

WHAT WE TEACH

An Expanded Doctrinal Statement



Preface

Recognizing that the Bible is the very Word of the living God to man, and understanding the priority of knowing and obeying its truths, the Elders of Visalia Evangelical Free Church are deeply committed to studying and teaching Scripture with diligence and authority.

Thus, the central ministry of VEFC is imparting the biblical truth to the people of God in order that they may know God and serve Him in worship and ministry.

The Board of Elders of the Visalia Evangelical Free Church recognizes that any doctrinal statement is but a fallible human attempt to summarize and systematize the riches of an infallible divine revelation. But this in no way detracts from the importance of such a statement. The affirmations, which follow, carefully specify the teaching position of our church with regard to the major biblical doctrines, and thus provide a framework for the ongoing curriculum and instruction at our church. They also provide an anchor to protect our church from practical and doctrinal error. For this reason, members of the pastoral staff, elders, teachers within our body, and missionaries who represent our church, are required to teach within the framework of this Statement of Faith (“What We Teach”) and the ten-part “Confession of Faith” of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

We allow individuals to join our body who may not be in complete agreement with our expanded statement of faith on these issues. They understand the teaching position of our church and choose not to undermine that position and we choose to allow them, in their priesthood as a believer, to hold to a different position. Together we strive to make disciples (Matthew 28:19), to live in harmony in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-4) and to be always growing in our ability to understand the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Ephesians 4:12-16 says, “Equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by whatever joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Our hope in this document is to clarify what we teach.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, thus the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal 24-hour days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We teach that the Word of God is completely sufficient in the area of counseling for all the non-medical needs of man. The Word of God is entirely sufficient to teach us all that we need to know about how to be rightly related to God and our fellow man (2 Peter 1:3).

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

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

GOD

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

God the Father

We teach that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is Spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11).

He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6); He saves from sin all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

God the Son

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

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

We teach that in the Incarnation, Christ laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of deity and coexistence with God the Father, and took on an existence appropriate to a servant, while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes either in degree or kind. Jesus, the eternally existing second person of the Trinity, accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity, and so became the God-man (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 15:27, 28; John 1:14).

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

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Psalm 2:7-9; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

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

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

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

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

We teach that preceding the seven-year period of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven (but not to earth) to call and receive the church unto Himself in the air. This event is called the rapture. Then, at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return to the earth with His church and mighty angels in glory, to establish His millennial kingdom. (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20; John 14:1-3).

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

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

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

God the Holy Spirit

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

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7; Titus 3:4-7).

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

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

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

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the Church. Every believer receives at least one spiritual gift for the building up of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10). The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

We teach that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the building up of the saints (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Every believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment he believes (1 Corinthians 12:13) and is to be filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit on a continual basis as he yields to the Holy Spirit and obeys the Word of God (Ephesians 5:18).

MAN

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

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

We teach that God created gendered human beings: Adam (male) and Eve (female). As such, God established the pattern of marriage to be between one man and one woman. From this covenantal bond of marriage, God intended intimacy as the means for procreation of the family. (Genesis 1:27, 28).

We teach that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of marriage between a husband and a wife (Hebrews 13:4).

We teach that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God. (Matthew 15:18-20; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). (See the Elder's position papers for more detail on our position.)

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

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

SALVATION

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

Regeneration

We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which a new nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 1:30). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation (John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; 16:14). Genuine regeneration is evident as one performs deeds appropriate to repentance demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct (Acts 26:20; Luke 3:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Good works and spiritual fruit will be visibly evident (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12b; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10) in a believer's life. This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

Election

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

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

We teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative on their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (John 1:12,13; Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).

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

Justification

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

who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

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

Sanctification

We teach that there is also by the work of the Holy Spirit a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to obedience to the Word of God. We teach that through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 5:23; Philippians 1:6; 2:12, 13).

In this respect, **we teach** that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict - the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh - but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

Glorification

We teach that one day, believers will be conformed completely to the image of the Son. Our bodies will be redeemed and we will be like Christ. This is our future hope (Colossians 3:11; Romans 8:17, 23, 24, 29, 30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21).

Eternal Security/Perseverance of the Saints

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

We teach that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Romans 6:15-22; 13:13; 14; Galatians 5:13, 25, 26; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 5:10-13).

Separation

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

We teach that all the saved should live in deep gratitude for the undeserved grace granted to us by God. Because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should demonstrate our adoring love to God so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from any religious apostasy, and from worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:1; 2 John 9-11).

We teach that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness demonstrated as we strive to portray the lifestyle advocated by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:2-12). There must also be a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

THE CHURCH

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

We teach that the formation of the Church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) and will be completed at the rapture of the Church before the seven-year Tribulation period (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

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

We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one scriptural body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (Acts 2:41; 5:13; 1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

We teach that the one supreme authority for the Church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that the Church's leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (males, who are also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We teach a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17; James 3:1; 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17).

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

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

We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Local churches, however, through their pastors and

their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judges of the measure and method of their cooperation (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We teach that the purpose of the Church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

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

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

We teach that two kinds of gifts were given to the New Testament church: miraculous and ministering. The miraculous gifts of divine revelation, tongues, and healing by the Apostles were temporal during the Apostolic era to confirm the divine message (Hebrews 2:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:8). Since the New Testament revelation is complete, Scripture alone is the sole test for authenticating the message (2 Peter 1:19). We teach that the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives gifts to every believer for the common good for building up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 1 Peter 4:10). Every message is to be tested by the Word of God (Acts 17:11). The miraculous gifts have even been counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14; Revelation 13:13-14). Many will be self-deceived, coming to Jesus in the last day claiming to have done miraculous works in His name and yet He will tell them to depart from Him because He does not know them (Matthew 7:22, 23). God can and still does heal miraculously. God does continue to use known languages to communicate the gospel. God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15). Subjective revelatory impressions, false healers, and private prayer glossolalia (non-language or ecstatic speech spoken without interpretation) are not Biblical. All the gifts must be regulated by the teachings of the Word of God, especially the principles outlined in 1 Corinthians chapters 12–14.

We teach that two ordinances have been given to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion* (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42). Baptism is, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation (1 Corinthians 1:17; Luke 23:43; Ephesians 2:8, 9). Baptism by immersion is the first act of obedience and is foundational for church membership (Acts 2:41, 42; 16:14, 15, 40; 18:8).

**Exceptions to the mode of baptism because of medical/health related reasons may be authorized by a member of the pastoral staff and/or Elder Board.*

We teach that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes. It should be celebrated with thanksgiving and joyous expectation but should also be preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). We also teach that whereas the elements of communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual Communion with the risen Christ who is present in fellowship with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Priesthood Of Believers

We teach that all members of the body of Christ are believer-priests before God the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 4:9). We teach that we have been chosen in Christ to declare the excellencies of the One who has chosen us. We teach that as believer-priests we are responsible to confess our sins directly to God (1 John 1:9) and present our own bodies to Him daily as a reasonable sacrifice of worship (Romans 12:1, 2). We teach that we are responsible to search the Scriptures to ascertain if the truth being proclaimed to us is actually according to the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15).

Therefore, we continually strive for the truth from the Word of God. Ephesians 4:12-16 says, "Equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by whatever joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

ANGELS

Holy Angels

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

Fallen Angels

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

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

LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

Death

We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 14:2, 3) which initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the redeemed souls of those who have died in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).

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

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

Rapture of the Church

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

Tribulation Period

We teach that following the rapture of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 16). These judgments will be climaxed by the second coming of Christ in glory to the earth (Matthew 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:15-31; 25:31-46).

Second Coming and the Millennial Reign

We teach that after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His Messianic kingdom for a literal thousand years on the earth (Revelation 20:1-7). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised bodily. Their souls will have been already with the Lord. During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him on the earth (Ezekiel 37:21-28; Daniel 7:17-22; Revelation 2:26, 27; 20:4; 19:11-16; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:12). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Daniel 7:17-27; Revelation 20:1-7). Those unbelievers who have died will be judged at the conclusion of the Millennium (Daniel 12:2-3; Revelation 20:4-6; 11-15).

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

We teach that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isaiah 11; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 36:33-38), and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan and the final conflict (Revelation 20:7-10).

Judgment of the Lost

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

We teach that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (Romans 14:10 13), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment, body and soul, in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-15).

Eternity

We teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth wherein only righteousness dwells (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15, 21-22). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Revelation 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Revelation 21, 22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 13: 24-28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

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THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

What Is Not Part Of The Gospel?

The Gospel is not a plan of striving to be a better person by improving one's moral behavior (Matthew 19:16; Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16; Romans 4:2-6; 10:2-4; Galatians 2:21; 3:3; 10-11). The Gospel is not about Jesus being a person's role model. The Gospel is not social justice, nor is it political action trying to transform a secular culture. The Gospel is not about being baptized. Although baptism is the first act of obedience in a new believer's life, it does not save anyone (1 Corinthians 1:17; John 4:2; Luke 23:41-43). These are all good things, but an individual must not confuse these with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ (John 6:28, 29). Good works may authenticate the Gospel (Galatians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Matthew 5:16; James 2:14-26), but they are never a replacement for the Gospel (Titus 3:5). The Gospel involves complete deliverance. It is not advice, not momentary self-improvement, nor is it a philosophical way of life.

What Is The Gospel?

The Gospel message is about Jesus Christ and what He did on man's behalf. It is available to anyone who will put their faith in Him as Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9; 3:22; 5:8-11,10; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:2; 15:3, 4; Isaiah 53:6, 12; Colossians 1:21, 22; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). He is God, Savior, Lawgiver, Judge, Justifier, Forgiver, the Substitute, the Atoning sacrifice, Righteousness, Advocate, High Priest, Sustainer, Creator, Lord and King. The Gospel is the message of the reconciliation that God has made available to man, through Christ, to restore man's broken relationship between God and himself caused by man's sin (Colossians 1:21, 22; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; Ephesians 2:14-19; Romans 5:8-11; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23; 5:1).

The term "Gospel" means good news, (Luke 2:10; Acts 8:12; Hebrews 4:2) and indeed it is. The Gospel is the message of what Jesus the Christ, the Savior of mankind (1 Timothy 4:10), did for us through His life, death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4). The Gospel is not a set of instructions or advice about what a person is to do to earn God's favor. Rather, the Gospel is the news of what Jesus accomplished through His righteous life and through His death on the cross.

The Gospel is the transforming news that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became a man and lived a sinless life by obeying the Father's moral Law perfectly. Jesus died as the substitute in man's place, because man, by nature, was hopelessly lost as a sinner. Christ graciously paid the debt man owed for his sin and satisfied the Father's justice. Jesus "gave His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus is eternally victorious over every enemy that stood between God and man and now stands as man's advocate for those who have put their trust in Him. Because of Jesus' redeeming work on the cross, nothing can separate a believer from his Creator, or from any of His promises (Romans 5:8; 10:9-11; 5:1; 8:1, 33, 38, 39). Jesus rose from the grave to conquer death and reconcile man back to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Why Do I Need the Gospel?

In the beginning, God created all things good (Genesis 1:31). Yet, man willfully chose to rebel against his Creator by disobedience to God's righteous standards, resulting in complete corruption and the curse of death passed on to all mankind (Romans 5:12; 6:23; Psalms 51:5). Mankind became wholly corrupt physically and spiritually without any possibility of recovery apart from Divine intervention and grace (Romans 8:7, 8; Ephesians 3-9). Redemption, or the moral restoration of man, can only come solely from God, by His Spirit, through the work of Jesus Christ, revealed in the Bible which is God's Word to man. Jesus is the only sufficient, perfect substitute (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

All men need God's forgiveness, because they have all violated God's moral Law and are, therefore, guilty of being law-breakers (Isaiah 64:6; Proverbs 20:9; 1 John 1:8, 10; 3:4; 5:17; Ecclesiastes 7:20). Without His forgiveness, we stand condemned for falling short of God's perfect righteousness (Romans 3:10-12, 23; Ephesians 2:3; Jeremiah 13:23; 1 John 3:3; 5:17; James 4:17). Man rightly deserves God's anger, His just wrath, and eternal punishment in hell. Man's words, actions, attitudes, and motives reflect his rebellious heart against God. Man cannot save himself. Man is utterly lost.

Christ's complete obedience to all requirements of God's Law (perfect righteousness - Philippians 2:8; Romans 5:19; Hebrews 5:8,9) and His willingness to bear all the punishment justly imposed for *mankind's* disobedience (atonement – 1 John 1:7; 2:2; 1 Peter 2:24) is the foundation for God's justification and forgiveness He offers to sinful man (Romans 1:15-17; 5:1, 8-11; 8:1, 3, 4; Isaiah 53:6, 12). Righteousness, or right standing with God, is accounted to those who put their trust in Him (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:8; 3:3, 9). The life, death, resurrection, and empty tomb of Jesus are historical facts. This good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, has purchased salvation for all those who put their trust in Him.

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Jesus said, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul said, "I have declared that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Repentance is an act of the heart, mind, and volition when someone sees their sin as God sees it and turns from it (Isaiah 55:6, 7; Psalms 32:5; 51:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10; Proverbs 28:13). Conviction is an act of the Holy Spirit on the sinner's heart, and repentance is a gracious gift of God (John 16:8; Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25, 26). Belief is putting one's trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the ability to believe is also God's gracious gift to an undeserving sinner (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Romans 4:20-24; 9:23; Acts 16:30, 31; John 6:44, 65; Ephesians 2:4, 8, 9). True faith always involves a public confession (Romans 10:9, 10). A true seeker must call upon God's mercy and acknowledge his sin and spiritual need for salvation (Luke 18:13; 1 Timothy 1:13-15). Each believer must personally acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and receive by faith His gift of righteousness (John 1:12; Romans 5:17; Colossians 2:6).

At the point of faith, God declares the guilty sinner justified, pardoned, and completely forgiven from every lawless deed (Romans 5:1; 8:1). He changes the believer from the inside out, (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the Holy Spirit indwells him (Romans 8:9-11; John 14:17; 1 John 4:13; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). The new believer is immediately adopted into God's eternal family (John 1:12, 13; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5, 6; Ephesians 1:5), and has the future hope of heaven reserved for him (1 Peter 1:3-5).

What If I Reject The Gospel?

The Bible is clear, "Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36). Hebrews 10:26, 27 says, "If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am He (the Savior), you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). The Bible says that those who reject the gospel, and what Jesus paid for their sins, they will experience God's righteous judgment and His just wrath in hell (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8; 22:15). Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but

have eternal life” (John 3:16). Each person must choose what he will do with Jesus: accept Him or reject Him.

In Summary

Man was created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. "Worthy are you, our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things" (Revelation 4:11). For believers who are in Christ, their purpose is to live for God's glory through daily obedience to His will (2 Corinthians 5:15; Colossians 1:9,10; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 8:29, 30; 2 Peter 1:3).

Jesus is Lord and King of all things, both seen and unseen. The Bible says one day that “at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10, 11). A person should not hope in the false idols of this age (any God-replacement). Jesus will soon return and overthrow His enemies and righteously judge all sin and injustice. He offers pardon, in advance, to anyone who will submit to His Lordship (John 1:12, 13).

All who, by the grace of God (unmerited favor), turn to Jesus Christ in submissive faith, will be forgiven and eternally saved. 1 John 5:10-13 says, “The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself... and the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”