



# Membership

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## *HIS PLACE* Class

CHURCH

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***Our desire is to glorify God  
by loving people  
and making disciples  
of Jesus Christ***



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## *Welcome!*

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We are really excited that you are taking this important step toward understanding, appreciating, and committing to the local church! Membership in the local church in the New Testament was always assumed. Everyone who confessed Jesus as Lord was baptized, added to the church, and was engaged in mutual ministry to and with one another.

*Acts 2:41-47 — So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

They continued in one accord, gathering, and worshipping together, and continuing to have new believers “added” to the body (Acts 5:12-14). In the early church, and in much of the world today, there is little doubt about who genuinely understands and is committed to Christ and the gospel. To make that profession and commitment through baptism often puts a person’s very life in danger. It is not culturally comfortable to be a Christian.

While we don’t see a membership process outlined in Scripture, we do see the patterns of “adding” to the number of those whose professions and actions evidenced belief and commitment to the gospel (Acts 5:12-14). We see the churches having a clear and distinct understanding of “removing” some and distinguishing who were the “insiders” and “outsiders” (1 Corinthians 5:10-13).

Centuries of cultural acceptance, doctrinal drift, and denominational confusion in Western and American Christianity makes it necessary to formalize a process for identifying, embracing, and committing to those who truly know and worship Jesus through the gospel, and desire to commit to the ministry of His body through the local church.

### ***Let’s start by getting to know one another BRIEFLY***

- ◆ Name?
- ◆ Family?
- ◆ Ministry?
- ◆ One unique, surprising, or interesting fact about yourself—just for fun!
- ◆ How long have you been a Christian?
- ◆ How long have you been at HPC?
- ◆ Previous Church Background

## *The Gospel*

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### Essential Truths about God

#### 1. God is the Creator.

He has a right to your life. You belong to Him

*Psalm 100:3 — Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Revelation 4:11 — Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*

See also Romans 1:18-32; Acts 17:24.

#### 2. God is the Righteous Judge.

God's righteous, holy character is seen in His perfect Law. As with any law, His law provides a standard for you to live by, punishment for those who don't meet that standard, and freedom to those that do meet the standard.

*Hebrews 9:27 — And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.*

See also 1 Peter 1:16 and Acts 17:22-31.

#### 3. God is Loving.

God is loving to all men (even His enemies—see Matthew 5:43-48), but this does not mean all men will go to heaven.

*John 3:16 — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

## 4. God is gracious to all who repent.

The delay in the Lord's return reflects His desire to show patience and grace to those who repent.

***2 Peter 3:9 — The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

### ***Essential Truths about Man***

## 1. Man was created to know God.

God wants men to seek Him and find Him. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 describes God creating mankind so they might worship Him and He might dwell among them. The Bible's storyline—God's plan of redemption—is designed to recapture this purpose while putting all the attributes of God on display.

***Acts 17:26-27 — And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,***

***John 17:3 — And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***

## 2. Man sins against God.

Sin is breaking God's law. Sin is falling short of the perfection of God. The gospel enables man to be saved from his rebellion and sin.

***1 John 3:4 — Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.***

***Romans 3:23 — for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,***

### 3. Man cannot stop sinning; He is helpless in his sin.

Rom. 3:10-20 is an indictment on mankind and expresses our hopeless condition and helplessness in sin.

*Ephesians 2:1-3 — And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

*Jeremiah 17:9 — The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

### 4. Man is separated from God because of His sin.

*Isaiah 59:1-2 — Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

*Romans 6:23 — For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## Essential Truths about Jesus Christ

### 1. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh.

What was said about God is also true of Christ. He became a man to be a mediator between God and man.

*John 1:1, 14 — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*Colossians 2:9 — For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,*

*1 Timothy 2:5 — For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

## 2. Jesus Christ is the sin-bearer, or sin-substitute.

*Isaiah 53:5-6 — But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*1 Peter 3:18 — For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,*

Which leads to the next point!

## 3. Jesus Christ Rose from the dead - He is alive today!

The resurrection displays and guarantees the life-giving power of God through the gospel—that we too can be delivered from the death we deserve (Romans 6:23). The same power that raised Jesus from the dead gives life to sinners. The resurrection also declares that God was satisfied with Jesus Christ's payment of death on behalf of sinners.

*Matthew 28:5-6 — But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

*1 Peter 1:3 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

*1 Corinthians 15:17 — And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

*Romans 6:4 — We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

## 4. Jesus Christ is Lord.

All men must submit to Christ as their Master. It is impossible to say you truly believe in Jesus if you do not submit to Him in humble adoration and obedience. This worship and obedience is the goal of faith.

*Romans 10:9-10 — because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

*Titus 2:11-14 — For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

## Essential Truths about Man's Response

### 1. Man's response includes faith.

"Faith" as it is used in Scripture has elements of knowledge (what you know), belief (what you embrace as true), and trust (what you rely upon because it is true). Any time a man has "saving faith" it contains all of these elements.

*John 3:16 — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

*1 John 3:23 — And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.*



## 2. Man's response includes repentance.

Repentance—a change of mind that causes a turning *from* sin, and *to* God—is a necessary part of obtaining salvation. It is a gift of God's grace that He would change our hearts, cause us to hate our sin and to desire Him, and enable us to turn and follow Him in repentant faith. Without repentance from sin and the fruit of good works, there is no evidence of genuine conversion. These two ideas of faith and repentance comprise the biblical idea of conversion.

*Matthew 3:2 — [John the Baptist preached] “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

*Acts 20:20-21 — [Paul said] ...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Matthew 4:17 — From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

*Acts 2:38 — And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

*Acts 17:30 — [Paul preached that] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,*

*Titus 1:16 — They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*

*James 2:14, 17 — What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*



## Core Values

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“Core Values” are fundamental and foundational **values** from which our **practices** logically flow.

The Scriptures place a pre-eminent importance on these principles, as you will see. That is why they are at the “core” of all that we say and do. They are important, necessary, and influential. In fact, these core values undergird and energize everything we do here at His Place Church. Their fundamental and foundational nature lead us to do ministry in a certain kind of way (our “Distinctives”). Because we are all on the same team, working toward a common goal (Philippians 1:27), it is important that we all understand and allow these values to inform our ministry together (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Here is a list of the Core Values of His Place Church

- ❖ A High View of God
- ❖ A High View of the Word of God
- ❖ A Biblical View of Man
- ❖ The Primacy of the Gospel Mission
- ❖ The Centrality of the Local Church
- ❖ A Biblical View of Leadership

Now we will take a detailed look at each of these values and their importance.

### A High View of God

Everything we do as servants of God is shaped by our thinking about Him. A.W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think of God is the most important thing about us.” He also said, “Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God.”

Many ponder God only as *they* would like to, in ways that make them feel comfortable. People will say, “Well, I like to think of God as...” People have their own ideas and opinions of what God is like. But God is simply who He is. Our ideas about what we *want* God to be like are not important. We can’t decide what God is like. He is who He is, and it doesn’t matter how we feel about it.

People *like* to think of God as loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving. He certainly is that, but He is much more. He is holy and just and righteous. If we have an imbalanced view of God, we will tend to water down God’s holiness, sovereignty, and justice. Generally, people are quick to ignore or forget the attributes of God that would cause us to tremble.



It is possible, even likely, that in many churches their statement of faith may be perfectly true and orthodox, while their actual thoughts about God may be unworthy of Him. That is a dynamic we cannot adopt, and at HPC we desire to encourage one another to avoid. We must maintain a high view of God and help one another shape our worship and service for Christ in ways consistent with that thinking.

How serious is this issue? Another observation by Tozer rings loudly with its significance. He says, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him." The Scriptures teach that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 111:10). A right reverence and awe for God is the beginning of the very things that ought to shape our worship, service, choices, and approach to ministry (knowledge and wisdom).

Here are some practical reasons why this "fear of the Lord" and a "high view of God" must shape our thinking and our ministry together.

First, we will strive to be holy because God is holy. We are called to be holy, because the Lord our God is holy (Leviticus 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Peter 1:14-16). We must look at God's holiness and then strive to be like Him. For many the temptation is to set the bar too low, to use other men and their lives as a standard for goodness and righteousness. Perhaps we should ask ourselves—are we making others our standard or God?

We must maintain a high view of God, which will help motivate us to appreciate God's holiness, and to pursue the expression of His holiness in our own lives. That is the positive statement of this principle, but the opposite is also true.

Second, failing to maintain a high view of God will lead to a toleration of sin. The dark days of the Judges were some of the worst in Israel. We are told that those dark days started when a generation arose in Israel who did not appreciate God for who He is, and what He had done (Judges 2:10-12). The whole nation deteriorated into a people who had no real standard of righteousness, where "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

We must be careful to maintain a high view of God, so that our standards of life and ministry will accurately reflect the beauty of His holiness. We must be that "*pillar and buttress of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15) that God says the church is called to be.

Third, failing to maintain a high view of God will lead to a focus on men. What will fill the void if we don't have a high view of God? Everyone values something. It is almost certain that we will replace a proper view of God with an improper and inflated estimation of man's importance. We will be tempted to entertain people, rather than instruct them. We will be tempted to market the church, rather than call people to repentance and faith. We will be tempted to compromise the truth so that people will stay and support the church financially. We will be tempted to not admonish those who need direct shepherding.

God is worthy of our highest and most noble thoughts, and we must be diligent to ensure that His honor and glory is foremost in all of our pursuits. Remember, the glory of God is the purpose of the church. God must have the preeminence in our thoughts, and that preeminence of thought must be allowed to shape our lives individually, and then the ministry of the local church collectively.

## A High View of the Word of God

A high view of God leads to a high view of God's Word. If we think much of God, we will think much of His Word. Do you view the Word of God as being the perfect guide for your life? There are many passages that teach, encourage, and promote a high view of the Scripture, both because of its nature and its role in the purposes of God.

- ❖ **God's Word is supreme and established forever**  
(Ps. 119:89; Isa. 40:8, 55:11; Matt. 24:35).
- ❖ **God's Word is also authoritative and must be obeyed**  
(Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; Jam. 1:22).
- ❖ **The precepts of God are relevant to every situation**  
(Psa. 19:7-14; Rom. 12:1-2, 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
- ❖ **The Word of God is sufficient for every circumstance**  
(John 6:63, 68; 2 Pet. 1:3).
- ❖ **God's Word must be studied and taught as the objective Word of God**  
(Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:15, 4:1-2).

God's Word is authentic, authoritative, sufficient, and relevant. Every word of Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16). That's why every part of God's word is important to us and worthy of diligent study.

As we study it, we must also recognize that it is authoritative. What it says, we must do! If we see the Word as authoritative, we will want to obey the Word when we hear it. We will not be content when the Word is studied without a view to applying it. Instead, we will want it to make us mature and complete, fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). We will desire the double-edged sword of the Spirit to cut our souls open so that we can be

cleansed and made holy (Heb. 4:12). A high view of Scripture also requires that we recognize that it stands alone as complete and sufficient in itself. How can we make something that is already a perfect Word of God any better than it is? How can we claim that the knowledge of God, which comes to us through His Word, gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness and enable us to be partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:2-4) when we turn to other sources or authorities for help and counsel?

Psalm 19 is a great passage about the sufficiency of the Word to speak broadly about the issues of life. It may not give the specific answer to a specific question, but it gives us the principles necessary to operate in a way that fully pleases God. While there is much to learn, and no one could exhaust the riches of God's Word, it is still truly sufficient. If one does not see how the Scripture is relevant to an issue of life, it is only because he does not understand it enough. Those who teach the Word of God have a noble responsibility to make sure that those who hear the Word taught have the meaning and the relevance of Scripture made clear.

What might happen if the church fails to maintain a high view of Scripture?

Without a high view of Scripture, we may take the easiest path. We may elevate personal experience above God's Word. We may glorify man's opinions and purposes, rather than allow our opinions and purposes to be defined and guided by biblical truth. The dangerous result might be that we will pursue our own desires in the church rather than God's.

A high view of Scripture keeps our eyes focused on the truth. And keeping our eyes focused on the truth is vital to knowing how to live our personal lives, and for knowing how to conduct ourselves in the church (which is supposed to be the pillar and buttress of the truth —Timothy 3:15). At HPC we reject thinking about God's truth in a way that even suggests it is irrelevant, impractical, or unable to help people solve their spiritual problems.

The church must humbly and willingly submit to the authority of the Bible. God's people must pattern and conform their individual lives and the corporate life of the church, to the truth of God's Word. The church must strive to teach the Word of God in such a way that people can apply it to their lives. The church must turn to the Scriptures alone to find the answers to people's problems. This is what it truly means to have a high view of Scripture.

## A Biblical View of Man

To embrace a biblical view of man means to comprehend and promote an accurate and biblical view of man's nature. A high view of God and Scripture will lead to a biblical view of man - an accurate view of man's sinful nature.

All men are stained by sin, unable to do anything to save themselves (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-26; Titus 3:5). Man was created to glorify God, but because of his sinful heart, he seeks to glorify himself (Gen. 3:17-19, Rom. 1:18, 3:10-23), and seeks fulfillment from the world's evil system (Jer. 17:9-10; Mar. 7:21; Eph. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:2; 1 John 2:16).

Every part of man is corrupted by sin: his mind, will, emotions, desires, motives, body, soul, heart and even his powers of reasoning. Sin has alienated us from God and apart from saving grace we will seek answers only from within our corrupted heart or from the world's evil system. Unless we have a biblical view of man, we will default to a self-centered way of thinking and a self-centered way of doing ministry.

What might happen if we don't have a biblical view of man? We may become too focused on the material world and material needs and neglect to focus proper attention on the spiritual problems related to our earthly existence. We may fail to give people the real help they need. We need an accurate view of the problem (a proper diagnosis) to give the proper solution.

A man-centered way of thinking may also cause us to not appreciate the gospel properly. The need for Christ to save us will seem relatively small if we underestimate our desperate condition apart from Him. We may not see Christ as the only solution to our most essential needs. Christ will not be seen as the Savior from the sin to which we are enslaved, but as someone who helps people who are basically good but just "need a little boost." Failure to acknowledge the spiritual corruption of man may also cause us to give undue respect to the opinions of man.

At HPC we strive to overcome this risk by taking the corruption of mankind seriously. Having done so, it fuels a proper humility and life of confession and repentance. It even causes us to sing about our desperate need and how Christ is the glorious and gracious answer. And most importantly, it fuels a proper expression of the gospel which does not neglect to proclaim man's corruption in sin and need for forgiveness and redemption.

## The Primacy of the Gospel Mission

More and more churches are moving from an emphasis on teaching the gospel to an emphasis on bettering the community, improving society, or calls to social justice. While the love that Christ energizes seeks the good of others, there is no greater good than the knowledge of God that brings salvation. Truly being salt and light in the community includes speaking the gospel as a way of life. Our goal is to be involved in our community in ways that cultivate relationships and foster gospel opportunities, while not neglecting other ways to show love to our neighbors. We value this because the proclamation of the gospel is the essence of our mission as a church.

Matthew 28:19-20 is our Great Commission too. Verbal proclamation of the gospel is critical because the spread of the gospel should be the passion of every spiritually mature Christian. What is spiritual maturity? It is certainly nothing less than a fascination with the gospel. It is a joyful life produced by embracing the gospel, meditating upon, and appreciating the gospel, and by maintaining a proper commitment to the gospel.

Paul's letter to the Philippians is a call to joyful gospel-centered living that is done in partnership with others in the local church. Paul was thankful for how he and the Philippians shared in that ministry. He said,

***Philippians 1:3-5 — “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”***

Later, he challenged the whole church in Philippi to be gospel-centered together.

***Philippians 1:27 — Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,***

The point is simple. His Place Church desires to see the whole body moving toward the kind of spiritual maturity in Christ that produces love for the gospel, an appreciation for our “so great salvation” (Heb. 2:1-4), and a passion to spread that good news to everyone.

Proclamation of the gospel is a core value because it's at the heart of our mission— “Our desire is to glorify God by loving people and making disciples of Jesus Christ” (see Matt. 28:19-20). It's critical because that's what specifically, clearly, and fully reveals the righteousness of God. It's critical because that's what men need to hear to believe and call on the name of the Lord to be saved.



## The Centrality of the Local Church

Christ promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). He is doing that right now. The church is God's chief institution through which He spreads His gospel throughout the world. The local church is the *"the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:15).

This principle is included in our "Core Values" because it is foundational to helping keep our lives and ministry on track. In short, we need to make sure that nothing competes for our loyalties, and that God's purposes for promoting His gospel and glory take place as He has designed them to work best—which means *through* the local church, and in all of the various ways that the church (and *only* the church) can display and promote the truth.

While we cannot review here all the ways the church displays God's wisdom and glory, we certainly want to encourage a greater appreciation for and commitment to the local church. While parachurch ministries are not inherently wrong, church members should guard against being drawn away from the church, away from God's primary means of propagating the truth concerning Himself, and away from their responsibilities to the body of Christ as expressed in the local church. Christians must have a strong affection for the church, commit themselves to a specific local church, and consider the other members of their local church to be their family.

## A Biblical View of Leadership

In many churches the qualifications, process and responsibilities for leadership are not based squarely on biblical principles. Some churches may consider their leaders to be mere managers. Others don't see them as shepherds, but simply as figureheads. On the opposite end of that spectrum, some churches look to their leaders as workhorses, men hired to do *all* the work. It is potentially easy to consider leaders to have the narrow function of teaching or preaching, given that this is a primary function they have been given by God. Non-staff leaders in some churches are chosen based simply on voting for the most popular people in the church.

We believe this value as stated above reflects the biblical priorities, structure, and functions of eldership. Peter gives an excellent description of an elder (or overseer, or shepherd), along with God-honoring motives for fulfilling this role.





*1 Peter 5:1-3 — So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

Notice first, that the people under an elder's charge are called the Flock of God—the flock belongs to God and must be cared for according to His guidelines. They are defined *not* as people belonging to the elder/pastor, but to God. It is a stewardship really, exercised by those who are really “under-shepherds” of the one true Shepherd, to Whom they will give an account (Hebrews 13:17). That is a compelling reason to make sure that the structure, function, and character qualities enjoined upon elders in the local church are understood and fulfilled faithfully.

We will discuss the structure of our church government in a separate lesson. Here we would like to outline the broad duties of this team of biblically qualified men.

### First, they shepherd the flock of God

They do this by feeding the flock from God's Word. Shepherds guide the flock to the green pastures of Scripture and the life-giving power therein. They also shepherd by guarding the flock from dangers, both doctrinally and practically. A true shepherd protects the sheep and lays down his life for them. There is affection and willing sacrifice for the sake of those he is called to care for. (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28)

### Second, they oversee the flock of God

Our elders are responsible to oversee the HPC family. While this oversight is not strictly administrative, it certainly includes those matters. Oversight also includes casting and carrying out vision and ensuring our regular and ongoing ministry continues to result in fulfilling our overall mission. (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2)

### Third, they are an example to the flock

The character qualities required of an elder suggest that their life be exemplary (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This requirement is stated specifically in the passages above. While exemplary character does not require perfection, it does imply a model worthy of imitation. (1 Peter 5:3; Titus 2:7; Hebrews 13:7)



## Fourth, they equip the flock for service

Staff pastors and elders are not appointed to “do all the work” of ministry. They are appointed to guide, direct, model, and equip others as well. The body of Christ only works when we see “the proper working of each individual part, [which] causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). Pastors equip others so that this work of edification is carried out by all. (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 2:2)

## Conclusion

These core values are foundational principles that we desire to undergird and energize every aspect of ministry at His Place Church. A robust understanding and practice of these values produce a mindset that informs our philosophy and methods for ministering the gospel of Christ to and with one another. Because we are all on the same team, working toward a common goal (Philippians 1:27), it is important that we all understand and allow these core values to inform our ministry together (Ephesians 4:11-13).



## *Doctrinal Statement*

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At His Place Church we respect that people hold a variety of doctrinal positions. With the assumption and aim that we are all continually submitting ourselves to Scripture, we will over time come to more and more doctrinal unity. However, there are some fundamental truths which a person must affirm if they desire to consistently fellowship and minister within our Body.

These ten basic points of doctrine are fundamental and central to the true Christian faith. Finding any of these doctrines objectionable or questionable would put a person outside the realm of orthodoxy. Therefore, every member must wholeheartedly ascribe to these truths.

### **1. God**

We believe in on God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

### **2. The Bible**

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

### **3. The Human Condition**

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled, and renewed.

## 4. Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel’s promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

## 5. The Work of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

## 6. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

## 7. The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches; whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

## 8. Christian Living

We believe that God’s justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor, and justice for the oppressed. With God’s Word, the Spirit’s power, and fervent prayer in Christ’s name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ’s commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.



## 9. Christ's Return

We believe in the personal, bodily, and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, requires constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission.

## 10. Response and Eternal Destiny

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment, and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord, in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

### *Doctrinal Questions & Answers*

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Below is a space for you to jot down notes from the doctrinal "Q&A" during the class.

## *Specific Doctrinal Highlights*

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While the following are not essential for salvation, because of current cultural confusion these are a few doctrines about which we desire to make sure we have clarified.

### 1. Gender

We believe that gender is the sexual identity of a person established by God at conception and is permanently embedded in their DNA.

### 2. Marriage

We believe that marriage is an intimate, complementary, and exclusive union between a biological man and a biological woman (as defined by "Gender" above) in which the two become one in all aspects of life.

### 3. Sex

We believe it is sinful to engage in sexual relations outside of marriage as defined above. We also believe that forgiveness, healing, and restoration are available through faith in Christ for those who repent.

### 4. Sanctity of Life/Abortion

We believe that physical life is a gift of God and begins at conception, therefore, abortion is sinful. We also believe that forgiveness, healing, and restoration are available through repentant faith in Christ for those who have participated in abortion.

## *What We Teach on Other Issues*

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### 5. Creation

We teach a literal six-day creation, which came about when God spoke the world and everything in it into existence. Death subsequently entered into creation when Adam sinned (Gen. 2:16–17; Rom. 5:12). We know this because the Genesis account is not purely a poetic expression of a creation story, but historical fact.

The term for “day” in Genesis chapter one (Heb. “yom”) never means anything other than a literal 24-hour day when it is used in conjunction with ordinal numbers (“first, second, etc.”).

Though some Christians may hold to differing positions on creation, they must affirm the following points:

- ❖ God Himself is the source of life and matter, not natural processes. (Gen. 1:1)

- ❖ God literally created a historical and actual Adam and Eve. (Gen. 1:26, 2:7, 2:21-23)
- ❖ The fall of mankind into sin is a literal account of history. (Exod. 31:17)

First, to believe that matter and life comes from any other source than God is to deny the most fundamental truth about creation, and about God Himself (who is “life” itself). The basic tenets of atheistic evolution (even a view of creation that resembles deism) must be rejected to have any hope at all of salvaging an orthodox view of Scripture.

Second, both the writers of Scripture and Jesus himself assume a literal and historical Adam and Eve. To teach otherwise would relegate their teachings to be inaccurate and untrue—a position that is unacceptable. A literal Adam is a necessary implication of Romans 5, where it is outlined how the guilt of sin spreads to all men. That implies the necessity of the third qualification above as well.

Because the fall of man into sin is a literal historical event, the sacrificial death of Christ is necessary to save Adam’s descendants. Jesus’ death and resurrection rescues us from our condition in sin that is a reality because of the literal, historical, and even genetic relationship with Adam from whom all mankind has descended.

## 6. The End Times

We teach that Jesus will return to earth following the Tribulation and prior to the establishment of His 1,000 year kingdom. When He returns, He will defeat His enemies and an angel will bind Satan and cast him into prison. Jesus will then rule on the throne of David in Jerusalem for 1,000 years (Revelation 19:11-20:6). This 1,000 year rule, known as the millennial kingdom, will be a time of blessing, prosperity, long life, and the restoration of the dominion mandate given to mankind in the garden of Eden. Israel, having been brought to repentance and faith in Jesus as the Messiah, will receive the land promised to their fathers (Ezekiel 36:22-32). Jesus, as the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), will rule from Jerusalem over Israel and all the nations (Psalm 2; 110).

At the end of the millennial kingdom, Satan will be released from prison and lead a final rebellion amongst mankind against Jesus. The people who will rebel will be unbelievers born during the millennial kingdom. They will be descendants of believers who survive the Tribulation and enter the millennial kingdom. Satan will be defeated and cast into the lake of fire where he will spend eternity (Revelation 20:7-10). All unbelievers will then be judged before the Great White Throne and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). God will make a new heaven and new earth, where all believers will live with resurrected bodies in the presence of the triune God in eternal fellowship and bliss. The throne and dwelling place of God will be on the new earth with mankind forever (Revelation 21-22).

## 7. Men's and Women's Roles in the Church and Home

We teach that God made men and women in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). As image bearers of God, both men and women are equals in their worth and humanity. In Christ, men and women are on equal spiritual ground, both being clothed in the righteousness of Christ and being equal heirs of the grace of life (Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7). Men and women are also equals in many of their spiritual roles. They are both called to serve in the church, make disciples, and proclaim the gospel.

God has also made men and women gloriously distinct. These distinctions do not indicate a distinction in value. In addition to their biological differences, God made men and women to be distinct in some of their roles. In marriage, God calls the husband to be the loving, sacrificial Christ-like leader of his wife. God calls the wife to be the dignified helper of her husband, submitting to his leadership as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7). These roles are not consequences of the fall but were instituted at creation, when the man was created first and the woman was then created as his helper (Genesis 2:7-25; 1 Corinthians 11:7-12; 1 Timothy 2:13).

In the church, God calls godly, qualified men to teach the Bible when men are present (1 Timothy 2:8-15) and lead as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). God calls women to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5). God also calls men and women to learn from one another as we fellowship with one another (Acts 18:26).

## 8. Baptism

Baptism is a believer's (Matthew 28:19) public declaration by immersion into water (Acts 8:36-39) of his faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12). Immersion into water symbolizes a believer's death to sin and new life in Christ (Romans 6:1-11). Baptism does not bring about salvation, which comes by faith in Christ (John 3:16), but is a believer's declaration that he has been saved by Christ.





## *Mutual Commitments*

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At His Place Church we respect that people hold a variety of doctrinal positions. It is not our desire to discourage those who love God and love His Word to abandon or deny their beliefs if they are different from our own. However, we desire there to be a spirit of unity and a humble willingness to yield and defer to the elders without causing dissension. We are convinced that over time, submitting to Scripture and being willing to dialogue humbly about these matters, believers will grow more and more toward doctrinal unity.

What do we believe that humble submission and dialogue regarding differences should look like from the perspective of both church leaders and church members?

We believe the elders have a general responsibility to guard the truth (1 Tim. 6:20), while being able to gently instruct and care for the flock.

***2 Timothy 2:24-25a — And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.***

We believe members also have some general responsibilities to appreciate their leaders, and to be teachable and willing to yield to them.

***Hebrews 13:17 — Obey [be persuadable] your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.***

***1 Thessalonians 5:12 — We ask you, brothers, to respect [know, appreciate] those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish [instruct] you.***

Keeping these admonitions in mind, what kinds of specific commitments do we believe the shepherds and the flock are making when they join hands in ministry through membership?



## Commitments of the Elders

1. We will strive to hold and teach our convictions with humility, and not be personally critical or condescending toward those who differ; instead, we will do our best to appreciate every member and the diversity they bring to the body.
2. We will strive for a unity of spirit centered around Christ and the gospel that will cultivate an atmosphere of openness and mutual appreciation.
3. We will provide spiritual instruction and resources to help members understand any matters of doctrine they desire to grasp more fully or deeply.
4. We will commit to respecting your personal convictions and beliefs, and properly grant you liberty of conscience in matters of doctrine and beliefs.
5. We will not hinder a member's service in the church in any way, providing they are holding their convictions humbly, and not teaching or promoting doctrines contrary to those held and taught by the elders.

## Commitments of the Members

1. The member must strive to hold their convictions with humility, and not be personally critical or condescending toward the elders, or others in the body with whom they disagree.
2. The member will strive for a unity of spirit centered around Christ and the gospel that will cultivate an atmosphere of openness and mutual appreciation.
3. The member will strive to love, pray for, and appreciate those in authority over them in the church.
4. The member, in keeping with Hebrews 13:17, will strive to maintain a teachable spirit, avoid stubbornness, cultivate a willingness to be persuaded, and have a heart willing to yield even when the differences in doctrine remain.
5. The member commits to not teaching or promoting doctrines contrary to those taught and held by the elders, and to be respectful in any and every conversation where those doctrinal differences might arise.

## Conclusion

The desire of your shepherds is to care for your spiritual health and to see you walking in the truth. In fact, like the Apostle John, we would be able to say...

*3 John 4 — I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

We believe this kind of care—being fed well spiritually and cared for practically—can happen effectively in a context where doctrinal differences exist. The prerequisite for that to happen is humility, genuine affection, abundant grace, and mutual respect in every heart. That is our prayer and desire, from our hearts and from yours.

### *Commitment to a Local Church*

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Have you ever been to a carnival or county fair, and put your face through a hole where a headless frame was painted to represent a muscle man, a clown, or even a bathing beauty? Many of us have had our pictures taken this way, and the photos are humorous because the head doesn't fit the body. If we could picture Christ as the head of our local body of believers, would the world laugh at the misfit? Or would they stand in awe of a collective human body that is so closely related to a divine head? (Illustration from Dan Bernard)

Today we will talk about our relationship with Christ, not primarily about our personal relationship with Him, but our relationship to Christ in its corporate expression - how relationship with Christ implies and makes necessary a relationship with everyone else that is related to Him.

Much is said about our personal relationship with Christ, but our corporate relationship with Him (with His "body," "family," "household," "church") is just as important. You can't have one without the other. The Scriptures teach us that we should put just as much effort into developing our corporate relationship with Christ as we do our personal relationship.

Sadly, there are many who think their personal relationship with Christ is all that is important. Many people feel guilty about their lack of commitment when it comes to their personal relationship with Christ, but they think very little of their lack of commitment when it comes to their corporate relationship with Christ - their commitment to the local church.

What does it mean to be committed to the church? What does God require? What do the Scriptures teach?

We are going to examine FIVE aspects of a proper commitment to the local church.

These biblical principles, and their implications, should help all Christians see the importance of joining together in a mutual commitment to one another in a local church setting.

## *I. The Local Church is Central to God's Plan*

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The *first* aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is recognizing that the local church is central to God's plan for ministry. It is also to be central to the life of every Christian. The New Testament does not conceive of living the Christian life apart from the local church. Commitment to the local church is not optional. It is not dispensable.

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, the Apostle Paul told Timothy and the rest of us how important the local church is to God. He points out four realities about the local church in order to highlight its importance in God's economy. First, here is the text of that passage.

***1 Timothy 3:14-15 — I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.***

### The local church is the “the household of God” (the family of God).

If you consider yourself to be a Christian, you should consider yourself to be a part of the family of God. Who would want to be without a family? Who would want to be without a local church? Who would want to be loosely connected to a family? Who would want to be loosely connected to the local church? If the two share certain qualities (and God says that they do), then we should also see how both must have a similar importance in our mind and in our commitments.

### The local church is “the church of the living God.”

God owns the local church. He started it, builds it, energizes it, grows it, and purifies it. We should desire to be committed to what God is doing. He is building His church, and that activity is happening in relational ways in the local church.



## The local church is “the pillar of truth,” it holds up God’s truth for all to see.

The church is the “pillar of the truth.” Through baptism, the Lord’s Supper, authoritative preaching, humble listening, regular attendance, and personal accountability, the truth of God is held up for all to see, appreciate and receive. It is God’s means of holding up the truth for all to see. You should desire to be committed in a dynamic way to a local church so you can both “see the truth for yourself” regularly, and to be a part of holding up the truth for others to see as well.

## The local church is “the support of the truth,” it is the foundation.

What does it mean to have good ground support, a proper foundation, on a building? It makes the building firm and stable. The local church provides stability for God’s truth. The local church, alone, is able and responsible to proclaim the truth, to defend the truth, to live out the truth in their daily lives, and to hold one another accountable to do the same. Commit yourself to a local church so you can be a part of God’s plan for proclaiming and preserving His truth!

This may be the first time you have considered how God’s program for saving people, growing Christians, glorifying Himself, and proclaiming truth is centered around the local church. Don’t lose sight of this! Trying to live the Christian life independent of others in the family of God is not only unbiblical, it will detract from allowing the church to fulfill all of the purposes for which God designed it.

Get on board and make your personal commitment to the local church known. That leads us to the second aspect of a proper commitment to the local church.

### *II. Commit Yourself to ONE Local Church*

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This is the second aspect of a proper commitment to the local church. You need to CHOOSE, and you need to choose ONE!

Many people attempt to live the Christian life without a stated commitment or regular participation in ONE local church. Some claim being a member of an organized church is completely unnecessary. Others are just very irregular in their attendance at the church they claim as their home. Many others hop around from one church to another, never really committing or building lasting relationships.

If people thought or acted this way in regard to their literal family, most people would think it unusual. So why don't all Christians see it as unusual when their brothers or sisters in Christ are so distant, disengaged, and independent toward their spiritual family?

The Scriptures teach that you are to commit yourself to one local church. How does the Scripture teach this principle directly?

We will look at five ways the Bible teaches that we need to be part of a local church. The first three consider the biblical metaphors used for the church. The last two consider the Bible's direct teaching that we have certain obligations and responsibilities to both church leaders, and to other Christians.

## 1. You are a member of a family

We already pointed out above that the church is referred to as the "household of God." This means you are part of family. If a member of a family only came home to sleep at night, and ate their meals at a neighbor's house five nights a week, we would consider them to be a poor family member (at the very least, and inactive one). God has designed the church to be like family. We are to share meals, share a mutual concern for one another, enjoy life together, and have an active life of love toward one another.

## 2. You are to be a brick in a building.

God has a temple—and *you* are a brick in it.

***1 Corinthians 3:16-17 — Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.***

When he said, "*You are God's temple*" he was speaking of the whole church. "*You*" is plural, meaning that "all of you together constitute a temple of God" (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). The followers of Christ are not to be scattered around the earth's landscape, but carefully placed together to form spiritual temples. You may think you are spiritually strong on your own. You may think you are sturdy as a brick, but God intends to make something of you. He intends for you to be a brick in His spiritual temple.

Charles Spurgeon said:

I know there are some who say, "Well, I've given myself to the Lord, but I don't intend to give myself to the church." I say, "Now why not?" And they answer, "Because I can be just as good a Christian without it." I say, "Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? There's a brick. What is the

brick made for? It's made to build a house. It is of no use for the brick to tell you that it's just as good a brick while it's kicking about on the ground by itself, as it would be as part of a house. Actually, it's a good-for-nothing brick. So, you rolling-stone Christians, I don't believe that you're answering the purpose for which Christ saved you. You're living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do." (Spurgeon, Mack, 71).

### 3. You are to be a member of a body.

***1 Corinthians 12:18-25 — But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.***

God uses this metaphor to describe the local church so that we may understand the importance of having unity and commitment among the members of the body. Though the church is made up of individuals, those individuals are definitely one body. You don't keep your toes in your pocket until you need them. They are joined to the body. They are members of the body. They are not loosely connected. You are a member of the body of Christ. Don't try to be loosely connected. Commit yourself to one local church.

When you watch the news, you will notice that even in times of great tragedy - like that of a terrorist attack - they don't often show pictures of people's bodies dismembered. It is unnatural. It is gruesome. It is disgusting. It is grotesque. Somehow, you'll find many Christians who think it is not that big of a deal to be loosely connected to the local body of believers. When God sees members of His body—the body of Christ—loosely connected or dismembered it is ugly and grotesque. We are the body of Christ.

## 4. You are to fulfill “one another” commands with those in your church.

Love; serve; admonish; encourage; live in peace; be patient; be of the same mind toward; build up; comfort; confess your faults to; pray for; show hospitality toward; and the list could go on. There are many passages of Scripture that speak of responsibilities that Christians have toward one another. All of them are present tense verbs, meaning they are ongoing and continual responsibilities.

***Galatians 6:10 — So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.***

This means that you are to prioritize some people over others. You are to prioritize those in your church household/family over those who are not in your church. It would not be possible to fulfill these responsibilities toward everyone who calls himself a Christian. Because these commands are given in Scripture, we know that God’s design is for individual Christians to be members of a local church.

## 5. You have responsibilities toward your church leaders.

There are many passages of Scripture that teach us that, as followers of Christ, we have certain privileges and responsibilities toward our church leaders. Those Christians that have not committed to a local church could not possibly know to whom they owe those privileges and responsibilities. Do you know who your leaders are?

Many Christians are content to skip over the commands given to them regarding pastors, elders, and overseers. Others fool themselves into thinking that they just need to have a humble, helpful attitude toward all church leaders (not specific ones). Sadly, the end result is that there is a whole list of biblical commands that they cannot obey—because they do not know to whom they are responsible.

What are those privileges and responsibilities? Here are some representative examples of biblical commands and principles that all Christians must live out in order to be faithful to God’s calling on their life. Notice that as the writers of Scripture pen these words, it is assumed that Christians will know who their leaders are.

***1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 — We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.***



*Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

*Hebrews 13:7 — Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

People who are not committed to a local church do not know who they are to know, appreciate, obey, submit to, bring joy to, follow, or imitate. Godly, biblically qualified elders are appointed in a church (this is God's pattern, as we will learn), and every Christian should be able to name those under whose care they are to be fulfilling these spiritual duties. Without a commitment to a particular local church, with identified members and leaders, a Christian will be unable to fulfill these responsibilities truly and fully. Don't be a useless brick, or a dismembered limb, or fail to be able to identify the particular Christians (members and leaders) toward whom they have these privileges and responsibilities.

### *III. Commitment must be Mutual and Recognized*

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This third aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is a very general principle and is taught by implication and by the example of the early New Testament church. It is because of these principles and implications that we see the need for a formal membership process.

Did the early church have people fill out forms to become a member? We don't know that. Did they conduct membership interviews and have membership classes. We don't know that. But you are to be committed to the church and the church needs to be committed to you. And, you need to know of the church's commitment to you and the church needs to know of your commitment to them.

This is what it means to be a part of the church. This principle is true for both the leaders of the church, as well as all of the other members. We will look at the biblical reasons why separately.

## 1. You and the shepherds need a mutually recognized commitment.

We pointed out above that every Christian has responsibilities toward their leaders. It is also true that leaders have a serious and solemn responsibility toward those they are called to lead. First, the Bible says they are to shepherd you.

***1 Peter 5:1-3 — So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.***

Every elder, pastor or shepherd must ask, “Who is the flock?” He will ask that question if he wants to be faithful. He must ask that question if he desires to fulfill his responsibilities before God. Do your pastors know that you are committed to your local church, and do they know that you are committed to receiving their spiritual care and oversight? Without your verbal expression of that desire and commitment, they will not know (at least for sure) that they will give an account for your soul one day.

***Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.***

Who will the shepherds give an account for? Are you a part of this church? The shepherds need to know. If we want to be shepherded—and want the shepherds to give an account for our souls—a mutually recognized commitment is necessary.

## 2. You and the rest of the church need a mutually recognized commitment.

Both leaders and members of the church need to know that you desire a mutual commitment with them. Why do they need to know? As we have mentioned, every church member has responsibilities toward others in the church. Because of this, every member needs to know who is a part of their church.

We talked previously about all of the “one-anothers” in Scripture that outline many of our mutual responsibilities. There is also a responsibility to love one another by properly holding others accountable to live out the reality of one’s profession of faith.



In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlines this process of lovingly reproofing other members of the body. Ultimately, when a so-called brother refuses to listen to the loving reproof coming from the whole church, there comes a point where the Scripture instructs us to put them out of the church. The Apostle Paul puts it this way.

***1 Corinthians 5:11-13 — But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”***

This sobering process is a necessary part of church life (even though we all hope that it is seldom necessary). The simple point to be made under this heading is that if the church body does not know who is an “insider” and who is an “outsider” then they will not know who they are responsible to love and hold accountable in this way.

Some people simply assume that everyone will “just know” that they are a part of the church, because they regularly attend. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly what each regular attendee is actually thinking in this regard. Even though the process may be different from church to church, a formal church membership (a stated mutual commitment to one another), is a means for people to verbalize this commitment, and to clearly identify those people to whom each member owes the responsibilities of love and accountability.

So, let’s be really clear on this. Church membership is biblical. The process of becoming a member that we have developed is a means to help Christians (leaders and congregation) fulfill their biblical responsibilities. God does not command us specifically to fill out a church membership form or go to a church membership class. That is why the process is different from church to church. What these principles do teach us is that we need to have a recognized mutual commitment to each other. The process we have developed at His Place Church is simply a means we have developed to help us fulfill this responsibility.

## *IV. Appreciate the Value of Church Membership*

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The fourth aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is to fully appreciate the values and benefits of being a recognized church member. While a formal church membership commitment is a helpful way to identify and fulfill one's mutual responsibilities to others in the local church, there are also many blessings that come with having this mutual commitment with the church body. It is worth taking some time to consider them and learn how to appreciate these benefits.

### 1. You will be blessed through loving accountability.

The Christian life is hard. God has not designed us to live this life of struggling against sin alone. We need encouragement, comfort, admonishment, and love from others. When you become a member, you are asking for this encouragement and accountability. Verbalizing it reminds everyone of the blessing of being called to live life together with others who are engaged in the same spiritual battle.

### 2. You bless your shepherds with joy, which will bless you too!

Remember Hebrews 13:17? It says it is unprofitable for you if your shepherds have to lead with grief. Pastors and church leaders often grieve when people are simply "Christians-at-large" rather than committed to the mutual love and accountability for other Christians. They know that a Christian will be more edified and will profit spiritually if they make this mutual commitment (and take it seriously). It is a joyful experience to teach and shepherd people who invite and appreciate this mutual commitment.

### 3. You encourage others by committing to your part in building up the body.

*Ephesians 4:15-16 — Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

A hitchhiker is someone who wants a free ride. He doesn't assume any responsibility for the money needed to buy the car, put gas in it, or maintain it. He wants a free ride, a comfortable ride, and a safe ride. He wants the driver to take him where he wants to go. A

spiritual hitchhiker takes the church for a ride. He may switch back and forth between churches. Or he may take advantage of the same ride over and over again. He wants to take advantage of certain blessings of the church without taking any responsibility. Don't be a spiritual hitchhiker. Encourage others by doing your part to cause the growth of the body.

#### 4. You encourage other believers to commit themselves to the local church.

*Hebrews 10:24-25 — And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Making and fulfilling the mutual commitments of church membership makes the church look beautiful. As the church loves one another and does good deeds for one another, it encourages others to see the value of the mutual commitments of church membership, and to pursue fulfilling their biblical responsibilities with joy and energy as well.

#### *V. Make the Most of Church Membership*

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This is the fifth aspect of a proper commitment to the local church. We should not just appreciate the value of it, we should wholeheartedly throw ourselves into being part of that blessing and value to all the other members as well.

Every organ is created by God to be a functioning part of the body. Individual organs, separated from the human body, cannot survive except by some artificial sustenance for some time. But that is not what it is designed for. God intends that members of the body be functioning in the body and through that connection to be stimulated for growth and development.

Every Christian is designed by God to be an active member in a local body. You were not made a Christian for independence but interdependence. Just as a hand or a foot cannot survive if amputated from the human body, Christians are encouraged to see themselves as dependent on others in the body.

***1 Corinthians 12:18-21 — But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."***

Don't just verbalize a commitment and forget about it. Every member of the body needs the other members. Be diligent to fulfill the commitments you make to the church body and be diligent to help others who have made that commitment. We all need one another. And the Bible talks about the fact that there are so many ways that we actually need one another.

***1 Peter 4:8-9 — Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.***

***Hebrews 3:13 — But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.***

***Romans 12:3-13 — For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.***

What a beautiful picture of love and mutual dependence. Imagine what a glorious portrait of the value and effectiveness of Christ's love it would be if every church member were committed to this kind of love, encouragement, and service. This is truly God's design.

Make the most of your church membership commitment by always striving to live your Christian life in a manner that reflects the value of being a member in the *"household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15).



## *Distinctives and Structure*

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In week 1 we looked at our “Core Values,” which are the underlying principles that inform and energize everything we do as a church. In week 2 we discussed our Doctrine and how we should interact with one another in a humble way when differences in non-essential matters exist. In week 3 we discussed principles of church membership, highlighting its biblical nature, its importance, and the need for that commitment to be both public and mutually recognized. In our final installment this week, we hope to excite you about how the ministries of His Place Church happen in practical ways (our Distinctives, and our Organizational Structure), and then discuss what your role and responsibilities are as a committed church member.

### Our Distinctives

As stated, our “Core Values” inform and energize the ministry we do—they give shape and depth to the ministry. The shape and depth of ministry developed through the application of these core values lead us to do ministry in a distinctive way. We have chosen to identify and define these distinctives because we believe they distinguish our church from many others. We are not unique in the practice of these distinctives. Hundreds—even thousands—of churches in our country and around the world also practice these distinctives. We are convinced, however, that the practice of these distinctives in a way that is energized by a faithful application of our core values potentially sets us apart from many modern churches that are driven by cultural acceptance, or shaped by the latest ministry fad or program. In contrast to culture, fads, and programs, these distinctives are timeless practices that are relevant to all God’s people across generations and regardless of culture.

We have four such distinctives:

- ❖ Expository preaching
- ❖ Biblical reproof and restoration
- ❖ Growth groups (fellowship and teaching in small groups)
- ❖ Equipping disciples for ministry

Let’s consider each one and define and discuss their nature and importance.

## 1. Expository Preaching

His Place Church is submitted to the authority, inerrancy, and sufficiency of God's word—the Bible. This demands that we seek to understand, teach, and preach the Bible according to the author's intended meaning. Each verse and passage of the Bible has one meaning and yet may have many implications and applications for life today. The Apostle Paul gave Timothy and by extension the church these key mandates about teaching and preaching.

Teach Accurately. We must say what God says in a passage.

***2 Timothy 2:15 — Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.***

Teach Profitably. We must use the inspired scriptures to equip God's people in all areas of life.

***2 Timothy 3:16-17 — All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***

Teach Persistently. We must keep preaching and teaching whether people like or dislike what the Bible says.

***2 Timothy 4:1-2 — I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.***

### What is expository preaching and teaching?

Expository preaching and teaching is the proclamation of God's Word in such a way where the content, tone, structure, and implications of the text are directly and explicitly displayed in the sermon. Reading, explaining, and applying the text is done in context to honor the author's intent.

***Ezra 7:10 — For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.***

***Nehemiah 8:8 — They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.***

***Colossians 1:28-29 — Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.***



*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Expository preaching can be done working verse by verse through a passage or by topics using a variety of verses so long as the author's intent is conveyed.

Paul refers to the repeated, proactive, and intentional teaching of biblical and systematic theology when he speaks of the whole counsel of God.

*Acts 20:27 — for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*

The "whole counsel of God" is frequently used as jargon meaning every word and theological idea of every verse of every book of the Bible. That is a good and noble thing. But this is not what Paul had in mind, rather he was speaking of a specific body of doctrinal knowledge related to redemptive history. Depending upon the circumstances and needs of the congregation it is perfectly acceptable and good to explain and apply every word, theological idea, of a paragraph or verse. This should not be confused or equated with expository preaching.

Elders and pastors are also responsible for equipping the saints in the whole message of the Bible. Time constraints do not permit word by word, passage by passage teaching of the whole Bible. But elders use their wisdom to determine the speed and depth in which to cover the whole Bible. First Timothy 4:13 says, "*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*" This will always be the practice at HPC.

## There are three ways expository preaching and teaching are done at HPC

First, you will hear detailed, consecutive teaching through books of the Bible where each book is carefully chosen based on the most current, urgent needs of the congregation. This is the primary way HPC teaches on a Sunday morning and many of its other ministries.

Second, you will hear systematic teaching on foundational doctrines. This is done individually, in growth groups, or other ministry settings.

Third, individual, case-by-case issues and needs are addressed because of false or errant teachings on particular issues about which the congregation has immediate need. This can be done in all ministry settings at HPC.

## Accounting for giftedness, experience, passion, and personality of the teacher

There are certain essential elements that all teachers must bring to their teaching. These include accurate reading, explanation, and application of the Word of God. If these elements are not present, then it is not expository. However, sermons can and should be different in style, emphasis, and presentation according to the gifts, personality, and experience of the teacher/preacher. Many styles, and approaches can still be expository. Theological messages focusing on just one word in a passage, topical messages focusing on selected texts of scripture, or the verse by verse explanation of a passage and book, can all be expository, provided they explain and apply the original author's meaning and intent.

## 2. Biblical Reproof and Restoration

Our use of the phrase “biblical reproof and restoration” corresponds to what has historically been known as church discipline. This is how the Bible instructs us to pursue members in the church who are straying from the faith, teaching false doctrine, or living in a pattern of unrepentant sin. Our choice to use the words “reproof and restoration” better communicates the biblical process and goals of loving others in this way. Biblical church discipline is aimed at promoting repentance and, when possible, reconciliation.

It is important that every church member understand these principles for at least two reasons:

First, the reproof and restoration of fellow church members is a responsibility that belongs to every church member. This is not simply a responsibility for leaders. Notice that Matthew 18:17 (below) says that these straying brethren must listen to the church. That means everyone, not just leaders.

Second, by covenanting together with our church community you are committing yourself to give and receive this kind of loving accountability. Everyone in the church is subject to the same standard for reproof and restoration. At one level, we all need help to overcome sin. Membership, in part, is a commitment that declares we are willing to listen to fellow believers as they encourage us biblically in our battle against sin. While this process rarely is carried through to the final step, being a part of the church means recognizing that if we need this degree of help, we are willing to receive it.

What does the Bible teach about the church's responsibility in cases like those above? The principle passage is Matthew 18:15-20:

***Matthew 18:15-20 — [Jesus said] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have***

*gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

Let's consider practically what this passage teaches. It describes what is to be done if we know a brother or sister in Christ is acting in willful sin. The procedure is clearly spelled out in Matthew 18:15-20. There are four steps that are to be fulfilled if necessary.

## Personal contact — Step 1

The first step involves an individual conversation that takes place when we are convinced that our brother has performed an unrepentant, willful act of sin. This confrontation should be from the Word of God...

*Hebrews 4:12 — For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

...and done in private (Matthew 18:15). If he does not listen to you then you are to go on to the second step.

While the initial contact must be in private, this should not be understood to mean more than it says. It does not prohibit us from having contact with other people about the situation or to attempt to minister to others in light of the situation. Indeed, it is wise to listen to counsel...

*Proverbs 12:15 — The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.*

and this may prevent us from wrongly or ineffectively rebuking our brother or sister. Of course, all of our communication must be for the purpose of edification.

*Ephesians 4:29 — Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

## Group contact — Step 2

The second step is to confront with two or three witnesses. This takes place only if the sinning brother or sister “refuses to listen” and continues to be unrepentant.

These individuals are there to confirm every fact (Matthew 18:16). How are they to do this? They must confirm (1) that the act has been committed, (2) that it is indeed sinful, and (3) that it has been committed willfully and without repentance. They must also make sure the person understands the way in which their actions are clearly outside the clear teaching of God’s Word and that he understands why he needs to repent.

It is best that the individuals know the person well. The advantage of this is that the motivation of the confrontation is more likely to be recognized as genuine love and concern. However, it is essential that these individuals rightly understand the facts. If he does not listen to these individuals, then we are instructed to go to the third step.

## Church contact — Step 3

The third step is to tell it to the church (Matthew 18:17a). The goal is to have every relationship in the church (as many as possible and practical) used by God to persuade a person toward repentance. The motive and purpose of this step is to increase the level of accountability and the number of people who are lovingly calling the person to repentance.

This step must involve those in the church who exercise the spiritual oversight of the church. At His Place Church, this is the church elders. The elders will decide how to proceed so that the sinning brother will be ministered to effectively through his existing relationships within the church. If the person does not listen to the church, then we are to go to step four.

## Non-contact — Step 4

The fourth and final step is to treat him as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer (Matthew 18:17b). This is commonly referred to as dis-fellowshipping or excommunicating. The church at this point would have no further social contact with the individual. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 5:11 where we are instructed “not even to eat with such a one.” This does not mean that if we see them that we cannot acknowledge them. We should not be rude. It simply means that we are to keep our distance from them socially until they repent. We should never give the impression that the sin issue is not important. This action on the part of the church, which severs the ties with the sinning brother and thrusts them into the world, which is Satan’s domain, is intended by God to humble them and lead them to repentance.

There is an additional principle regarding divisive individuals. The process of church discipline appears to be more direct and speedier in cases of factiousness. Titus 3:10-11



says you are to “reject [have nothing to do with] a factious man after a first and second warning.” This is due to the unique threat of division that a factious man poses to the church. While much of Matthew 18:15-20 remains applicable, care must be given in informing the church so that the unrepentant, divisive man or woman can be rejected without harming unity in the body.

Our desire to practice these principles is something that distinguishes us from many churches. Sadly, many churches have soiled their reputation and the Lord’s testimony by not dealing with divisive or unrepentant sinners in this biblical fashion. We believe this practice is a matter of obedience to Jesus’ command in Matthew 18. A high view of Scripture demands we take those commands at face value. As well, they flow out of holding a high view of God and His holiness. This high view of God makes it impossible to tolerate unrepentant sin in the body of Christ. It also is a product of understanding what the Bible says about the sinful nature of man and the power of the gospel to transform us.

### 3. Growth Groups

Because of the unique structure and history of His Place Church, it is appropriate to think of our body as a church of Growth Groups, not a church with Growth Groups. We will not be able to function the way God has called us to function as a church without an effective and thriving growth group ministry.

Every member has biblical responsibilities to the body of Christ (think of the “one-anothers” of Scripture). Most of them cannot be fulfilled by a church member as a part of the Sunday

morning service. The purpose and design of our corporate worship time on Sundays is necessarily limited. The Growth Group ministry is where we connect people relationally in a way that enables them to give and receive all the blessings that come with being a part of the local church.

Our desire is that 100% of our families be involved in the growth group ministry. HPC’s vision states that “Our desire is to glorify God by loving people and making disciples of Jesus Christ.” The Sunday service is really a time to be fed, but full-orbed discipleship takes place in the context of other relationships. We believe what the church is called to do on a large scale, every growth group should be aiming at on a smaller scale. Our desire and aim is that shepherds and members of each growth group are cultivating and participating together in all the aspects of our corporate mission.

Every group will have a distinct personality, comprised of members with different gifts, desires, and burdens. There are, however, a few general goals that every group should be striving for. Of course, the overarching goal is that through this kind of focused ministry to and with one another, that we grow in our worshipful, passionate relationship with our God and Savior. To reach that goal our groups have regular times of instruction and study in God's Word, time for prayer and mutual encouragement, relational connections for shepherding and care, service opportunities within the church, and focused outreach to those in our circle of influence who need Christ. The bigger picture should also involve each group intentionally aiming at growing and multiplying their group as the church matures and grows numerically.

## 4. Equipping Disciples for Ministry

We are determined, by God's grace and to His glory, to ensure that the entire body is equipped and functioning effectively and fruitfully in the ways God has called and gifted them.

***Ephesians 4:11-16 — And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.***

That is a great description of how God has gifted and given teachers to the church so that they can equip others in ways that result in the whole body doing its part so that everyone would be built up. In many churches only the pastors are considered equipped to do real ministry (maybe some would add "significant" ministry, or "quality" ministry, or "expert" ministry). The tendency might be for people in the church to refer everyone to the pastor (or counselor) when they have a spiritual problem. Our desire is to do all that we can to teach, train, disciple and mentor others in the church to perform all the various functions of ministry in the body—serving, teaching, preaching, comforting, counseling, and leading. No church ministry should be dependent on only a few people.

This distinctive springs from our core value of having a "biblical view of leadership." Godly leaders seek to reproduce themselves *and* multiply the ability of local church members to serve and minister to one another.



***2 Timothy 2:2 — and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

***Romans 15:14 — I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.***

The objective for every pastor of God's flock should be to fully train others to exposit the Scriptures, effectively counsel the hurting, and to reproduce themselves. The church ought to be a spiritual greenhouse for discipleship and mentoring relationships. Ministry is always focused on relationships. "The work of ministry" is more than knowledge (Eph. 4:12). Matthew 28:19-20 indicates that disciple-making involves teaching people to "observe" Christ's commands. Pastors should pass on knowledge, but they must also train others to lovingly obey Christ. Pastors, and others, must train others for effective, practical ministry. This is discipleship!

Our high view of Scripture reminds us that God's Word is sufficient to accomplish this task! Through its truth every man and woman of God can be made competent and equipped for every good work.

***2 Timothy 3:16-17 — All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***

We work as a family—a community of people bound together by our hope in Christ—to equip one another so that all are growing in faith and knowledge of God, increasing in love for one another, and becoming steadfast in living life for God's glory. We do this in many ways—through:

- Corporate Sunday Morning Worship
- Growth Group Ministry
- Men's Ministry
- Women's Ministry
- Youth Ministry
- Children's Ministry
- Training and Care Opportunities

We're trying to create a healthy growth environment so that everyone in the body can grow to be like Christ. Ultimately, we desire that all of us become disciple-makers. This is why we are continually trying to equip one another to study and teach the Scriptures.

## *Our Church Government*

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His Place Church is an elder led congregation. That means we have a team of spiritually minded, mature, gifted, tested, and affirmed men who collectively shepherd the flock. We see this group of men as equal in authority and accountability, but variable in giftedness and function.

You see the titles elder and overseer used interchangeably in Titus.

*Titus 1:5-7 — This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,*

There are three different titles used: elder, overseer, and pastor.

### Elder

This Greek word has two primary uses in New Testament. It can be used for an older man or old man (1 Tim. 5:1), or as a title for a community official (an elder of the church or city). There is no specific age remains with this second usage, but it implies maturity, dignity, experience, and honor. Twenty-eight times in the Gospels & Acts it refers to the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Twelve times in Revelation it identifies the 24 elders—representatives of the redeemed people of God. Nineteen times in Acts and the Epistles, it identifies a unique group of leaders in the church.

### Overseer

This is a common word for an office holder in the Greek culture and was used of secular officials of various kinds, especially local officials. It was used for any official who acted as a superintendent, manager, controller, ruler, or governor. The LXX (the Septuagint: the Greek translation of the OT used in Jesus' day) uses the word for army officers (Num. 31:14); tabernacle administrators (Num. 4:16); supervisors of the temple repair (2 Chron. 24:12, 17); temple guardians (2 Kings 11:18); city supervisor or mayor (Neh. 11:9). It occurs only five times in NT; one time of Christ (1 Pet. 2:25), and the other four times for church leaders. It is especially used for Gentile congregations like Ephesus. It is a general word like supervisor, manager, or guardian—a function assigned to elders. First Timothy 5:17 further develops this idea of oversight (there using the title of "elder").



***1 Timothy 5:17 — Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.***

We can observe from this text that all elders are supposed to “rule.” Some elders rule particularly well. While all elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), some work hard at preaching and teaching; the implication is that some elders have greater teaching responsibilities, obviously because of God’s gifts and calling on their life.

## Shepherd

This term is also translated pastor. The noun form occurs eighteen times in the NT, usually for actual shepherds; keepers of animals. It is also used of Christ (e.g. Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:25). Only one time is it used directly of church leaders; translated “pastor” in English versions—Eph. 4:11. The term emphasizes the shepherd’s primary role of teaching or feeding the sheep.

The verb form used three times in context of the church’s leaders (John 21:16, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2). Shepherding speaks to feeding (teaching), leading (guiding), tending (guarding, protecting), and caring for the flock.

## Putting It All Together

Our conclusion is that the terms elder/presbyter, overseer/bishop, and shepherd/pastor, all refer to the same office. The qualifications for an overseer (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and for an elder (Tit. 1:6-9) are almost identical. Paul tells Titus to appoint elders (1:5), then calls the same office overseer (1:7).

First Peter 5:1-2 brings all three concepts together into one office:

***“I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight....”***

Similarly, Acts 20:17, 28 uses all three terms interchangeably.

***Now from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [shepherd] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.***

The terms are used of the same office, and...

- ❖ The term *elder* emphasizes his character—he is spiritually mature.



- ❖ The term *overseer* emphasizes his function as an overseer, manager, governor, ruler, and supervisor.
- ❖ The term *shepherd or pastor* emphasizes his functions of feeding (teacher), leading (guiding), and protecting.

## Some further Considerations

Within those guidelines and basic definitions, certain elders will excel at certain responsibilities, and therefore play a more prominent role in certain areas. This is because every man is gifted and skilled differently. Although all must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and all will “rule” (1 Tim. 5:17), some are said to “rule well” and others are said to “work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). These varied degrees of giftedness and equipping is really what distinguishes the “double-honor” elders from the “lay-elders.”

Annually, the elders are presented to the congregation for their examination and affirmation. We take this responsibility of the congregation seriously. We desire to know and hear of your appreciation and affirmation of these leaders.



## *Our Church Covenant*

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Below is the covenant that you will be asked to publicly affirm at a membership induction. More importantly, it is a real commitment you are making before God and man to live out faithfully.

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, I commit myself to unite with the His Place Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of my church by acting in love toward other members, by refusing to gossip, by upholding the doctrinal statement, and by following my leaders.
2. I will share the responsibility of my church by praying for its spiritual growth, by inviting the unchurched to come, by warmly welcoming visitors.
3. I will serve the ministry of my church by using my gifts, talents, and abilities.
4. I will support the testimony of my church by attending faithfully, by living a godly life, and by giving regularly.
5. I will pursue the Vision of my church: "Our desire is to glorify God by loving people and making disciples of Jesus Christ."

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

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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



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*C H U R C H*

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