

WHAT WE TEACH

THE SCRIPTURES

We teach the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments to be the full record of God's self-disclosure to humanity. Different men, while writing according to their own styles and personalities, were supernaturally moved along by the Holy Spirit to record God's very words. We trust in the verbal, complete inspiration of the Scriptures and that they contain all the words of God that we need in order to love, enjoy, trust, and obey Him. The Scriptures are without error in their original writings (Psalm 119:97-104; Psalm 119:160; Matthew 5:18; John 5:46-47; John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:15-16), completely dependable in their instruction (Proverbs 6:32; 2 Peter 1:19), eternal in duration (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:23-25), the final authority and the standard for Christian faith and daily practice (Matthew 4:4; Psalm 119), and sufficient for counsel in every spiritual and relational issue of life. (Psalm 19:7-14; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16) We teach the Bible versions which translate God's Word most literally into modern English should be preferred. It is in Scripture that we see Jesus and gain His joy for daily living. (John 5:39; John 15:11)

THE TRIUNE GOD

We teach there is one living and true God, eternally (John 17:3) existing in perfect unity as three equally and fully divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19-20) Each Person of the Godhead, while fulfilling distinct but complementary roles in redemptive history, has precisely the same nature, attributes, and being, and is equally worthy of the same glory and honor and obedience. (John 1:1-4; Acts 5:3-4)

God the Father

We teach God the Father created all things in six literal days for His glory according to His will (Revelation 4:11), through His Son Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. God upholds all things by the Word of His power, exercising sovereign authority over all creation, including the restoration of those who have rebelled against Him. (Genesis 1:1-2:3; Isaiah 46:9-10; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3)

God the Son

We teach that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, moved by love in accordance with the will of the Father, took on human flesh. (John 1:1, 14, 18) Conceived through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the virgin Mary. He, being fully God and fully man (John 14:8-9), lived a sinless life and sacrificially shed His blood and died on the cross in our place, accomplishing redemption for all who place their faith in Him. (Mark 10:45; Ephesians 2:8-9) He arose visibly and bodily from the dead three days later and ascended into heaven, where, at the Father's right hand, He is now Head of His Body the Church, the only Savior and Mediator between God and man, and will return to earth in power and glory to complete His redemptive mission. (Matthew 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 1 Timothy 3:16)

God the Spirit

We teach the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ during this age. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He draws those who are in rebellion toward Him to repentance and faith, and at salvation imparts new spiritual life to the believer, bringing that person into a reconciled relationship with Jesus Christ and the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit sanctifies, seals, satisfies, guides, instructs, comforts, equips, empowers, permanently indwells at salvation, and bestows spiritual gifts to the believer for Christ-like living and service. (John 16:8, 13:15; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 1:22, 4:11-12; Romans 8:9-17, 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 12:4-5, 11-13, 19; Galatians 5:25; Hebrews 2:1-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12)

HUMANITY

We teach God created mankind—male and female—in His own image and likeness, free of sin, to glorify and enjoy Him. Adam and Eve were given the privilege to oversee all of God’s creation under His guidance and care. Tempted by Satan, but in the sovereign plan of God, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, bringing sin, death, and a death sentence to all people. All human beings are totally corrupt by nature and by choice. Alienated from God without defense or excuse and subject to God’s righteous justice, all of humanity is in desperate need of the Savior. (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:1-6, 6:5; Romans 1:18, 32; Romans 3:10-19)

SALVATION

We teach the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as the substitutionary atonement in our place and that salvation is found in none other than Jesus Christ. Before Creation, God chose His people and granted each one unearned grace solely based on His good pleasure. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross was the sole and complete payment for sin, fully satisfying God’s righteous justice, for each person that turns from sin in repentance and places his or her faith in Christ alone by grace alone. If we go to heaven, it is because of God’s unmerited grace through Jesus Christ, and if we are eternally separated from Him, it is because of our own rebellion. We hold these two truths with humility and awe. (John 6:39, 44, 8:23-24) At salvation, each person is made a new creation by the Holy Spirit, declared righteous before God, and adopted as a child of God forever. Genuine faith continues in obedience and love for Jesus Christ with a life eager to glorify God and persevere to the end. (Romans 8:37-39; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 12:13; John 14:15)

THE CHURCH

We teach that upon placing one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the believer is made part of the Body of Christ, the one universal Church, of which Jesus Christ is the Head. The Scriptures command believers to gather locally in order to devote themselves to worship, prayer, teaching of the Word, encouragement and partnership, the ordinances of baptism and communion, service to the local body through the development and use of talents and spiritual gifts, and outreach to the world to make disciples. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 2:42-46; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Matthew 28:18-20) Wherever God's people meet regularly in obedience to this command, there is the local expression of the Church under the watchful care of a plurality of elders. A church's members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ and proclaiming His Good News to all the world. (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Ephesians 4:16; Mark 16:15)

BAPTISM AND COMMUNION

Baptism and communion are the two ordinances required in the church. We teach Christian baptism by immersion in water is a public identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Although baptism is not required for salvation, it is commanded of all believers, declares one's allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Savior, and is for believers only in order to declare that we are saved by God's grace through Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 18:8; Romans 6:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9) Scripture shows that a person was baptized after receiving forgiveness of sin through trusting in God's grace through Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41, 8:36-38, 10:47; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5) Baptism by immersion is a symbol of our death, burial, and resurrection to newness of life that happens when we become new creations in Christ. (Colossians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:1-4)

Communion is the remembrance by believers of Christ's death for us, and a reminder—through the bread and the juice—of the Savior's broken body and shed blood for us. We are reminding ourselves that Jesus satisfies as the Bread of Life when everything else leaves us unfulfilled and empty. (John 6:48-51; Jeremiah 2:13) Communion is to be a time of self-examination and also a time of celebration of who we are in Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:3-6; 1 Corinthians 11:20-32; John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5; Romans 6:6; 1 Peter 2:9, 3:18) We encourage believers to take communion in their homes and small groups as a way of life as God leads. (Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 2:41-42)

MISSIONS

Every believer has the calling and privilege to glorify God by being active participants in the Great Commission call of Jesus Christ; that is, to go and make disciples of our family, neighbors, and all nations. The primary focus and priority of this call is centered on establishing and strengthening disciple makers who make other disciple makers who then strengthen and plant churches for future generations and God's glory. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Ephesians 6:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:1-2)

THINGS TO COME

We teach and expectantly await the glorious, visible, personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blessed hope of His return has vital bearing on the personal life, service, and mission of the believer. (Colossians 3:3-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) We teach the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost. (John 5:25-29) The lost will be raised to a righteous judgment and experience eternal justice. (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9) The righteous in Christ will be raised to eternal joy in the new heaven and new earth in the manifested presence of God. (Acts 1:3, 8-11; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11-15, 21:1-4; Matthew 25:23)

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A local church is a regular assembly of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. (Ephesians 1:1-14) We teach the importance of offering an intentional and clear path for people to start and continue in healthy, encouraging, committed, accountable, and growing relationships with others in the church body. Church membership is a byproduct of people who are growing in Christ and who understand the importance of fulfilling God's call to love one another and reach the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Church membership helps make the gospel clear to non-Christians by providing a unified witness of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Pastors and elders also need to know for which of God's people they are responsible to personally know, lead, feed, and protect so that they can tend to them most responsibly and effectively. Church membership reveals devotion and commitment to Christ, His people, and His mission. (John 13:34-35, 17:20-26; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-6; 1 John 4:20-21; Acts 2:40-47; 1 Corinthians 12:14-26; Ephesians 4:11-16)

CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS

The Body of Christ exists to glorify God through the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. (Matthew 22:37-38, 28:19-20)

The Great Commission is fulfilled as disciples of Jesus Christ grow in relational and spiritual depth with Him and His people. (John 15:5, 7-8) God is glorified as we enjoy and manifest His presence, live for His glory, and go disciple others who will, in turn, disciple others. (Acts 4:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Timothy 2:2)

In seeking to fulfill the church's purpose by the empowerment of God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), we recognize the extraordinary value in multiplying the reach of God's ministry by cooperating with existing, like-minded biblical churches. God is glorified when we and other like-minded churches walk with

one another in order to foster relationships that encourage, support, lovingly admonish, and prayerfully strengthen fellow disciple makers. (Luke 9:49-50; John 13:34-35)

COUNSELING PHILOSOPHY

The Lord changes lives and accomplishes His purposes directly through reading and applying the Scriptures, meditating on the truths of the Scriptures, prayer and the influence of the Holy Spirit that leads to obedience to Jesus. (John 5:39, 17:17; Ephesians 5:18; Luke 24:45; Acts 1:8; John 14:15, 15:14; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18) The Lord uses those who proclaim His Word as they encourage, exhort, admonish, strengthen, and console others toward Christlikeness. (Romans 8:29; 1 John 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:6) God needs no new or unique insight into the human condition in order to change lives. God alone through His Spirit, word, and people provides sufficient relationship, truth, insight, empowerment, and wisdom that transforms lives. (Colossians 2:8-10; 2 Corinthians 3:18; John 15:12-13; Romans 12:1-2; John 7:37-39)

Only the God of the Scriptures can offer real solutions that lead to godliness and a successful, joyful life. (Luke 4:18; John 15:11; 1 Timothy 4:8; Psalm 1:1-3) God has given the church everything we need for life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17) He changes all of us as we trust Him and walk together in obedience to the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 5:14; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Philippians 1:6)

Because of the rebellion of Adam and Eve there are medical, genetic, and cognitive issues that need medical and holistic care. We will cooperate with any qualified medical professional to get individuals proper medical care. We also teach holistic care of the human body which includes proper eating, exercise, and rest. (Genesis 9:3; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Proverbs 20:1, 23:20-21, 25:27; Mark 6:31; Psalm 127:2; Mark 2:27)

CREATION AND EVOLUTION

We teach God is the creator of the universe and all things and that He created the earth in six twenty-four-hour days and that before He created the universe, nothing except God existed. (Genesis 1; Exodus 31:17; Psalm 33:6-9; Acts 17:24; Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16) God chose to create the universe and all that is in it to reveal His glory, divine nature, eternal power, infinite wisdom, supreme authority, and great joy. (Isaiah 43:7; Psalm 19:1-2; Jeremiah 10:12; Romans 1:20; Revelation 4:11; Genesis 1:31; John 17:13; Matthew 25:23)

We reject the theory of macroevolution, which states that nonliving substances gave rise to the first living material, which then reproduced and diversified to produce all living creatures. We teach all people are descendants of Adam and Eve, whom God created as complete human beings. (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7, 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9) The fall of Adam and Eve infected all people with sin and death, but the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives the opportunity to receive God's gift of eternal life. (Romans 5:18-19, 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22) God rules over His creation, cares about it, and is actively involved in the lives of individuals. (Job 12:10; Acts 17:25, 25:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:13; Ephesians 4:6)

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

All human life is sacred and created by God in His image. (Genesis 1:26; 2:24, 9:6) Because our Creator created us for His glory, human life is of immeasurable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. (Genesis 5:1-2; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 19:4; John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 10:31; Philippians 2:11) We are called to defend, protect, and value all human life. (Psalm 82:4, 140:12; Proverbs 14:31, 24:11; Matthew 25:39-40)

PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE

God commands, "You must not murder." (Exodus 20:13) Jesus also commands us, "love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31) Allowing someone to naturally die by withholding treatment combines these two commands, because the intention is to care for a person in the best and most humane way possible, rather than to cause someone's death.

The moral distinction between physician-assisted suicide and allowing someone to die involves intention, benevolent care, and allows God-given timing to run its course. It is in this space of God-given timing of suffering and eventually death that we can be part of God's plan to mature us, our families, and those watching in deeper awareness and dependence upon God: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

GOD'S SPIRIT, CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT, AND TONGUES

We teach the main calling of the local church is to glorify God through the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and Commission with the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit and God's word. We are a Spirit-led and biblical church that welcomes all who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as well as all who are by God's grace seeking Him. We teach the Christian life is supernatural and that the Lord continues to perform miracles, especially the work of salvation in a rebellious person. We do not seek to control personal, individual interactions with the Lord; however, the expression of tongues and other sign gifts are not to be overtly expressed at meetings that are under the authority of the elders of our church. (Matthew 22:37-39, 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 2 Timothy 1:9; Galatians 5:22; Acts 1:8; John 15:7-8; Luke 6:43-45; Matthew 7:20, 12:33)

ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA, AND WISE CONSUMPTION OF FOODS

Alcohol in itself is not evil or forbidden in Scripture. Jesus Himself drank wine and was even mistaken for a drunkard because He drank wine. (Psalm 104:14-15; John 2:3-5; Matthew 11:18-19)

We are given clear warnings concerning any amount of alcohol that changes our cognitive capabilities, impacts our judgement, or alters our behavior. Drunkenness is clearly forbidden. (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18)

Since today's modern fermentation methods often result in higher levels of alcohol than could ever have been achieved in biblical times, we must be wise and prayerful with alcohol. (Isaiah 5:11; Proverbs 23:17, 21, 29-30)

Food, alcohol, or whatever we consume is to be for God's glory and our enjoyment, not for self-medication. Believers who feel it is better not to drink any alcohol have the freedom to abstain. Those who choose to drink alcoholic beverages must always do so wisely and thoughtfully so that they do not harm others, their own testimonies, or themselves. (Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Marijuana, unless medically prescribed, is prohibited by law in many states, and we are to obey our God-given authorities. (Romans 13:1) Where marijuana use is legal, the Bible prohibits intoxication. We are told that all food, plants, and herbs are for our benefit to digest, but we are never told that we can transform those into new substances that we smoke, snort, or inject into our veins. (Genesis 1:29) Since marijuana makes a person high or intoxicated, then there is no way to smoke it and obey God's commands against drunkenness. If a person has some tolerance to marijuana, the fact that marijuana negatively influences the clarity of the mind and can impact the health of the body prohibits us from consuming it for God's glory and our good. (Proverbs 23:29-35; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20)

Lastly, food can also be misused. We are to enjoy all that God gives us but also eat in a way that honors and strengthens the body God gave us and brings God glory. Self-medicating with food can be as problematic and sinful as any drug. (Proverbs 23:21; 25:16; 1 Timothy 6:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

PHYSICAL HEALING, PRAYER, AND MEDICATION

God still performs miraculous works today. Every time an individual is saved from his or her sin nature and is turned into a redeemed follower who loves God, a miracle has transpired. (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Ephesians 2:1-5; Titus 3:1-8) We are to pray for physical healing and rescue and trust God with His answer in how He heals and rescues. (Matthew 7:7, 26:39; Romans 15:13; James 5:14-15) Although God still physically heals and rescues today, He may choose not to do so when He will get greater glory in not doing so. (2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Hebrews 11:36-38) A Christian's use of prescription drugs is between the Christian and the Lord and is not forbidden in Scripture. (Romans 14; Proverbs 31:6; 1 Timothy 5:13) The believer should, however, care for his or her body as being the temple of the Holy Spirit and be careful that no prescription drug masters his or her life if at all possible. (1 Corinthians 3:13, 6:12)

ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

It is God's divine love that saves a person from his or her rebellion, and it is God's kindness and patience that leads a person to repentance. (Ephesians 1:1-14; Romans 2:4) All glory for the salvation and security of every believer belongs to God alone. (Romans 3:21-31; Ephesians 1:7-9, 2:8-9; Jude 1:24-25) We teach everyone who is born again by the Spirit through Jesus Christ is eternally assured of salvation from the moment of conversion. (Philippians 1:6) This assurance relies on God's grace rather than on the Christian's performance. (Ephesians 2:8-9) A person who professes genuine faith in Christ immediately becomes God's eternal possession (Luke 23:42-43; Acts

2:40-41, 16: 30-34), and nothing can snatch that person out of God's hands. (John 10:27-29) We are protected by God's unlimited power. (1 Peter 1:4-5) Obedience, good works, and fruit-bearing do not earn or maintain the believer's salvation but indicate the reality of the person's love of Christ and profession of faith. (Luke 6:46; John 14:21, 15:7-8; James 2:17-18)

THE PROCESS OF CHRISTLIKENESS AND MATURITY

Mature disciples go, grow, and glorify God through their relationship with Jesus Christ. A person in a reconciled relationship with Christ will see growth in personal Christlikeness over time and will experience a more mature and enjoyable relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ because we are already "complete in Christ." (Colossians 2:8-10) Growing Christlike over time with God's word, by His Spirit, and walking in community with other believers is to be a way of life for every follower of Christ. (Colossians 1:9-10, 1:28; Ephesians 4:11-15) Our leaders are committed to multiplying the godly characteristics of God's work in their lives into others. (1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Timothy 2:2) This multiplication of ministry is key to the healthy growth of the church. Healthy disciples reproduce healthy disciples. (Matthew 4:19) All disciples of Jesus Christ should serve others and reproduce healthy disciple makers in the local church rather than just the "professional pastors" bearing total responsibility to care for, disciple, and serve the congregation. (1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 2:2)

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Demonic activity is real, but God being in us is greater than any demon or anything that demonic forces can do to us. Christians, therefore, should neither fear demons nor go looking for them. We have authority to reject Satan's attacks and daily live out our freedom in Christ. (Galatians 5:1; James 4:7; 1 John 4:4) Although Satan and his demonic servants oppose the work God performs for, in, and through His people, God, Who is infinitely more powerful than Satan, in due time will always have complete victory over Satan's present work in this world. (1 Peter 5:8; Genesis 3:1-7; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 4:4; Revelation 20:1-10)

Although it is appropriate to pray in Jesus' name for protection against demonic activity, the Scriptures do not instruct the Christian to "bind Satan in Jesus' name." Rather, the Scriptures instruct the Christian to combat Satan by:

- Humbly drawing near to God, knowing that He will give grace, mercy, and strength (2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Hebrews 4:15-16; James 4:8; 1 Peter 5:6-10)
- Resisting Satan's temptations (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9)
- Applying the truth of the Scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11; John 8:44; Ephesians 4:24-27)
- Forgiving offenses (2 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- Putting on the armor of God's truth, righteousness, readiness to share the Gospel, faith, salvation, and prayer (Ephesians 6:11-20)
- Enduring trials with God's Spirit and strength while not growing weary in doing what is good (Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 5:18; Revelation 2:10, 2:13, 3:9-10)

ELDERS, PASTORS, AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

In Scripture, elders—also called pastors or overseers—are called to lead the church (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1–2), teach the Word (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teaching (Acts 20:17, 28–31; Titus 1:9), pray for the sick (James 5:14), equip the saints (Ephesians 4:11–13), and use proper judgment in theological and doctrinal matters. (Acts 15)

The qualifications for the office of elder are given primarily in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Titus 1:6–9, and 1 Peter 5:1–5. In these passages, elders are expected to model spiritual, moral, and social godly character. They are to live sincere, generous, faithful, and hospitable lives. They are students of Scripture, holding to biblical truth, and able to teach others. If married, they

are to be faithful husbands of one wife, with home lives that prove that they apply the truth of Scripture not only in public, but also in private.

Biblical requirements for elders preclude women from serving in that role. We do not see this as an issue of equality, for men and women are equal under God. (Genesis 1:26-28) We affirm the God-ordained and significant role that women are to have in a local church. The testimony of Scripture shows that women are equal partners in salvation, in theology, and in mission. Every leadership opportunity is open to women except those that are excluded by Scripture. Scripture provides no examples of women who served the church in the capacity of elder overseeing a local church, and the consensus from church history corroborates this perspective. More pointedly, Scripture forbids women from teaching with the authority of an elder and exercising spiritual authority over men in the church. (1 Timothy 2:12, 3:15)

Women are called to exercise all of the same spiritual gifts as men within the community of faith and in the world, including teaching, explaining the truth of Scripture, and proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ from Scripture. (Acts 2:17–18; Colossians 3:16; 1 Peter 4:10–11; John 5:39)

GENDER, MARRIAGE, AND SEXUALITY

We recognize that all have sinned, and as a result, our brokenness is demonstrated in numerous ways that are contrary to God's ways, including greed, selfishness, covetousness, and immorality. We teach all people must be shown compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Any behavior or attitudes not displaying these qualities should be rejected, as they are not in accord with Scripture or the Spirit of Christ. (Galatians 5:14; Luke 6:31-38)

We teach God wonderfully created each person as distinctly male or female. (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:18-25, 5:1, 2) These two distinct and complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Gender identity is determined by biological sex and not by one's self-perception – a perception

which is often influenced by fallen human nature in ways contrary to God's design. (Ephesians 4:17-18; Jeremiah 17:9) Rejection of biological and God-given gender is a rejection of the image of God within that person. We extend love and compassion to those whose sexual self-understanding is shaped by a distressing conflict between their biological sex and their gender identity. We also offer the Good News of freedom through Jesus Christ. (Luke 4:18-19; 1 John 1:9)

We teach marriage was created and sanctioned by God to join one man and one woman in a single and exclusive union for a lifetime. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6)

We teach God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Any form of sexual intimacy outside of marriage is sexually immoral and is sin against God and His design for healthy relationships. (1 Corinthians 6:15-7:6; Ephesians 5:3-7) Sexual immorality includes, but is not limited to, adultery, sexual activity outside of marriage, homosexual conduct, and pornography. (Matthew 15:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4)

We teach God offers forgiveness, transformation, and restoration to all who confess and repent from their sin and humbly ask for God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:11; John 8:31-36) Our love for the Gospel and urgency for the Great Commission includes declaring what Scripture teaches about God's design for us as male and female persons created in His image, for His joy, and for His glory. (Psalm 34:8; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 20:27; Romans 11:36)

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

God's main purpose in marriage is not to make us happy by uniting us with the perfect person, but to help in making us holy by teaching us to love and live like Him. Marriage is a relationship in which God fuses two lives into one

for His glory, their good, and for future generations to be blessed. The two individuals become one flesh. Our lives, finances, bodies, parenting, discipling others, and much more become one. More than a contract, marriage is a covenant relationship with God and a companionship for partnership and for procreation (either biological children, adoptive children, or spiritual children whom we disciple). God designed marriage to reflect the Trinity: distinct persons, one essence, and one main goal to make the name of God glorious to everyone. (1 Corinthians 10:31; Psalm 78:6) This kind of covenant unity cannot just be discarded. It's not a contract where we negotiate terms and have a buyout option. It's a fusion of two lives that creates oneness. (Genesis 2:24-25; Matthew 19:1-12)

Is it ever okay to divorce?

Jesus says that divorce should not be an option except in the case of ongoing and unrepentant adultery. (Matthew 5:32, 19:9) Adultery kills the covenant. When a person unites himself or herself to another person sexually, he or she has destroyed the covenant. You are free to remarry if your spouse dies; it is the same if a person commits adultery. Adultery nullifies the covenant, which makes divorce a legitimate biblical option.

Another biblical reason for divorce is if an unbelieving spouse abandons the covenant relationship and leaves the marriage. (1 Corinthians 7:10-15) An individual is no longer bound to the marriage because the departing spouse has killed the covenant.

What if there is technically not adultery or the departure of an unbeliever, but one spouse is abusive, or the spouse is involved in illegal activity that he or she won't stop--one that is endangering the family?

First, one would need to leave the situation, seek help and safety, and ask people around you to encourage and walk with you.

Many Bible scholars say that the logic of Paul and Jesus' statements may allow for divorce when a spouse has killed the covenant by becoming an unsafe partner through his or her rebellious behavior. Some theologians teach separation but not divorce. Each individual must make a choice through prayer, with biblical guidance, and in humility. (Romans 14:1-12; Philippians 3:15) From the beginning of creation, God established marriage as a loving and covenant relationship between a man and a woman for a lifetime, not a consumer or throw-away relationship. Divorce is to be as radical as amputating a leg or arm—a last resort. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:1-12; Malachi 2:15-16)

The empty tomb is the answer for a soul broken and beat up by divorce. You can't change the bad decisions that you or someone else has made in the past. Those failures, sins, and missteps do not mean that God is done with you. God loves redeeming the worst situations, even the hardest cases. Trust your past, present, and future fully to God and His grace, and move forward with Him. (Psalm 51:1-10; Jeremiah 17:14; John 8:1-10; 1 John 1:9; 1 Peter 5:10)

GAMBLING

Scripture endorses three ways to obtain goods or money: working, obtaining goods through exchange, and receiving gifts or inheritance. (Numbers 27:6-11; Proverbs 31:15-19; Colossians 3:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 3:7) Gambling tends to cultivate a materialistic view of life and often takes from those who cannot afford to lose their monies or goods. Gambling also cultivates winners and losers through games of chance. For someone to truly succeed in gambling, someone else must lose their monies or goods. None of these can reflect the Great Commandment or Great Commission. (Matthew 22:37-39, 28:18-20) There could be certain types of gambling in which one does not have the motivation to take from others and win by seeing others lose (investments, the stock market, penny poker, and games of fun), but one must have the motivation to love his neighbor, do so in

good conscience, and not cause others to stumble. (Romans 13:10, 14:1-23)

WORSHIP

The chief purpose of mankind is to glorify God by loving and enjoying Him with the entire heart, soul, mind, and might. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 22:37) All believing men, women, and children are to glorify God and fulfill the purpose of their existence. Worship glorifies God through reverence (Psalm 95:6), praise (Psalm 99:5), prayer (Daniel 6:10-11), thanksgiving (Nehemiah 12:46), and a complete yielding to Him (Romans 12:1-2). Worship declares His worth, makes much of Him, and celebrates Him in a life of joyful obedience. We seek to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth for His glory and others' good. (Exodus 15:1-21; 2 Samuel 6:14-16; Psalm 5:7; John 4:23-24; Revelation 4:11; 5:12; Matthew 22:37-39)

When we gather, we seek to:

- Make much of the name of Jesus Christ (John 4:22-26; John 12:32; John 14:6)
- Lead God's people to know and exalt Christ in music and Christ-honoring lyrics (Nehemiah 12:45-46; Psalm 66:1-4, 95:1-2)
- Ask the Lord to speak through the proclamation of Scripture as we prepare ourselves to hear from Him and follow Him (Psalm 95:6-9; John 5:39; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; James 1:22-25)
- Emphasize fresh and contemporary expressions of praise while retaining traditional elements that recognize the richness of our heritage in the faith (Deuteronomy 32:7; Psalm 33:3; Isaiah 46:8-9; Matthew 13:32; Ephesians 5:19; Revelation 5:9)
- Pursue Spirit-led direction in worship, knowing that God alone through His word and Spirit can lead us to transformation and true worship (John 4:23-24; Luke 10:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17)