Christ, man has a new relationship to sin. Romans 6 tells us that we were joined with Christ in his death and are now dead to sin. We are also joined with Christ in His resurrection and may now walk in newness of life.¹³¹ Based on this and other passages describing our new life in Jesus Christ,¹³² it seems that the we cannot continue to live a life of continuous, unrepentant sin.¹³³ When we encounter professing believers living a life characterized by unrepentant sin, we lovingly exhort them to repent and share Scripture’s warning that they may not truly be in the faith.¹³⁴ True believers who try to persist in sin will find themselves miserable and, by the grace of God, will experience inner conviction by the Holy Spirit that “the way of the treacherous is their ruin.”¹³⁵ Scripture also indicates that the believer who intentionally persists in sin may be taken by the Lord, for there is a sin leading to death.¹³⁶ But, thanks be to God, Scripture gives us confidence we can overcome the temptation to sin through the work of the Holy Spirit in our union with Christ.¹³⁷

¹²³ Grudem, 490.

¹²⁴ Matt. 9:13

¹²⁵ Gen. 2:17; 3:6

¹²⁶ *The Desiring God Affirmation of Faith*, 5.2; Rom. 5:12-19.

¹²⁷ We are guilty for Adam’s sin because we have “imputed” natures. This means we can receive credit for another person’s actions if they serve as our representative. Because we have imputed natures: (1) Adam’s sin was imputed to us (Rom. 5:12-21); (2) Our sin was imputed to Christ, the perfect man (Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21); and (3) Christ imputed His righteousness to us (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9).

¹²⁸ Rom. 2:6

¹²⁹ Gen. 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Isa. 64:6; Prov. 20:9; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-20

¹³⁰ Gen. 20:1-7; Ps. 145:9; Matt. 5:45; Luke 6:35b; 2 Thess. 2:7

¹³¹ Rom. 6:3-11

¹³² For example, 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:9-10

¹³³ Rom. 6:2

¹³⁴ 1 John 2:19

¹³⁵ Prov. 13:15; 1 John 3:5

¹³⁶ 1 John 5:16

¹³⁷ Rom. 6:1-14; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pet. 2:9; The so-called “unforgivable sin” is taken from Jesus’ comments in Matt. 12:31-32 and Mark 3:29-30. This sin is not a sin one can accidentally commit by which he will unwittingly be condemned to Hell. Rather: “The sin consists in the conscious, malicious, and wilful [sic] rejection and slandering,

What We Teach About Salvation

We teach that salvation is a gift of God and obtained by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. As we have seen, Scripture clearly teaches our sin separates us from God.¹³⁸ To be in relationship with God, we need both forgiveness¹³⁹ and righteousness.¹⁴⁰ In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul clearly lays out the need all humanity has for deliverance from God's wrath. He also establishes that the righteousness of God is both necessary to enter into heaven and completely unattainable through man's efforts. Therefore, salvation is not a work of man but of God as He provides a way for us to receive the righteousness we need. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, lest any man should boast."¹⁴¹

We teach that God, in eternity past, elected to save His people. The situation in which we find ourselves apart from God is utterly hopeless.¹⁴² We are dead in our sin¹⁴³ and at war with God.¹⁴⁴ Our only hope is God's divine intervention.¹⁴⁵ Before the foundation of the world, God elected—or chose—to graciously save some so that "we would be holy and blameless before Him."¹⁴⁶ We were predestined "to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."¹⁴⁷ God's predestination and election are not based upon God's foreknowledge—His knowing what people would choose to do before they did it—but are based upon His sovereign choice and active intervention. This is not a doctrine that should cause us to feel either despair or arrogance. Instead, it should cause us to respond with worship as we consider God's grace in saving us.¹⁴⁸

We teach that Christ's righteousness is ours based upon His perfect life and death on the cross. Christ's perfect life and death are vitally necessary for multiple reasons. By God's grace, all of Christ's righteous acts and perfect obedience to God the Father during His earthly ministry are imputed, or credited, to us. Through faith, we receive the gift of Christ's righteousness and He bears the penalty for our sin by His death on the cross. His death is the propitiation—that is,

against evidence and conviction of the testimony of the Holy Spirit respecting the grace of God in Christ, attributing it out of hatred and enmity to the prince of darkness. It presupposes, objectively, a revelation of the grace of God in Christ and a powerful operation of the Holy Spirit; and subjectively, an illumination and intellectual conviction so strong and powerful as to make an honest denial of the truth impossible. *And then the sin itself consists, not in doubting the truth, nor in a simple denial of it, but in a contradiction of it that goes contrary to the conviction of the mind, to the illumination of the conscience, and even to the verdict of the heart*" (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 253).

¹³⁸ Isa. 59:2; Josh. 7:11-12; Ps. 66:18; Isa. 1:1-20; Col. 1:21

¹³⁹ Ps. 32:1; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:12; 1 John 1:3-2:2

¹⁴⁰ Isa. 1:18; 61:10; Rom. 3:19-28; 2 Cor. 5:21

¹⁴¹ John 3:3; Eph. 2:8-9; cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; James.1:18

¹⁴² Eph. 2:12

¹⁴³ Eph. 2:1

¹⁴⁴ Rom. 5:10; 8:7-8; James 3:14-16, 4:4

¹⁴⁵ Rom. 2:1-4, 5:6; 2 Tim. 2:24-26

¹⁴⁶ Eph. 1:4

¹⁴⁷ Eph. 1:5

¹⁴⁸ Deut. 7:6-8; Rom. 11:5-6, 28-12:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10

the complete satisfaction—for our sin.¹⁴⁹ His death accomplishes our eternal redemption, purchased with His blood,¹⁵⁰ and our freedom from enslavement to things such as worldly systems,¹⁵¹ sin,¹⁵² our passions,¹⁵³ legalism,¹⁵⁴ a futile way of life,¹⁵⁵ and death.¹⁵⁶ It reconciles us to God¹⁵⁷ and makes us His sons and daughters.¹⁵⁸ At the cross, the wrath of God against us was exhausted¹⁵⁹ and all the legal demands of the Law were fulfilled.¹⁶⁰ His death also demonstrates His great love for sinners.¹⁶¹

We teach that we must respond to the gospel with repentance and conscious faith in Christ.

Affirming the reality of election and predestination does not mean we deny man’s responsibility to respond to the gospel.¹⁶² God calls each of us to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ.¹⁶³ Some have wondered if perhaps conscious faith in Jesus Christ is not necessary for salvation. Such arguments fail to understand the watershed event in redemptive history: the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁴ The “times of ignorance” spoken of by Paul to the Greeks in Athens in Acts 17 are no more. Now is the time where God declares to all men everywhere that there is one name under heaven by which we may be saved.¹⁶⁵

We teach that the ability to respond to the gospel is a gift of God. All of salvation is a gift from God, including the ability to receive the gift of salvation through faith.¹⁶⁶ The entirety of our redemption, from eternity past to eternity future, is in the hands of our sovereign, powerful, and gracious God: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”¹⁶⁷

We teach that those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ are regenerated. Regeneration refers to the act of God by which He causes us to go from death to life. Regeneration happens at the moment of conversion.¹⁶⁸ We are now new creatures and have a new heart, the fulfillment of

¹⁴⁹ Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 4:7-10; 10:3-7, 14; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10-12

¹⁵⁰ Acts 20:27-28; Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:15-23; Heb. 9:12-22

¹⁵¹ 1 Cor. 1:26-2:16; Eph. 2:2; Col. 2:20-3:4

¹⁵² Rom. 6:3-10, 22; Gal. 3:13, 4:5; Col. 1:13

¹⁵³ Titus 3:3; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 4:19-24

¹⁵⁴ Gal. 4:9; Col. 2:20-22

¹⁵⁵ Rom. 1 Pet. 1:18

¹⁵⁶ Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:14

¹⁵⁷ Rom. 5:10a

¹⁵⁸ Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:5-7

¹⁵⁹ Rom. 5:9; Eph. 2:3-5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 John 2:2

¹⁶⁰ Matt. 5:17-18; Col. 2:13

¹⁶¹ Rom. 5:7-8; Eph. 5:2

¹⁶² Mark 1:15

¹⁶³ Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38

¹⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 15:19

¹⁶⁵ Acts 4:12

¹⁶⁶ Eph. 2:8-9

¹⁶⁷ Rom. 8:29-30

¹⁶⁸ See “What We Teach About the Holy Spirit” and discussion on regeneration, p. 23-24.

the promise of the New Covenant.¹⁶⁹ Our relationship with God, sin, and one another is forever and radically changed.

We teach that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ are justified. Those who are in Christ have been declared righteous by God.¹⁷⁰ We no longer fear His condemnation¹⁷¹ but are confident that when God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ.¹⁷²

We teach that those who are in Christ are being sanctified. To be sanctified means to be “devoted to God.”¹⁷³ Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit,¹⁷⁴ we who are in Christ are continuing to be conformed to His image.¹⁷⁵

We teach that those who are in Christ are eternally secure. We believe that those who are elect will persevere.¹⁷⁶ Our confidence is that “He who began a good work” in us “will bring it to completion.”¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the doctrine of election causes us to feel secure in God’s love¹⁷⁸ as we look at passages like Romans 8:28-30 that confirm the security we have as we consider God’s work in every aspect of our salvation.

What We Teach About Angels and Demons

We teach that angels are created beings. In Psalm 148 the psalmist exhorts the angels to praise the Lord because, verse 5 tells us, “He commanded and they were created.” Colossians 1:16 elaborates on the source and purpose of their creation: “For by Him [Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” The angelic realm is not separate from but part of God’s creation, brought into existence to glorify Him.¹⁷⁹

We teach that angels perform ministry in the service of God. The biblical word for “angel” mean “messenger,” and throughout Scripture we see them serving as messengers of God.¹⁸⁰ Angels also minister to God as they continually declare His holiness and worship Him.¹⁸¹ Angels also minister to us as they provide protection¹⁸² and perhaps encouragement.¹⁸³ On occasion,

¹⁶⁹ Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 5:17

¹⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 1:30

¹⁷¹ Rom. 8:1

¹⁷² See “What We Teach About the Holy Spirit” and discussion on justification, p. 23-24.

¹⁷³ See “What We Teach About God the Father” and discussion on holiness. See also “What We Teach About the Holy Spirit” and discussion on sanctification.

¹⁷⁴ 2 Cor. 3:17-18

¹⁷⁵ Rom. 8:29; James 1:2-4

¹⁷⁶ 1 Pet. 1:5; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; 1 John 2:19;

¹⁷⁷ Phil. 1:6. See “What We Teach About the Holy Spirit” and discussion on sanctification.

¹⁷⁸ Rom. 1:6-7. See James M. Boice, *Romans*, commentary on this passage, regarding election, love and confidence in one’s salvation.

¹⁷⁹ Heb. 1:6, 7, 14; 2:6, 7; Rev. 5:11-14

¹⁸⁰ Dan. 9:12-23, 10:4-21; Luke 1:26-38; Rev. 5:2

¹⁸¹ Isa. 6:2-3; Rev. 5:11-12

¹⁸² Ps. 35:4-5; Rev. 7:1-12

¹⁸³ Acts 17:23-25

angels have provided sustenance¹⁸⁴ and direction;¹⁸⁵ however, we do not see angels performing these ministries on a regular basis. We also do not see believers anywhere encouraged to seek out interactions or communication with angels and worship of angels is expressly forbidden.¹⁸⁶ In regard to unbelievers, we see angels act as agents of judgment.¹⁸⁷

We teach that Satan and fallen angels exist. Satan was created and his original state of beauty and perfection is described in Ezekiel 28:12-16. His fall was due to his desire to exalt himself above God and as such he is the author of sin.¹⁸⁸ ¹⁸⁹ At the time of his fall he also lead numerous other angels away with him. These angels became evil spirits called devils or demons.¹⁹⁰ Scripture is also clear that Satan was in the garden, either as the serpent itself or in some way possessing it.¹⁹¹ Satan¹⁹² and demons now work to oppose the manifestation of the glory of God through deceit, destruction, and active opposition to His revealed plan.¹⁹³

We teach that Satan and the fallen angels await God's final judgement. Satan's initial judgment occurred when he was thrown out of heaven prior to the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.¹⁹⁴ His earthly defeat was predicted in the garden¹⁹⁵ and accomplished at the cross.¹⁹⁶ In the future, he will be bound for one thousand years¹⁹⁷ and then thrown forever into the lake of fire.¹⁹⁸

We teach that believers do not need to live in fear of the demonic realm. Satan's power does not rival God's in any way whatsoever. God is sovereign over all creation, including Satan and the demonic realm.¹⁹⁹ While believers cannot be possessed by demons, they can be susceptible to the influence of the demonic realm. We are wise to remember Satan has true power in this world. Ephesians reminds us our struggle is not against the physical realm, but ultimately against the spiritual realm where demons operate.²⁰⁰ Despite the terrible power of our foe, the believer is given weapons to combat the schemes of Satan.²⁰¹ The armor of God includes truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. James encourages us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.²⁰² Our ability to withstand him is not cause to be

¹⁸⁴ 1 Kings 19:5-7

¹⁸⁵ Acts 8:26

¹⁸⁶ Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9

¹⁸⁷ Gen. 19:1-26; Matt. 13:39-42; Acts 12:23; Rev. 14:6-20; 16

¹⁸⁸ Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:12-16; Rev. 12:4-9; 1 John 3:8

¹⁸⁹ Based on Rev. 12:4-9, we can infer that Satan's fall is also described in Ezek. 28;12-16 and Isa. 14:12-17

¹⁹⁰ Matt. 12:24; 25:41; Rev. 12:1-14

¹⁹¹ Rev. 12:7-9

¹⁹² Satan is also known as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), "the devil" (Eph. 6:11-12), "the tempter" (Matt. 4:3), "Beelzebul" (Matt. 12:24), "Lucifer" or "morning star" (Isa. 14:12), "the dragon" (Rev. 13:1), "the accuser of the saints" (Rev. 12:10), and "a roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8)

¹⁹³ Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:6; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:9-10

¹⁹⁴ Rev. 12:4

¹⁹⁵ Gen. 3:15

¹⁹⁶ Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 16:20

¹⁹⁷ Rev. 20:2-3

¹⁹⁸ Rev. 20:7-10

¹⁹⁹ Job 1:12, 2:6

²⁰⁰ Eph. 6:12

²⁰¹ Eph. 6:13-17

²⁰² James 4:7

arrogant or flippant in our regard for Satan.²⁰³ Rather, we humbly trust in God to preserve and protect us.

What We Teach About Human Sexuality, Marriage, and the Family

We teach that sexual ethics are not based on the shifting norms of our culture but on God’s unchanging Word. In Leviticus, God instructs His people that they are not to imitate others in their understanding of sexual morality. “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.”²⁰⁴ We recognize there is a constant temptation to adopt the morals of those around us, and so we strive to be holy as He is holy.²⁰⁵ As we do so, we believe we have a unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel and hope that is in Jesus Christ to those who are part of a hurting world that has rejected much of what God teaches about how to find true joy.

We teach that God created human beings as male and female in His own image, equal in importance but different and complementary in roles. Part of being created in the image of God includes the gender distinction of male or female. A person’s gender is determined by God, the Creator.²⁰⁶ Each person, as either male or female, has been given different roles and responsibilities that, when fulfilled in accordance with God’s glorious design and intention, foster a lifestyle that honors God.

We teach that marriage is a permanent, covenant relationship between one man and one woman. Marriage was instituted by God and is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. A husband and wife are to pursue oneness within the marriage relationship as they become one flesh.²⁰⁷ It is only within marriage that sexual relationships are to occur, with all purity.²⁰⁸ Any deviation from this—such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, premarital sexual intimacy, cross dressing, sexting, or any wrongful attempt to change one’s gender, or disagreement with one’s biological gender—is sinful and offensive to God. Such deviations are not expressions of worship to God but are rather expressions of self-worship. This is why sexual immorality is called “idolatry” by God.²⁰⁹

We teach that divorce represents a violation of the marriage covenant. God hates divorce and makes allowances for it only in cases where there is unrepentant sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever. We teach that remarriage is permitted, but only when the divorce was on biblical grounds.²¹⁰

²⁰³ Jude 9

²⁰⁴ Lev. 18:3

²⁰⁵ Ex. 19:6; Lev. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8; 1 Pet. 1:16; 1 Thess. 4:7

²⁰⁶ Gen. 1:27

²⁰⁷ Gen. 2:23-25

²⁰⁸ Heb. 13:4

²⁰⁹ Ps. 106:39; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 4:3

²¹⁰ Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 5:32, 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12-15

We teach that those who are not married glorify God in their singleness. Singleness is a good thing²¹¹ and provides several ways to bring glory to God. A single person can pursue ministry unencumbered.²¹² A single person who desires to be married can demonstrate their trust in the Lord as they wait with patience. A single person who chooses celibacy for the kingdom of heaven can show that their identity is in Christ and not in their marital status.²¹³

We teach that sexual sin is so deadly it is worth taking Spirit-fueled radical steps to eradicate. Jesus tells us that God’s call to pursue holiness is not just about our actions but about our heart: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”²¹⁴ Sexual sin is dangerous and is one of the reasons God’s wrath is coming upon the world.²¹⁵ As those who have been united with Christ, we should strive to flee lust,²¹⁶ even if it means taking radical actions.²¹⁷

We teach that God offers forgiveness and freedom to those who repent of sexual sin. God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.²¹⁸

We teach that the victims of sexual sin are loved and cared for by God. It should not be surprising to us that a culture that pursues pleasure through idolatry instead of worship of God will be a culture in which the vulnerable are often harmed. We are grieved and deeply troubled with the suffering of others. We desire that those who have been the victims of sexual abuse or violence not feel shame but rather understand that God is grieved by what has happened to them. He is the hope and defender of those who have been hurt or abused.²¹⁹ Our desire is that our church would be a safe, compassionate, and loving place where those who are vulnerable or hurt are nurtured and loved.

We teach that the family is not an idol to be worshipped but a means by which we can glorify God. The presence of children in our homes and church is a blessing from God.²²⁰ We believe the entire church is responsible to help our children see the wondrous things that God has done and the beauty of worshipping Him. For those who are parents, we believe God desires for us to love Him and then model that love for our children.²²¹ Children are to honor their parents and parents are to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.²²²

What We Teach About the Church

²¹¹ 1 Cor. 7:8

²¹² 1 Cor. 7:32

²¹³ Matt. 19:11-12; Eph. 4:1-6, 17-24

²¹⁴ Matt. 5:28

²¹⁵ 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Col. 3:5-6

²¹⁶ 1 Cor. 6:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:22

²¹⁷ Matt. 5:29-30

²¹⁸ 1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-20

²¹⁹ Ps. 9:9, 10:17-18; John 10:10; Rom. 8:14-16

²²⁰ Ps. 127

²²¹ Deut. 6:4-9

²²² Eph. 6:1-4

We teach that God desires for His people to live in fellowship with one another. God designed His people to live not in isolation but in relationship. The church is a unique fellowship. It is not a social club or a political force. In Acts 2, we see the church is a group of believers who gather together to devote themselves to the teaching of Scripture, fellowship, corporate holiness and prayer.²²³

We teach that church membership is necessary for our community of faith. For biblical fellowship to exist, there are several things that are necessary. One of these is church membership. Church membership is not a casual commitment but rather a covenant that believers enter into for their joy and spiritual protection.²²⁴ To put it more formally, church membership is “a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant that consists of the church’s affirmation of the Christian’s gospel profession, the church’s promise to shepherd the Christian, and the Christian’s promise to gather with the church, submit to its oversight, and love its people.”²²⁵

We teach that a devotion to the glory of God is necessary for our community of faith. For biblical fellowship to exist, we must be committed to first loving God. Our church’s purpose statement affirms that all that we do is rooted in the desire to glorify God: “We exist to glorify God as we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare His people to worship Him forever.” We believe that teaching believers to be devoted to the glory of God is essential to helping them understand and live the Christian life.²²⁶

We teach that sacrificial love is necessary for our community of faith. In addition to loving God, we must love each other. The fellowship God desires us to have is not possible if we are focused on exalting ourselves instead of serving others. In humility, we count one another as more important than ourselves as we enter into covenant relationship.²²⁷ We consider the physical resources God has given us as tools to use to care for each other.²²⁸

We teach that the church has unique spiritual authority in our lives. It is a sad reality that many churches have failed to exercise the authority God has given them properly. God’s intention in vesting the church with authority is for our good. The church has been given the authority to do things such as proclaim the gospel, affirm our profession of faith, care for believers, exclude imposters who would harm the church and degrade God’s name, and provide oversight for professors of the gospel.²²⁹ It is hard for us to grasp in our cultural context, but we teach that we should look to the church to affirm and nurture our spiritual gifts and ministries. There is joy and safety in mutual accountability as we look to the believers in our lives who are tasked with the responsibility to care for our souls.²³⁰ Leeman puts it strongly, but his thoughts here should give us pause: “Just as the Bible establishes the government of your nation as your

²²³ Acts 2:42

²²⁴ Heb. 13:17

²²⁵ This definition is adapted from Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*.

²²⁶ 1 Cor. 10:31

²²⁷ Phil. 2:1-11

²²⁸ Acts 2:44-47; cf. 1 John 3:16-19

²²⁹ Adapted from Leeman, 192ff.

²³⁰ Gal. 6:1-2

highest authority on earth when it comes to your citizenship in that nation, so the Bible establishes the local church as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your discipleship to Christ and your citizenship in Christ's present and promised nation."²³¹ Our responsibility is to submit to the church and its leaders for their joy and our benefit.²³²

We teach that church discipline is necessary for our community of faith. There are several purposes of church discipline, such as protecting the flock from sin, protecting the purity, doctrine, and unity of the church, glorifying the name of Christ, and demonstrating love to those who have been deceived by sin.²³³ In those circumstances where discipline has to be enacted, the hope is always for the full repentance and restoration of the individual.²³⁴

We teach that humble, committed shepherds are necessary for our community of faith. In the New Testament church, we see the community of faith is led by elders. Elders are also called "pastors," "bishops," or "overseers" in Scripture, and these terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament.²³⁵ The New Testament tells us much about the role of elders in the church. They were to rule gently,²³⁶ protect,²³⁷ teach,²³⁸ pray,²³⁹ and provide oversight over the finances of the church.²⁴⁰ Men who would be elders must meet qualifications that address both their character and ability.²⁴¹ We believe that passages such as 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-15, which precludes women from teaching or exercising authority over men in the church, limit the office of elder to men.

We teach that there is a visible and invisible church. Admittedly, it is hard to reconcile what Scripture says about the attributes of the church with the reality of what we experience. Part of the answer lies in understanding the difference between the visible (or local) and invisible (or universal) church.

We teach that Christ has given ordinances to His church. We teach that the church is to faithfully practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is to be administered only to those who have professed their faith in Jesus Christ.²⁴² The very meaning of baptism presupposes faith, and there is no indication that baptism was administered to non-believers.²⁴³ Concerning the mode of baptism, there is less clear evidence, but what evidence there is seems to support immersion.²⁴⁴ Additionally, the symbolism of the union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection is best represented by immersion. The Lord's Supper is to be

²³¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, 25.

²³² Heb. 3:7, 17

²³³ 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Gal. 6:1

²³⁴ Matt. 18:15-17

²³⁵ E.g., Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7

²³⁶ 1 Pet. 5:2-5

²³⁷ Acts 20:28

²³⁸ Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17

²³⁹ Acts 6:4

²⁴⁰ Acts 11:29-30

²⁴¹ 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

²⁴² Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:44-48, 16:14-15, 32-33

²⁴³ Rom. 6:3-4

²⁴⁴ Mark 1:5, 10; Acts 8:26-40.

given to believers “as a sign of continuing in fellowship with Christ.”²⁴⁵ It symbolizes Christ’s death²⁴⁶ and indicates our participation in it.²⁴⁷ The Lord’s Supper is to be taken by the church together, affirming the unity of the church as she proclaims the death of the Lord until He returns.²⁴⁸ We encourage those who partake of communion to be committed to a local church body through membership.

We teach that there are certain attributes that Christ’s church possesses. In Scripture we see some fundamental characteristics of Christ’s church.²⁴⁹ We see that it is *unified*. Jesus prays His disciples and all those “who believe in Me through their word...may be one.”²⁵⁰ This unity is seen in passages dealing with the church as a “body,” such as Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Second, we see that the church is *catholic*, or universal. The church as a whole can be seen as the body of Christ, who is the head.²⁵¹ Third, the church is *apostolic*. The church today maintains the original teachings of her apostolic founders. We are God’s household having been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”²⁵² Finally, the church is *holy*. Her members were chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy, devoted to the glory of God.²⁵³ Christ gave Himself up for the church to purify her in order to “present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”²⁵⁴ God’s concern with the holiness of His church is also seen in the process of church discipline.²⁵⁵

What We Teach About the Future

We teach that the souls of all people exist forever and that there is a resurrection for both the righteous and the wicked. When we die our bodies return to dust.²⁵⁶ Our souls, however, are immortal and do not die or sleep. The souls of believers are immediately made perfect, and from the moment of their death, believers are in the presence of God, awaiting the physical resurrection of the righteous when Christ returns. Those who are in Christ have the hope of dwelling with God forever in the new heaven and new earth.²⁵⁷ The souls of the wicked are sent to suffer in hell while they await their resurrection and final judgment. Following their judgment, unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will continue to experience conscious torment eternally.²⁵⁸

²⁴⁵ Grudem, 988.

²⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 11:26

²⁴⁷ Matt. 26:26; Rom. 6:3-10

²⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:26

²⁴⁹ See Berkhof....572-576.

²⁵⁰ John 17:20-21

²⁵¹ Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18

²⁵² Eph. 2:20; cf. 2 Pet. 3:2; 1 Cor. 3:11; Rev. 21:14

²⁵³ Eph. 1:4

²⁵⁴ Eph. 5:25-27

²⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 5:6-7

²⁵⁶ Gen. 3:19, 18:27; Eccles. 3:20

²⁵⁷ 2 Cor. 5:8; Dan. 12:1-4; John 5:28-29; Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 21:1-4

²⁵⁸ Matt. 8:12; 25:30, 46; Luke 16:28; Mark 9:43; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:15

We teach that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly to the earth. Scripture encourages us to look forward with hope to Christ’s return.²⁵⁹ The earliest church confessions have followed Scripture’s encouragement toward that end. The ancient Apostles’ Creed proclaims that Christ will return to “judge the living and the dead.” The Nicene Creed, written in A.D. 325, teaches that Christ will “come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.”

We teach that following the tribulation, Christ will fully establish His kingdom and reign for a thousand years. The New Testament seems to speak of Christ’s kingdom as both present and future.²⁶⁰ Therefore, the kingdom of God can be said to be “already-not yet,” meaning that the reign of Christ has *already* been inaugurated but *not yet* fully consummated. For example, we are saved but our final salvation is still future. We have new life, but our bodies are not yet glorified. Christ is reigning, yet His reign has not yet been fully established and recognized. Though we recognize the diversity of opinions within evangelical Christianity, we teach that the most natural understanding of passages like Revelation 20 is that there is a literal, future millennial kingdom that Christ will reign over when He returns. During this time those believers living and dead who joined Christ at His second coming will also reign with Him.²⁶¹ Following the thousand-year reign of Christ, there will be a final rebellion by Satan and his army in which they will be defeated, judged, and ultimately cast into the lake of fire.²⁶²

We teach that all people will be judged by God. Both the wicked and righteous will give an account to God for their works.²⁶³ With their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, the righteous will be found righteous only by the grace of God through their faith in His Son Jesus Christ.²⁶⁴ Their “good works are merely the evidence of God’s gifts of regeneration, faith, justification, and union with Christ, for whose sake alone they are given their eternal inheritance.”²⁶⁵ They will be rewarded for how they have built on Christ as the foundation for all they have done.²⁶⁶ The hope of this future reward from our Lord is one motivation for us in this current life to, by His grace, pursue sanctification. The wicked’s names will not be found in the Lamb’s book of life, and they will be judged for their sins.²⁶⁷

We teach that there is a coming new heaven and new earth.²⁶⁸ Believers can look forward to the eternal state with great hope and expectation. We know that our resurrected bodies will be similar yet far superior to our current bodies.²⁶⁹ This is a future to which all believers should look forward: “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on

²⁵⁹ John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Rev. 22:20

²⁶⁰ Matt. 4:17, 11:12, 12:28, 13:24-43; Luke 11:20, 16:16, 17:20-21, 19:11-12; John 3:5; 18:36; Acts 28:23; Col. 1:13

²⁶¹ 1 Cor. 6:3; 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Rev. 20:4-6

²⁶² Rev. 20:7-15

²⁶³ Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 2:4-10; Rev 20:11-15

²⁶⁴ Exod. 32:31-33; Ps. 69:27-28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:1, 21:27

²⁶⁵ *The Sola Five Handbook Confessions of Faith*, p. 18; cf. Rom. 5:1-2, 9-10; 6:23

²⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 3:10-15

²⁶⁷ Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 5:6-10; Rev. 20:5, 11-15

²⁶⁸ Rev. 21:1

²⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 15:35-58

immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”²⁷⁰ It is in our resurrected bodies that we will spend eternity in the new heaven and new earth. There we will dwell with God and be His people. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”²⁷¹

We teach the reason God has told us about the future is to instruct us in how to live in the present. The study of what God has revealed about the future is called “eschatology.” As believers study eschatology, we find our faith strengthened as we hope in Him. Contemplating the hope of Christ’s return should cause us to reorder our priorities, grow in holiness, encourage us in our labors, and motivate us to be ready for His return at any time.²⁷²

We teach that we are to exercise grace when discussing eschatology and avoid common pitfalls when studying and teaching about the End Times. We desire to avoid “newspaper” eschatology in which we base our understanding of what will happen on current events instead of Scripture’s teaching. We want to reject any application of eschatology that would lead us to refuse to engage our culture with the gospel. We desire to avoid a spirit of arrogance that disparages those who hold other viewpoints that are within the boundaries of orthodox, traditional evangelical Christianity. Finally, we recognize that while diversity exists within our body and elders, our church’s roots are in the dispensational premillennial tradition. At the time of this writing, our elder group consists of both dispensational and historic premillennialists, with varying degrees of certainty in these positions. As such, we would ask that teachers refrain from advancing eschatological positions that deviate from those within the bounds of premillennialism.

²⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 15:53-54

²⁷¹ Rev. 21:3-4

²⁷² See Frame, 1094-5; cf. 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Pet. 1:3-9, 13-16; Rev. 2:7, 2:11, 3:5, 12, 17, 21, 25-28