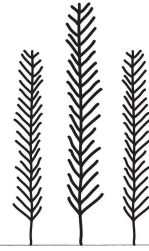


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# What We Teach

2019 Edition



THEBRANCHCHURCH

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## **What We Teach: What Is This Document?**

As a church, we believe there are certain beliefs that are distinctive to what identifies us as followers of Christ. That is not what this document is. Those beliefs can be found in our Statement of Faith section in our constitution or on our website under “What We Believe”.

This document serves a different purpose than our “What We Believe” document. “What We Teach” exists to better inform our church what our elder’s beliefs are in relation to some of the “non-essential” tenants of the faith. These are beliefs on different topics that Christians have freedom to disagree on, yet still remain united in our identity as Christ followers. Below you will find The Branch Church’s stance on a variety of topics; some theological, some social, and some practical. We will be calling each topic an “article”. We hope these articles can help inform you on what you should expect to hear from us as we preach and teach at TBC. We don’t hold these beliefs to be exhaustive or inexorable from change. We admit we are fallible humans with limited understanding. However, after much study, prayer, and discussion, these beliefs mark our understanding of what Scripture teaches to the best of our ability as your elders.

TBC Elders

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## Angels

Angels are spirit creatures (*Hebrews 1:14*) who serve God and direct our attention and worship to God alone. There is a vast number of them (*Hebrews 12:22*), but only three are named in Scripture: Michael the archangel, Gabriel, and Lucifer (who later fell and became Satan). They are higher in rank than humans (*Hebrews 2:7*), and they are incredibly powerful, but not all-powerful (*Matthew 28:1; Daniel 10:13*). Angels are personal spiritual beings who have intelligence, emotions, and will. Angels, like all creatures, are subject to the will of God, and at times angels are sent by God to help and serve believers (*Hebrew 1:14*). Angels serve God. The Hebrew word for angel is *malak* and the Greek word is *angelos*, both simply meaning "messenger."

The Bible tells us that there is a hierarchy of angels. Some are cherubim (*Genesis 3:24*), others are seraphim (*Isaiah 6:2*). Not too much detail is given about the distinction in ministry between these types of angels, although Scripture does note distinctions in appearance. Other angels are referred to as "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers" in *Colossians 1:16*. Only Michael is referred to as an archangel.

For more information on spiritual forces, please see the 'Satan and Demons' article on page 17.

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## Christian Eschatology

We teach that Jesus Christ is returning to the world in the future to judge the living and the dead. Christian eschatology looks to study and discuss matters such as death and the afterlife, Heaven and Hell, the second coming Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the rapture, the tribulation, millennialism, the end of the world, the Last Judgment, and the New Heaven and New Earth in the world to come.

We teach that the completion of all things includes the future, physical, visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the glorification of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. We believe that there is a judgment of the work of a believer, the bema seat judgment.

We teach that in the end, Satan, with his hosts and all those outside Christ, is finally separated from the compassionate presence of God, enduring eternal punishment (*Rev. 20:7-15*), but the righteous, in glorious bodies, will live and reign with

Him forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then the eager expectation of creation will be fulfilled, and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God, who makes all things new (*Rev. 21:1-5*).

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## **Christian Liberty**

Christian liberty concerns issues not strictly forbidden in the Bible over which Christians have varying views and opinions. Typically those issues revolve around social do's and do not's such as whether or not to wear certain kinds of clothes, makeup, jewelry, tattoos, piercings and hair styles. Other social do's and do not's pertain to practicing certain things such as smoking, social drinking of alcohol, recreational gambling and choices of entertainment. This is not an exhaustive list but a sample of issues Christians have varying opinions on.

The Apostle Paul addressed similar issues faced by the early church. The clearest instruction on these matters is found in in Romans 14. Paul is not addressing those things – drunkenness, sexual immorality, for example – that are expressly prohibited in Scripture and always sin.

When something is not expressly prohibited in Scripture, the duty of believers is to find a balance between legalism and license. Legalists reduce the Christian life to a list of rules, to “do's and don'ts”. To a libertine “anything goes”. These people often fall into undisciplined living and sin.

In view of that, we teach the following concerning Christian liberty. We urge our members to use the following questions as a guide in these matters.

Will my freedom in disputable matters cause another believer to stumble? Paul clearly states that, “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.” I must limit my freedom if it leads others (whose conscience does not allow them the same freedom) to sin.

Will my freedom lead to slavery? For example: The Bible does not prohibit believers from drinking alcohol (*1 Timothy 5:23; Romans 14:20,21*). However, godly freedom with out godly wisdom can lead to abuse. When freedom becomes addiction it is no longer freedom, but becomes slavery.

How will the exercise of freedom effect my testimony? "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food" (*Rom. 14:20*). I may be free to partake in certain things but if doing so destroys my testimony with an unbelieving world, I'm no longer acting in wisdom.

Am I a "professional weaker brother"? The "professional weaker brother" is always critical and offended by the actions of others and sees himself / herself as superior and more spiritual. To that person Paul writes "The man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand."

Does expressing my freedom pass the wisdom test? What is the wisest course of action when I survey the whole of Scripture? What I wear, for example, is a matter of freedom. But wisdom considers the following Scriptures in making decisions on dress: "We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works". We are not to "conform any longer to the pattern of this world". We should "dress modestly, with decency and propriety" (*1 Timothy 2:9*). We should "clothe ourselves in humility toward one another" and "look out for the interest of others". We should be "imitators of Christ" who pointed people to Father and away from Himself. If my motive in dress is to draw attention to myself, I am no longer living in wisdom.

I may have freedom in an area, but how will I feel about the exercise of that freedom when I stand before the Lord and give an account of my life? "We will all stand before the judgment seat" (*Romans 14:11*). For example, occasional recreational gambling may not be expressly prohibited in Scripture but how will I explain that stewardship choice when I stand before the Lord and give an account of how I used the resources He entrusted to me? This truth alone makes freedom a precious and a serious thing.

Am I willing to forgo my freedom for the sake of others? Paul clearly teaches that my freedom ends when it hurts someone else in the family of God. Maturity demands acceptance and acquiescence to the weaker brother or sister. "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat you are no longer acting in love." Simply stated, the goal of all our choices and actions should be love.

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## Creation

We teach that God created the universe out of nothing. (*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, and supreme authority.

We teach that creation is distinct from God yet always dependent on God. God rules over His creation and cares about and is involved in the lives of individual people (*Job 12:10; Acts 17:25; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:13; Ephesians 4:6*).

We teach that God created mankind in His image, after His likeness and that mankind had its beginning somewhere between 6,000-15,000 years ago. (*Genesis 1; Exodus 31:17; Psalm 33:6-9*) We deny that a natural process such as evolution could create human beings made in God's image. We deny that nonliving substances gave rise to the first living material. We believe that all people are descendants of Adam and Eve, whom God created personally and individually and as complete human beings (*Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9*).

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## Cults

Any group that denies that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, or denies salvation through Jesus Christ alone is a cult.

Dr. Ronald Enroth explains that "we define the word 'cult' to mean a group of religious people whose belief system and practices deviate significantly from and often contradict the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by orthodox, biblical Christianity and as expressed in such statements as the Apostles' Creed" (*Evangelizing the Cults*, Servant Publications, 1990, p. 11).

The basic mark of any cult, however, is that it rejects the divinity of Jesus.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh—that He alone was both fully man and fully God. Cults, however, deny this, and often confuse people who aren't familiar with the Bible by twisting its meaning. In a Christian context, the definition of a cult is, specifically, "a religious group that denies one or more of the fundamentals of biblical truth." A cult is a group that teaches doctrines that, if believed, will cause a person to remain unsaved. A cult claims to be part of a religion, yet it denies essential truth(s) of that religion. Therefore, a Christian cult will deny one or more of the fundamental truths of Christianity while still claiming to be Christian.

The two most well-known examples of cults today are the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Both groups claim to be Christian, yet both deny the deity of Christ and salvation by faith alone.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons believe many things that are in agreement with or similar to what the Bible teaches. However, the fact that they deny the deity of Christ and preach a salvation by works qualifies them as cults. Many Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and members of other cults are moral people who genuinely believe they hold the truth.

One such example is contained in a talk given by Elder Lynn G. Robbins (Elder Robbins was sustained as a General Authority Seventy of the Mormon church, the Latter-day Saints) The following quote is from his talk at the 2018 General Conference. It is lengthy, but it's worth a careful read.

"While we are grateful for second chances following mistakes, or failures of the mind, we stand all amazed at the Savior's grace in giving us second chances in overcoming sin, or failures of the heart.

No one is more on our side than the Savior. He allows us to take and keep retaking His exams. To become like Him will require countless second chances in our day-to-day struggles with the natural man, such as controlling appetites, learning patience and forgiveness, overcoming slothfulness, and avoiding sins of omission, just to name a few. If to err is human nature, how many failures will it take us until our nature is no longer human but divine? Thousands?

Knowing that the straight and narrow path would be strewn with trials and that failures would be a daily occurrence for us, the Savior paid an infinite price to give us as many chances as it would take to successfully pass our mortal probation. The opposition which He allows can often seem insurmountable and almost impossible to bear, yet He doesn't leave us without hope.

To keep our hope resilient as we face life's trials, the Savior's grace is ever ready and ever present. His grace is a "divine means of help or strength, ... an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts."

There are a number of things worth pointing out in these four paragraphs. Robbin's point is that, the Savior paid an infinite price to give us as many chances as it would take to successfully pass our "mortal probation". The atonement is all about giving us second, third, fourth, etc. chances to pass the test of life!

Note that grace is activated only "after they have expended their own best efforts." This is a quote from the Latter-day Saints Bible dictionary. It reflects the Book of Mormon verse stating we are saved "after all we can do" (*2 Nephi 25:23 'The Book of Mormon'*).

So, what did Jesus do for us? According to Mormonism, he gave us more chances to overcome our sins and to change our nature from human to divine. He also will powerfully enable us to do this but only after we have expended our best efforts. Mormonism states he gave us more chances to pass the test, but it is still up to us to do it.

This greatly differs from the biblical message. The Bible says Jesus' atonement didn't give us second chances, but eternal life. Biblical grace isn't activated after we expend our best efforts but while we were still dead in sin we were saved by grace (*Ephesians 2:4-5*). The Bible says he saved us while we were dead in sin and we have to do nothing to have eternal life. It is God's gift to us (*Romans 6:23*). This, my friends, is a world of difference.

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## **Discipleship**

Discipleship is a life-on-life relational process that God has instituted to present believers mature in Jesus Christ.

We teach that discipleship is a command for every believer. In Matthew 28:19–20: Jesus commands them to, "go therefore and make disciples". Discipleship is a process that starts at conversion and continues for life. In the Bible, we see the discipleship process done in the context of relationship and community.

We teach that the goal of discipleship is christian maturity, as Paul states in Colossians 1:28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." We spend a lifetime teaching them to obey all that Jesus said. That is what the verb "disciple" in the New Testament would include.



So evangelize people, baptize people, and then spend a lifetime teaching them to obey all that Jesus said.

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## **Gifts of the Spirit**

Spiritual gifts are supernatural empowerments given by the Holy Spirit to the followers of Christ so that they can do the work of building up the body of Christ, that is, the church, and extend the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

We teach that the gifts of the Spirit are available today and are to be desired by God's people, but we must be careful to practice them according to the Scriptures. Scripture nowhere states that the gifts have ceased. In fact, we have implicit evidence that they will continue until the future return of Christ. We believe "when the perfect comes" in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, refers to the future return of Christ.

We deny the teaching that tongues are a necessary sign of salvation, sanctification, or maturity because Scripture explicitly denies that tongues are universally possessed by all believers (*1 Cor. 12:27-30*).

We teach that believers should pursue the gifts, exercise them in an orderly manner, and subject them to God's Word (*1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,37-40*). To grow in an understanding and appreciation of the gifts, it is helpful to be walking in a healthy church community with others whom you can grow alongside of.

The list of gifts can be found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, and 1 Peter 4:11. We teach that these gifts are clearly identified in scripture as spiritual gifts that have been revealed, although God is not limited to giving just the gifts found in scripture. He can give His people anything they need for life and godliness, according to His will. (2 Peter 1:3)

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## **Heaven**

We believe that heaven exists and those who die in Christ will be raised to life with him, until Christ returns (see the article on Christian Eschatology). God has prepared heaven as a place for those that love Him and have put their faith and trust in The Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven is where God the Father dwells in unapproachable light

(1 Timothy 6:16) as well as his angels and those that have been resurrected unto life (Revelation 4:1-11). Heaven is free from all imperfections such as all sin, sickness, mourning, and pain. These things are all result of sin have been removed from God's presence and shall never enter heaven again (Revelation 21:4).

We believe that at the completion of time, there will be a new heaven and a new earth and that The new heaven and new earth is eternal, never ending in its existence. (2 Corinthians 5:1) Those that dwell in the new heaven and new earth will have incorruptible and glorified bodies (1 Cor 15) Heaven will be free from marriage (Luke 20:4-36). Believers will be able to recognize one another in heaven (2 Samuel 12:23, Matthew 8:11). The new earth will be full of many things that we enjoy on earth. (Ex. food, rivers, trees, a city). Hebrews 11:

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## **Hell:**

We teach that there exists a real, literal and eternal place of punishment the Bible calls "hell", which is also referred to as "the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:10). Hell was originally created for Satan and his demons. However after the fall of man, it has become the eternal destination for all mankind that does not repent from their sin and turn to Jesus Christ for salvation. It is unclear what hell will exactly be like as the Bible uses words like "darkness, fire, suffering, weeping and gnashing of teeth", to describe it.

While much of hell remains a mystery, much of which we have not been told, we do know that the Bible has revealed the following: Hell is a place that has been separated from God's presence and that was created for punishment. Therefore, no man or woman ought to sensibly desire to spend their eternity there, but do so because of their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:7-9) There will be eternal suffering in hell. How those in hell suffer is not clear in Scripture, but suffering will be a major component of its reality. (Revelation 20:10). There is no possibility of leaving hell for all of eternity for any beings that are damned there. Hell is an endless existence of suffering and torment. (Revelation 20:10)

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## **Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

We believe that marriage was created and instituted by God. It is a heterosexual, lifelong covenant relationship and that its origin dates back to the first two humans, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

We teach that Scripture affirms that marriage should model the relationship Christ has with the Church (*Ephesians 5:25*), that marriage is to be an example of the redemptive and submissive nature of Jesus, modeling Christ to the world, and that marriage should aim be filled with the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Galatians 6:22-23*).

We teach that God has given mankind sex as a gift to be enjoyed and to procreate within the confines of marriage. Sexual intimacy outside of the covenant relationship of marriage is a perversion of God's original design and is sin (*Hebrews 13:4, Deut. 22*).

At TBC we believe divorce is never what God desires for a marriage. The Bible is clear - marriage is meant to be for life between one man & one woman. However, we live in a fallen world. Many times divorce happens when one or both spouses do not know Jesus. Sometimes there is physical or emotional abuse, or danger to one spouse, and sometimes unfaithfulness on the part of a spouse. We live in a fallen world where sin, if left unchecked, can destroy marriages.

Our desire for every divorce or separation is reconciliation, even in the face of great challenges. We advocate that reconciliation would happen under the care, authority, and guidance of the pastoral staff and trusted Christian licensed professional counselors. We recognize in many situations, this is impossible. Perhaps one spouse has remarried, or one party is simply not willing to reconcile or address the issues which led to the separation or divorce.

We believe that no sin, and certainly no divorce, is greater than God's grace and forgiveness. The cross is able to bear the weight of all our sins, no matter how great.

When a couple comes to us, we seek to work through issues that could cause problems in their future marriage. In the case of divorced couples, we will seek to make sure the same issues that caused the previous divorce are no longer present in this marriage. Repentance of divorce and the issues that caused the divorce are key before beginning a new relationship or marriage.

Our desire is that the marriages at TBC be whole, healthy, and most importantly, Christ Centered. We pray that every marriage would be growing in Godliness, and seeking to work through any and all issues, knowing that God is able to restore and bring healing to any marriage.

For more information on human sexuality as referenced in this article, please see the article titled 'Sexuality' on page 18.

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## **Mental Health**

We believe that mental illnesses are real and we, as a church family, seek to help those who suffer with mental illness in a compassionate and informed way. We use many bible passages that refer to mental suffering to guide our teaching, including Philippians 4:6-7, 2 Timothy 1:7, John 16:33, 1 Peter 5:7, Ephesians 6:12, James 5:13-15, and Matthew 7:14-20.

We teach that all mental illness is ultimately caused by sin. We realize that not all mental illness is caused by personal sin or lifestyle choices but we affirm that there can be personal choices or 'sins' that have contributed or caused the illness. We also teach that while it may not be someone's fault that they have become mentally ill, it is primarily their responsibility to pursue fullness of health with the help that is available to them.

Mental illness can be caused by demonic influence, neurological impairment or chemical imbalance, poor lifestyle choices, stress, sins of abuse, terror, or neglect, willful sin, and sins committed against us as persons. We teach that mental illness can often be caused by a complicated combination of multiple or all of the above sources that are a result in living in a sinful world.

Mental illnesses are often best managed using a combination of treatments from a team of experienced people such as counsellors, psychiatrists, nurses, pastors, social workers etc. Effective treatments can include different combinations of biological treatments such as medication; psychological treatments such as counseling or cognitive behavioral therapy; and social treatments such as family therapy or changing working environments.

We teach that the ultimate solution to mental illness is restoration through Christ, our glorified bodies made whole and well in eternity with Him. This involves one's relationship with God, one's faith in Him, one's submissive obedience to His ways, one's relationship with His Church, and one's understanding of their identity as a disciple of Jesus. Spiritual care helps all of the available treatments to be centered on Christ, full of hope, love and meaning and it makes them more effective.

We teach that in certain circumstances there may be a need for special prayer for deliverance from demonic influence, but that this should be done with care, sensitivity and by the elders of the church.

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## **Ordinances**

We believe that there are two ordinances that the church is obligated to keep and obey. Those ordinances are Communion and Believers Baptism.

We believe that communion or the Lord's Supper is memorial in nature. That is, it reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for our sins; of His broken body and shed blood. Participating in communion is not a means of salvation. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The bread and wine used in communion are symbolic reminders of the body and blood of Christ. They do not become the actual body and blood of Christ (Catholic and Orthodox view called Transubstantiation) nor is the body or blood of Christ mysteriously present (Lutheran view called Consubstantiation) in the bread and wine. We deny any physical form or presence of Christ in the bread and wine.

We teach that all believers not living in open, unconfessed sin, should participate in communion. The Lord's table is not for perfect people. The table is for forgiven people who partake in the Lords Supper with humility and awe. If there is known, unconfessed sin in a person's life he or she must refrain from partaking in the Lords Supper (*1 Corinthians 11:27-28*).

We teach that baptism is an ordinance instituted by Jesus by which those who have repented and come to faith in Christ express their union with Christ in his death and resurrection by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:19*).

We teach that baptism is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the church, a symbol of burial and cleansing, and signifies death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin. Baptism is not a means of salvation but an outward expression of the transforming power of God's grace.

We see no Scriptural basis for infant baptism. However, we believe it is wise for parents to dedicate their children to Christ at a young age and as a church we provide an opportunity to dedicate children in our services.

For more information regarding child dedication, please speak with a pastor.

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## Race

God cares how we treat each other because we're all created in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). He makes no distinction between the inherent value of one race or ethnicity over another. He (God) cares about people regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and social status (*Deuteronomy 10:17-19*) "God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (*Acts 10:34-35*). "We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (*1 Corinthians 12:13*). "If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (*James 2:9*)

About the age to come, we see a heavenly picture: "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (*Revelation 7:9-10*).

God isn't about racial separation, but inclusion and unity. Jesus made it possible for anyone to be included in the people and promises of God (*Galatians 3:28*).

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## Salvation

We teach that salvation is a process that starts at a point in time (past act) continues throughout our lives (present process) and is complete upon our resurrection (future promise). Salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (*John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19*).

When a person is "born again" the salvation process begins, and they 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 all mankind is dead in their sin, that as a result of the fall of man (*Genesis 3:6*) every part of man—his mind, will, emotions and flesh—have been corrupted by sin. In other words, sin affects all areas of our being including who we are and what we do. It penetrates to the very core of our being so that everything is tainted by sin and "...all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" before a holy God

(*Isaiah 64:6*). It acknowledges that the Bible teaches that we sin because we are sinners by nature.

The Bible also teaches us that man is born dead in transgression and sin (*Psalm 51:5, Psalm 58:3, Ephesians 2:1-5*). The Bible teaches that because unregenerate man is "dead in transgressions" (*Ephesians 2:5*), he is held captive by a love for sin (*John 3:19; John 8:34*) so that he will not seek God (*Romans 3:10-11*) because he loves the darkness (*John 3:19*) and does not understand the things of God (*1 Corinthians 2:14*).

The Apostle Paul summarizes the condition of man in *Romans 3:9-18*. He begins by saying that "both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Simply put, this means that man is under the control of sin or is controlled by his sin nature (his natural tendency to sin).

Then in the rest of this passage Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament in explaining how sinful man really is. For example, we see that no one is without sin, no one seeks after God, there is no one who is good, their speech is corrupted by sin, their actions are corrupted by sin, and above all, they have no fear of God. So, when one considers even these few verses, it becomes abundantly clear the Bible does indeed teach sin affects all of us, including our minds, will and emotions so that "there is none who does good, no not one" (*Romans 3:12*).

This does not mean that man is as wicked or sinful as he could be, nor does it mean that man is without a conscience or any sense of right or wrong. Neither does it mean that man does not or cannot do things that seem to be good when viewed from a human perspective or measured against a human standard. It does not even mean that man cannot do things that seem to conform outwardly to the law of God. What the Bible does teach is that even the "good" things man does are tainted by sin because they are not done for the glory of God and out of faith in Him (*Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6*).

We teach that all true believers are forever secure in Christ Jesus. We believe that everyone who is born again by the Spirit through Jesus Christ is eternally assured of salvation from the moment of conversion. This assurance relies on God's decisive grace rather than on the works of the Christian. Obedience, good works, and fruit-bearing do not earn or retain 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; James 2:17-18*).

We believe that the Bible shows us that our God is a covenant keeping God. This means, when He entered into a covenant relationship with an individual or with

Israel, he did not break the covenant relationship even when they willfully sinned, denied him, turned away from him or worshipped other gods. But he used his power to discipline and call their hearts to return to him. (*Ex 2:24, Deut 7:9, Hosea 2-3*)

Eternal security in salvation relies on the Lord's guarantee of each believer's adoption as His son or daughter (*Galatians 4:4-7*), His seal on the believer by the Holy Spirit (*2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14*), and the conviction that God gives the Holy Spirit to each believer as a down payment toward future bliss in heaven (*2 Corinthians 1:21-22*). A person who professes genuine faith in Christ immediately becomes His possession (*Luke 23:42-43; Acts 2:40-41; Acts 16: 30-34*), and nothing can snatch that person out of His hands (*John 10:27-29*). Having been bought with the price of Jesus Christ's crucifixion as complete payment for sin, Christians are not their own. They are Christ's possession (*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*). This assurance is absolutely certain, reserved in heaven, protected by God's unlimited power (*1 Peter 1:4-5*).

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*).

We teach that salvation involves the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man: God is not under obligation to give grace or it wouldn't be grace. He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious and will show mercy on who He will show mercy (*Exodus 33:19*) and God desires all people to be saved (*2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Jn. 12:32*). Anyone calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (*Rom. 10:13*).

God is sovereign in choosing us and our responsibility is to confess and believe. Many have struggled to reconcile these two truths, but we believe the Bible teaches both and we must live with the paradox trusting God whose ways are higher than ours. Throughout history "Calvinism" and "Arminianism" have tried to explain this mystery. We believe these human attempts to explain this mystery have valid points but ultimately are incomplete. As a church we choose not to hold one view over the other.

"That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory, but they are not. The fault is in our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and I find that in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths



can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring." - Charles Spurgeon

"The attempt to answer these questions has divided the Christian church neatly into two camps which have borne the names of two distinguished theologians, Jacobus Arminius and John Calvin. Most Christians are content to get into one camp or the other and deny either sovereignty to God or free will to man. It appears possible, however, to reconcile these two positions without doing violence to either, although the effort that follows may prove deficient to partisans of one camp or the other.

Here is my view: God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so." - A.W. Tozer

The atonement of Christ is a central point of understanding salvation. Throughout church history there have been multiple views on what the atonement is and what it means for mankind. We understand that the atonement of Christ is a complex theological issue with multiple components to it. However the bible does give us clear truth we can hold fast to with confidence regarding the atonement.

We teach that the simplicity of the atonement follows this biblical narrative: there is sin in every human heart. God desires an eternal covenantal relationship with each person that he had created. However sin is a barrier between imperfect man and a holy and perfect God. God cannot allow sin into his direct presence. The penalty for sin is eternal death and separation from God (*Romans 6:23*). God's holy wrath had to be poured out upon sin. Because of his great love for mankind, God chose to send himself in the form of His son Jesus Christ to stand in our place, becoming the

propitiation for sin (*Ephesians 2:4, 1 John 4:10*). Jesus voluntarily took upon himself the sin of all man, becoming sin even when he knew no sin, so that any who profess faith in the Lord Jesus would be removed from sin's penalty and enter into a restored and reconciled relationship with God (*2 Cor 5:21*). The sin of man was paid for at the cross of calvary by the God-Man, Jesus Christ, allowing men to have the ability to receive forgiveness, redemption, justification, and salvation upon faith in Christ Jesus. Through the cross and the resurrection, Jesus conquered death, Satan, and the powers of hell once and forevermore (*Hebrews 2:14, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57*).

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## **Satan and Demons**

The Bible is not explicit in Satan's detailed identity, but infers that Satan is an angelic being who fell from his position in heaven due to sin and is now completely opposed to God, doing all in his power to thwart God's purposes. We teach the position the church has historically held regarding Satan and demons in this article.

Satan was created as a holy angel, and the Bible possibly gives Satan's pre-fall name as Lucifer. (*Isaiah 14:12*) Satan is a created being and was created as a cherub, apparently the highest of the created angels. He became arrogant in his beauty and status and decided he wanted to sit on a throne above that of God (*Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:15; 1 Timothy 3:6*)

Satan is a liar, clothes himself as an angel of light, accuser of the brethren, the adversary of God's people, prince of the power of the air. God has allowed Satan to have some authority over the kingdom of the world (*1 John 5:9*) and Satan's destiny is sealed, as an eternity in the lake of fire awaits him (*Revelation 20:10*).

Demons are the fallen angels, who rebelled against God with Satan. Led by Satan, they deceive humanity with a false message (*Galatians 1:8,9; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15*). Through demons (his spiritual agents) Satan slanders believers (*Revelation 12:10*) and schemes to defeat them (*Ephesians 6:11*). They are not all-powerful, and are restricted in their activity by God, but they do inflict physical, spiritual, and emotional harm upon believers (*2 Corinthians 12:7-9*) and non-believers (*Luke 13:11*). As with Satan, the destiny of demons is sealed as an eternity in the lake of fire awaits them.

There is no incident in the Bible where a believer is possessed by a demon.

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## Sexuality

Sexuality was created by God, and a proper understanding of sex and sexuality are incredibly important as followers of Christ. We believe many of the common problems in our world are created by people ignoring God's plan for sexuality and following their own way. Here are a few things we believe about sexuality:

God created humans male and female. We believe that God created humans with an order where gender is definitively male or female as a representation of His character and nature. However, mankind's sinful nature has a tendency to want to order the world the way man wants it, rather than the way God wants it. This applies to gender issues too. We teach that God determines gender, rather than gender being a personal choice.

In some cases we recognize people have painful and complicated intersex conditions or may suffer with psychological gender identity issues. However, it is God's design that people conform to their gender identity which is easily determined at birth for most people or with the help of medical professionals. We teach that the church should have compassion, understanding and grace to walk people through difficult issues of gender confusion.

We believe that God created marriage between one man and one woman. In the Old Testament people strayed from God's plan, and husbands had many wives, but God's plan was always for a one man and one woman marriage covenant. The 10th Commandment states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife [singular] ... " (*Exodus 20:17*) and also presupposes the ideal that there is only one wife. Polygamy is expressly forbidden for church elders (*1 Timothy 3:2*), and this is not just for elders, but rather an expectation for all the church because Paul also wrote: "each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (*1 Corinthians 7:2*). Paul goes on to explain marital responsibilities in terms that make sense only with *one* husband to *one* wife.

God designed sex to be in the context of marriage. Sex is never explicitly condemned for an unmarried person, but throughout the Bible sex is strongly implied as godly only in the context of marriage. In fact, in the Old Testament sex is often seen as equal to marriage! Sexual immorality is condemned over and over in the scriptures. Sexual immorality is used throughout the Bible and is defined as

1. adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.
2. sexual intercourse with close relatives; Leviticus 18

The final reality is that God created sexuality to be enjoyed and to procreate, within the bonds of marriage. Any participation in sex outside of those bounds is sinful, and causes hurt and damage to us and those around us.

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## **Singleness**

We teach there are biblical blessings of singleness that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7. Singleness is a gift from God and is a blessing to be enjoyed in its season. Unmarried people are spared what Paul calls the “worldly troubles” of marriage (*1 Cor 7:28*). The reality of marriage is there is always another person to consider in the daily routines of life. Children add yet another dimension of consideration. Single people only need be responsible to themselves whereas married people must consider the well being of a spouse and children.

This truth leads Paul to describe that the single person can fully devote their attention to the work of the Lord. The married person may be anxious about how to please their spouse, whereas the unmarried person may be anxious about the things of the Lord. The married person’s interests are divided whereas an unmarried person can fully set their interests upon how to please the Lord (*1 Cor 7:32*).

Singleness presents difficulties of its own like marriage. Singleness can often lead to struggles with loneliness or sexual temptation. These struggles are not exclusive to those that are single, but can be amplified in an unmarried person as marriage provides a place where there can be both emotional and sexual intimacy.

We teach both singleness and marriage are blessings and gifts from God that represent different aspects of God’s character and nature. Both realities will ultimately come to an end in eternity when all believers will be united with Christ.

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## **Social Responsibility**

As Christians we have responsibility to the world around us, including believers and unbelievers. The Bible is full of examples and commands concerning caring for people and communities. Here are a few responsibilities we teach.

We are commanded to care for the poor. In Proverbs 31:9 it says "Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Deuteronomy 15 says "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Jesus said the poor will always be with us, but he did not free us from the command to care for the poor. (*Matthew 26:11*). As Christians we must care for the poor.

We should pursue peace and seek justice for people who are oppressed. We see oppression all around us based on race, social standing, and many other factors. We as Christians are called to care for these problems and strive to solve justice issues we see around us.

In Leviticus 19:15 it says "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. The kingdom of God is entered through grace, but the kingdom operates on the principles of justice. Favoritism, unfairness, and prejudice have no place in Gods kingdom. We should seek to operate with justice in everything we do. Amos 5:24 states, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

We are called to treat immigrants and foreigners like ourselves. In Leviticus 19 it says "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." It's easy for us as people to elevate our nation or race, but God calls us to treat all people fairly and with justice, no matter race or nation.

Lastly, we should be good stewards of all our resources. God gave man dominion over the earth and its creatures (*Genesis 1*). We believe mankind is commanded to be responsible stewards of all our resources. We believe this principle is relevant to how we manage things like waste, fossil fuels, money, livestock, land or property.

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## Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God's people since biblical times. While the list below is not exhaustive, we believe the disciplines below are important for every believer to practice throughout their lives.

- Prayer
- Scripture reading, study, and memorization
- Worship (private and corporate)
- Fasting (health permitting)
- Service
- Sabbath
- Solitude, silence, and meditation
- Giving

Here are a few things we believe about the disciplines:

First, the Bible teaches both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines. There are those spiritual disciplines that we practice alone and those that we practice with other Christians. So, for example, we are to pray alone. That is a personal spiritual discipline. We are also to pray with the church. That is an interpersonal or congregational spiritual discipline. We are to practice both, because Jesus practiced both.

Next, a characteristic of spiritual disciplines is that they are activities, not attitudes. Disciplines are practices, and spiritual disciplines are things you do. They are not character qualities, they are not graces, they are not the fruit of the Spirit. They are things you do. The key verse in all this is 1 Timothy 4:7, which says, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB).

A third descriptor of the spiritual disciplines is that we are talking about things that are practices taught or modeled in the Bible. The reason this is important, is that otherwise we leave ourselves open to calling anything we want a spiritual discipline. So someone might say: Gardening is a spiritual discipline for me, or exercise is one of my spiritual disciplines, or any other hobby or pleasurable habit they could call a spiritual discipline. Exercise and gardening can be great activities for you as a Christian, but they are not spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual Disciplines are a means, not an end. The end, that is, the purpose of practicing the disciplines is godliness. "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7, NASB). And so we are not godly just because we practice the spiritual disciplines. That was the great error of the Pharisees. They felt by doing these things they were godly. No, rightly motivated, they are merely means to godliness.

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## **Versions of the Bible**

Few issues have been more divisive in the church in the last 50 or 60 years than the issue of English Bible translations. With that in mind we teach the following, we refuse to get caught up in the divisive and fruitless controversy over which English translation is best, authoritative or "God's True Word". In humility we recognize that English is one of thousands of the world's languages and only 20% of the world's population speaks English. We are thankful for a plethora of excellent English Bible translations to choose from.

We believe that Jesus spoke to the people in common everyday language. The New Testament was originally written in a form of Koine Greek, which was the common language of the Eastern Mediterranean from approximately 330 BC – the time of Alexander the Great – until roughly 300 AD. We should seek to communicate God's truth in contemporary, everyday English.

To the best of our knowledge, none of the original manuscripts of the Bible exist today. Only copies of the original text of Scripture exist. Of the thousands of manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts that exist, differences and discrepancies are miniscule. The English versions we have access to can be trusted.

We encourage our people to choose a readable, formal equivalency English translation. A formal equivalency translation is a word for word translation that preserves as much structure from the original language as possible. Popular formal equivalency translations are the English Standard, New American Standard, New King James, King James and Revised Standard Version. Other translations such as the New Living Translation and Contemporary English (CEV) are Dynamic equivalency translations. Dynamic equivalency translations focus on the meaning of the passage and the translation of thoughts. Still others, the Holman Christian Standard and the New International Version for example use both formal and dynamic equivalence.

We believe God has arranged things so that we can take any good English Bible translation, based on any translation philosophy, treat it as if its every English word were straight from Him, and get everything we need from that Bible to know, love, and live for Him in a way that will bring Christ's "Well done!" when we stand before him.

There are some inaccurate translations of the Bible that exist in our world today. If one is interested in using a translation that is not listed above, we would strongly recommend that one would research the translation or talk to a pastor or elder regarding the translation in question.

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## **Women in Ministry**

There has historically and culturally been disagreement on the specific allowances for women as they long to serve in the ministries of the church. We believe the following regarding the role of women in the church community:

We affirm that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female, in accordance with our statement of faith. These two genders are distinct and complementary, they are not interchangeable. The role of elder is reserved for qualified men as a position of spiritual authority over the local church. We affirm that women have historically held the role of deacon (*Romans 16:1*) and as such, the role of deacon is not reserved for men alone at TBC, and we affirm that women are able and welcome to teach where men are present.

We view teaching at the Sunday morning gathering as primary reserved for elders of the church. However, women are able to teach on Sunday mornings with the permission of, and under the authority of the elders and pastoral staff.

At TBC we believe that women may serve and lead in roles such as youth director, children's director, director of women's ministry, worship leader, deaconess, missionary, and teacher, among others in accordance with their gifts.

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