

# **The Bible Church of Little Rock**

## **Philosophy of Ministry**

### **Table of Contents**

Adult Ministries .....	2
Baptism .....	6
Appendix--The Question of Baptizing Infants and Young Children.....	8
Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration .....	9
Biblical Counseling.....	13
Children’s Ministries .....	15
Christian Literature .....	18
Church Administration.....	19
Church Membership.....	20
Discipling Believers.....	23
Divorce and Remarriage .....	25
Appendix 1--The Question of a Divorced Elder/Deacon .....	30
Appendix 2--Common Questions Regarding Divorce and Remarriage .....	35
Equipping the Saints .....	39
The Fellowship of the Saints.....	41
Financial Giving.....	42
Conflict of Interest Policy .....	43
BCLR Benevolence Policy .....	46
Gender.....	50
Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation.....	53
Leadership.....	55
The Lord’s Supper .....	57
Appendix--On Children Receiving the Lord’s Supper .....	60
Marriage.....	61
Missions .....	63
Outreach.....	66
Prayer .....	67
Preaching and Teaching.....	69
Appendix.....	70
Public Reading of the Word of God .....	76
Spiritual Gifts.....	78
Student Ministries .....	81
Worship and Music .....	83

## Adult Ministries

Ministering to adults in the local church is one of the most important aspects of shepherding in the Body of Christ. As a result, it is our first priority to cultivate a high view of God, presenting Him in all His fullness, and in this process we desire to give Him glory. This means we hope to instill a biblical fear of God, recognizing that Scripture says He is holy, righteous, and just. Since God is holy, each individual is commanded to pursue holiness (1Peter 1:13-16), and godliness (1Timothy 4:7-8). The priority of cultivating a high view of God must be established before we can properly understand and pursue practical or progressive sanctification – the process of changing and growing toward Christ-likeness.

How do we know what it means to have a high view of God, or a proper view of man, sin, and holiness? The conviction of The Bible Church of Little Rock is that those truths must be grounded in the sole authority of the Word of God (*"Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth."* John 17:17). The Word of God defines what it means to have a right relationship with God (salvation), and what it means to be "set apart" to mature and grow as a child of God (sanctification).

The Bible also describes in many places the characteristics of a God-honoring New Testament church. In Ephesians 4:12-13, the apostle Paul reminds us that spiritual gifts are given to the church for *"the 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 the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ"*. In keeping with this text, another important priority for The Bible Church's adult ministry is that we provide opportunity for both equipping of the saints and the work of service.

Scripture also makes it clear that a biblically driven ministry cultivates fellowship with one another in the Body of Christ. John tells us, *"but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:3-7).

Because we want to grow an adult ministry that is both strategic and thoroughly biblical, we will regularly highlight the following broad elements in the process of edifying the body of Christ in this local expression. These elements include but are not limited to:

**Spiritual Giftedness** – We believe that every believer has been given special capacity to minister to others in the Body of Christ – that ability is called a spiritual gift (1Peter 4:10, Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11). William McRae defines a spiritual gift saying "as to essence, a spiritual gift is an ability. It is an ability to function effectively and significantly in a particular service as a member of Christ's body, the church" (William McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, p.18). As a result, we will both teach and encourage all believers to use their giftedness and be an active part of the Body of Christ in this local expression.

**Equipping** – We agree with John MacArthur, Jr., Pastor-Teacher of Grace Community Church, when he states, "the church's most important function is to proclaim the Word of God in

an understandable, direct, authoritative way. . . . Paul told Timothy that if he reminded the brethren of the truth he would be ‘*a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine*’ (1 Timothy 4:6). He adds in verse 11, ‘*These things command and teach.*’ In other words, ‘Teach with authority.’” (John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, Moody Press, 1991, p. 57-58). We believe that gifted men in the church are to equip adults for ministry, using the Bible as their textbook. As a result, we will offer opportunities for adult instruction each week both on Sunday morning and during the week for men and women of all ages and stages. As we noted previously in Ephesians 4:11-12, equipping the saints is a prerequisite for biblical work of service.

Service – According to James, we are to “*become doers of the Word and not only hearers*” (James 1:22-25). Moreover, according to Ephesians 4:12, the saints are equipped in order that they might build up the Body via works of service. This is a service that is accomplished for the benefit of others both in the church and outside the church. Service inside the church is characterized by using one’s giftedness to “*care for one another*” (1 Corinthians 12:1-25), and thus build up one other. Service outside the church includes being “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13-16), and in the process, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world (Matthew 25:32-45).

Fellowship – As believers are equipped, and we use our giftedness to serve others, the body is “built up” (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is the community context of being “built up,” and occurs as each one does his/her part in the Body of Christ. Once again, John MacArthur, Jr. has said it well, “Fellowship could be described as ‘a common life together.’ In a way, it sums up the other functions we have talked about. Fellowship involves being together, loving each other, and communing together. Fellowship includes listening to someone who has a concern, praying with someone who has a need, visiting someone in a hospital, sitting in a class or a Bible study, and even singing a hymn with someone you have never met. Fellowship also involves sharing prayer requests” (John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, Moody Press, 1991, pp. 68-69).

Shepherding – Another critical aspect of our adult ministry is oversight by biblical shepherds. Jesus commanded Peter in John 21:15-19 to “*Shepherd My sheep.*” The Bible makes it clear that in the thinking of the apostles there was the closest possible relationship between the words “to shepherd” (*poimaino*), “a shepherd” (*poimen*), “an elder” (*presbuteros*), “an overseer” (*episkopos*) and “to oversee” (*episkopeo*). Jay Adams puts it this way, “to carry on the work of an overseer (*episkopos*, “bishop”) does not mean to do the work of any sort of overseer in general, but in the New Testament it always carries the idea of overseeing *as a shepherd*. It involves the all-embracing oversight required by the descriptions of such work in Psalm 23, John 10 and elsewhere. . . . As overseers, their function and duty was “to shepherd” (*poimainein*) the church of God. That *poimaino* here does not refer to the more restricted idea of ‘feeding’ alone, but rather to the complete care of the congregation (including feeding) is plain from the duties delineated, one of which is shepherdly protection from false teachers” (Jay E. Adams, Jr., *Shepherding God’s Flock*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, p. 8). For a practical look at meeting the needs of those at The Bible Church of Little Rock, please see Appendix 1: “BCLR Practical Care Needs Process.”





## Baptism

The concept of baptism had its origin as a washing in, with, or by water, suggesting the ceremonial cleansing of a person. Its spiritual significance can be seen first in the Old Testament, as when the Law required the bathing of persons who were considered “unclean” (Leviticus 14:8-9; see also Leviticus 15). On the Day of Atonement, Aaron the priest was to bathe himself both before and after entering the holy place (Leviticus 16:3-4). Even from the beginning of their priestly ministry, Aaron and his sons were ceremonially washed at their initial ordination for ministry (Leviticus 8:5-6). However, not all of these “baptisms” were immersions of people into water. Many of the instances of washings mentioned in the Old Testament were simply the cleansing of the hands as a symbolic gesture of holiness before God. The obvious symbolism conveys the need for the cleansing of the heart in repentance and for the sake of spiritual service (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-10).

Baptism took on a different significance with the baptism of John. (This era, including John’s baptism and ministry, has been commonly called, “Pre-Christian Judaism.”) Although this era called for the full immersion of a Gentile into water, which signified their complete initiation into Judaism (commonly called, “Jewish proselyte-baptism”), baptism in pre-Christian Judaism signified an inward repentance and faith. No one knows whether Jewish proselyte-baptism influenced the pre-Christian era regarding baptism like that of John the Baptist, but the two have striking similarities. John the Baptist preached a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4), a parallel to the Gentiles proclaiming their complete allegiance to Judaism (which along with baptism, would also include a Gentile becoming circumcised and his offering up animal sacrifices to God). This is precisely why John the Baptist reacted angrily to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were coming to him for baptism. Matthew 3:7-8 records that “when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance’.” Since they would have already understood Jewish ceremonial washings, they came to John for his baptism. However, they did not possess the requisite repentance in order for John’s baptism by immersion to take place (see John 3:22-25). Thus, the baptism of John laid the foundation for the proper understanding of the later, “Christian baptism.” This “Christian baptism” was instituted by Christ Himself when He commissioned His disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Regarding the proper understanding of the ordinance of water baptism, the word “baptism” itself is a transliterated English word which originates from the two Greek verbs, *bapto* (bap-to) which means, “to dip into,” like dipping a cloth into dye; or *baptizo* (bap-tid'-zo), which means, “to fully dip into” or “to immerse.” Controversy among various baptismal modes notwithstanding, individuals are not sprinkled, but literally immersed into water (Matthew 3:6,13,16; Mark 1:5,9-10; John 1:26, 3:23; Acts 8:36-38). This literal immersion into water becomes a powerful metaphor for the believer’s death to self and resurrection to a new life in Christ. Indeed, the apostolic teaching on baptism primarily signifies the believer’s union with Christ. If Christian baptism is to be properly understood, it should be defined as the complete immersion of a believer into water, which as the apostle Paul says, spiritually symbolizes his

death to sin, and his burial and rising again in order to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4; cf. also Colossians 2:12). Colossians 3:9-14 and Ephesians 4:22-24 both speak of the imagery of the believer putting off the clothes of the “old life,” and likewise putting on the clothes of the “new life.” This could well signify the baptismal ceremony of the early church, where the believer would remove his old garments of the common life, and put on his baptismal robe of the new, resurrected life. Paul told the Galatians: “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). The spiritual significance of baptism is lost if the concept of immersion is dismissed.

Practically speaking, the command for the believer to be baptized is a time for the declaration of his faith in Christ. The Bible teaches that once a person had come to Christ in repentance and faith, he was subsequently baptized. By looking at the pattern of the early church, those who were converted to Christ were then baptized (see Acts 2:38,41; 8:12-13; 8:36-38; 9:17-18; 16:31-33). One can easily see from these passages that baptism was a believer’s act of obedience, which would signify the new condition of the heart. It has been stated by some, however, that baptism and conversion were so linked in the early church that they had become synonymous (some believe Acts 2:38 explicitly teaches this). But since we know that regeneration comes *before* baptism (see especially Acts 8:36-38; 16:31-33), ***baptism can never be a condition or a requirement for salvation*** (see 1 Peter 3:21-22). The apostle Peter himself clarified that water baptism does not save—that literal immersion into water is not efficacious. It is simply the outward expression of the conscience being renewed through Christ’s work of redemption and resurrection. The fact that water baptism is not required for salvation is evidenced by the promised gift of eternal life by Christ to the thief on the cross. Although the thief was unable to participate in baptism prior to his death, Christ nevertheless declared to him that he would, that very day, be with Christ in paradise (a reference to heaven). The entire picture of the thief’s inability to undergo baptism proves that baptism cannot be a necessary work for salvation. Scripture declares in unmistakable language (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:20-28; Titus 3:5-7) that man is not saved by works of any kind, his salvation being based solely upon the merits of Christ’s work on the cross, which is then credited to the sinner’s account. Since justification occurs prior to water baptism, it cannot then be a condition for salvation. Therefore, let each person who has truly repented of his sin, *only then* become water baptized for the public proclamation of his faith in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## Appendix--The Question of Baptizing Infants and Young Children

The debate over the baptizing of infants has had a long and often controversial history. Regardless of the early church's position on the baptism of infants (the debate continues on this front), by the time of the Reformation, Roman Catholicism certainly held to an infant baptism position. Some reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin also continued to hold to a position of infant baptism. Many others, however, including the radical reformers (like the Anabaptists), believed that only true believers should undergo Christian baptism. Many today (especially those who are commonly called Baptists, taking their very name for this distinction of the baptism of professing believers only) believe that the evidence of regeneration alone provides the proper grounds for the church to baptize. This is the practice of The Bible Church of Little Rock. In this regard, we believe that to participate in the baptism of an infant is to reverse the order of the New Testament. You must baptize only those who have manifested the evidence of regeneration, rather than baptize those who have *not yet been regenerated*. To do otherwise may indeed give one a later false assurance of their salvation. To speak of the need to baptize an infant, based on their being a part of the New Covenant community, is to suggest something that we believe is not taught in the New Testament. The New Testament teaches that only those who have personally professed faith in Jesus Christ may be baptized.

Another debate occurs when the question arises about the baptism of young children. Since young children can consciously understand their sin and the need for the Savior, should they be baptized immediately after they profess faith in Christ? The simple answer seems to be yes. The more challenging issue, however, is this: It is often very difficult to discern whether the young child has been genuinely converted to Christ, as opposed to simply following the dictates of his parents' beliefs. Often, after having professed Christ, a young person will not follow in obedience to Christ once their commitment is challenged by the world. We believe it is best to see the young person's professed commitment evaluated over time, in order to show whether the commitment to Christ is genuine. They must show that their relationship to Christ is truly "*their own faith*," and not simply the extension of their parents' commitment. This evaluation may take some time (although admittedly, the time frame must remain undetermined, because each young person is different). The subsequent baptism of the child should depend on the assessment of the parents with the assistance of the leadership of the church. Once the evidence of regeneration seems to be manifesting itself in words, actions, and a pattern of obedience over time, the child should be encouraged to be baptized. Often, as children become young adults, they will come to their parents, or to the church, seeking to be baptized as an act of obedience, in subjection to Christ's command. It may be objected that this distinction in baptism between children and adults is a double standard, and that this further singles out young children unfairly. It should be noted, however, that while it is sometimes difficult to determine the reality of an adult's salvation, it is often *more* difficult to discern the true nature of a young child's heart. The time frame for an evaluation of an adult could be relatively short, given that they are both better able to communicate that commitment, as well as manifest the true fruit of their conversion. Scripture tells us that we can begin to see who is regenerate by the fruit of their lives (Matthew 3:8-10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:23; Luke 3:8-9; 6:43-45; John 12:24; 15:1-8). Young children, as well as adults, ought to be continually encouraged to show forth the evidence of their conversion, and after they have come to the place of readiness to be baptized, should be encouraged to do so, with the full affirmation of the church.



## Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration

One of the marks of true conversion in believers is their moral purity. A person who has submitted himself to the lordship of Jesus Christ is therefore one who endeavors to walk with integrity and holiness of life. Paul himself enjoined the Corinthians to live in this way: *“Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Corinthians 7:1). The preeminent reason, of course, is because God Himself is holy, and because He is, He commands that we are to be holy (1 Peter 1:15). It is not only an aspect of His character, but it is also true of His written Word. The psalmist has said, *“The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times”* (Psalm 12:6). Psalm 119:140 declares: *“Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it.”* Jesus Himself affirmed the unbreakable nature and purity of God’s revelation when He said, *“The Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35).

If these things are true of God and are expected of anyone who names the name of Christ, the church that names the name of Christ must by necessity seek to preserve holiness among her people. Again, Paul stresses the desire of every faithful pastor when he wrote to the Corinthians: *“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin”* (2 Corinthians 11:2). He similarly told the Ephesians that Christ’s own end for believers was this: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless”* (Ephesians 5:25-27). Paul taught the Colossians that Christ had reconciled them *“in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach”* (Colossians 1:22). Holiness is the premium virtue for those followers of Christ.

While holiness is commanded and expected of all Christians, it is also a reality that not all who profess to follow Christ will do so. It is therefore the responsibility of the leadership of a local church to examine both the profession and walk of one who fails to obey Christ’s Word. Daniel Wray rightly observes: *“Just as the church applies biblical principles in admitting persons to membership, so too must she apply biblical principles in the governing of the membership and, if necessary, in removal from membership. Jesus prescribed principles to follow which make all Christians to some extent responsible for each other’s behaviour, and he included disciplinary procedures [Matt. 18:15-17]”* (Daniel Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline*, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978, p. 2). Wray’s reference to Matthew 18:15-20 is crucial because it is the seminal New Testament text on *Biblical Church Discipline*. Jesus said,

*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by*

*My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.*

Jesus lays out a simple pattern for the church to follow. It consists of a four-fold process:

- (1) Any believer has the responsibility to confront any other believer when they see that that believer has sinned. If the sinning believer acknowledges his sin and repents of it, the confronting brother has won him to a place of unity and restoration. *This first step of discipline is where well over ninety percent of discipline begins and ends.* However, if the sinning believer does not repent, step two demands that,
- (2) The confronting believer has the responsibility to bring two or three additional believers back to the offending one for more confrontation. This step insures that, at the mouth of two or three witnesses, both the facts of the sin, as well as the confirmation of the process, can be confirmed.
- (3) Step three says that if the offending believer does not repent from the second confrontation, the sin is to be told to the church. This normally is carried out by communicating to the leadership of the church, who then on behalf of the congregation, informs the entire congregation (usually, the communication is done through a public worship service). Now, all the members of the congregation are enjoined to plead with the offending brother or sister to repent of their sin and come back to a right relationship with God. After a sufficient time (determined by the Elders), the sinning brother has either repented, or refuses to do so. If he refuses, then by virtue of Jesus' own pronouncement (via His words in Matthew 18:18-20), step four is to be enacted.
- (4) He is to be excommunicated or disfellowshipped from the congregation, including his attendance at all public services. He is therefore to be treated as one who rejects the gospel of Christ. If he is seen by any member of the congregation, he is to be warned of the consequences of his sin, but is also exhorted to come to a saving relationship with Christ as he once confessed. If the erring individual later repents, and requests reinstatement to the body of believers he once adhered, he shall meet with the elders, seek to be evaluated in the manifest presence of that professed repentance, and then be restored to the congregation, again at a public meeting. At such time, at the discretion of the Elders, he shall be then fully restored to all the rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities of fellowship and/or membership.

This is the four-fold process of Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration.

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration, following Wray's outline (pp. 3-4), can be proven from six bases: (1) It glorifies God because it proves our obedience to His instructions, while at the same time, maintaining the proper role of church government; (2) It's goal is to reclaim the offenders (i.e., to restore those who have veered from the path of obedience); (3) It

maintains the purity of the church and her worship, with a specific view toward the avoidance of profaning the elements of the Lord's Supper; (4) It vindicates the integrity and honor of Christ and Christianity by exhibiting fidelity to His principles; (5) It deters others from further sinning; (6) It prevents giving God any cause to set Himself against a local church. These need to be discussed further:

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration glorifies God and therefore proves our obedience to Him. If we cooperate with God in the matter of church discipline, we thus prove to Him and a watching world that we desire to glorify Him. In addition to Matthew 18:15-20, other passages speak of discipline in varying forms (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:20, 6:3; Titus 1:13, 2:15, 3:10; Revelation 2:2, 14, 15, 20), which when we obey the injunctions, we thus manifest our obedience to Scripture and its Author.

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration has as its goal the reclaiming of those who have sinned and thus veered from the path of obedience. Wray says, *"The goal in every type of discipline, whether it be gentle correction, admonition, rebuke, or excommunication, is always the restoration of the offender"* (Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline*, p. 4). It is not the intent of the church leadership, nor the congregation themselves, to see any other thing to occur in the person, save their full and complete restoration to the Lord and His body. Often, those who are under discipline claim that they are being singled out, sinned against in the process of discipline, treated unfairly, etc. If Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration however, is followed to its Scriptural specificity, no valid claim of wrongdoing can be justified. As John Calvin observed: *"Although excommunication also punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, by forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation"* (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Chapter 12, Section 10).

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration maintains the purity of the church and her worship, with a specific view toward the avoidance of profaning the elements of the Lord's Supper. When the Corinthian church persisted in their accommodation of a man in sexual sin, Paul admonished them: *"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one"* (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). The reason Paul is so strong on this point is that to associate with such *so-called* brethren makes the church and the world indistinguishable. The purity of those who profess to be followers of Christ must be maintained within the fellowship. This is also why Paul spoke so forcefully when challenging the Corinthians to examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper:

*"Whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep [die]"* (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

Wray wisely says, *“We must maintain the purity of Christ’s visible church to the full extent of our knowledge and power. This is all the more evident once we recognize that false doctrine and bad conduct are infectious. If these are tolerated in the church all members will receive hurt”* (Wray, p. 4).

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration vindicates the honor and integrity of Christ and Christianity by exhibiting fidelity to His principles. When Paul was speaking to the Corinthians regarding their adherence to his dictates of the proper discipline of fellow believers, he said to them, *“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things”* (2 Corinthians 2:9). Apparently, the Corinthians were now refusing to extend forgiveness to one who had previously sinned but who had now repented and was seeking to be restored. We are only faithful to God’s Word when we pursue Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration, and when we seek to restore those who repent. There is no virtue when we refuse to follow Christ’s command in the matter of discipline and there is no virtue when we refuse to grant forgiveness to those who truly repent.

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration deters others from sinning. Paul said regarding leaders who persist in sin: *“Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning”* (1 Timothy 5:20). Anyone, especially a leader in Christ’s church, is to be rebuked in the presence of all, in order to provoke others to avoid the same. It has a self-purifying effect on the congregation, challenging them to greater godliness.

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration prevents giving God cause to set Himself against a local church. One only needs to read Revelation 2:14-25 to see how intimately involved Christ is as the Head of His Church. One of the matters of extreme importance therefore, is the matter of obedience to His commands. If a local church leadership refuses to discipline its members, then that local church is also in danger of being judged by God Himself, even to the point of being judged out of existence. This should show any church the crucial importance of following the Lord’s directions in the matter of church discipline/restoration.

Biblical Church Discipline/Restoration, as shown, is a mandate from the Word of God. May God’s grace and power be upon those churches who desire to follow His Word in this regard.

## Biblical Counseling

The Bible Church of Little Rock is committed to giving its people counsel directly and exclusively from the Word of God. That means we affirm that the Scripture is sufficient for all areas of a person's spiritual life. The apostle Peter declared:

*His divine power has granted to us [the church] everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Peter 1:3-4).*

This must be emphasized today as never before, because so many who give lip service to the authority of Scripture, by their practice deny its rightful, authoritative place. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy states, "The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith and conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority" (*Inerrancy*, edited by Norman C. Geisler, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980, p. 493).

Therefore, whenever the local church gives counsel, whether formal or informal, it *must* be accurately Scriptural, with no integration of any other philosophy, including psychology. Even the so-called, "Christian psychology" is racked with conflicting opinions at variance with God's Word. Dr. John MacArthur rightly surmises, "The presuppositions and most of the doctrine of psychology cannot be successfully integrated with Christian truth. Moreover, the infusion of psychology into the teaching of the Church has blurred the line between behavior modification and sanctification" (John MacArthur Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, edited by John MacArthur Jr. & Wayne Mack, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994, p. 10).

The Bible Church of Little Rock will therefore counsel, both in its message and method, with a view toward the absolute sufficiency of Scripture. We affirm what Scripture teaches regarding the constitutional make-up of all men: physical and spiritual. We do not believe that there is a third, separate category (i.e., "psychological") which many believe also constitutes man's make-up. We also affirm that the Word of God is the ultimate and therefore adequate means by which the Christian's non-physical (spiritual) problems must be addressed. We further affirm Jesus' own words in John 17:17, which teach that special revelation (Holy Scripture) is the only legitimate means to sanctify the redeemed. There, He said: "[Father], Sanctify them in the Truth; Your Word is Truth."

We believe that because of the curse of sin, mankind will have physical abnormalities and these must be diagnosed and treated under the care of a medical doctor. Please note however, that not every so-called illness or disease really is one; there should be pathologic or physical phenomenon for a person to be legitimately treated in this way. A physician, who bases his care on objective, scientific data, as well as established treatment regimens, must treat

physical issues. The Bible alone however, must address spiritual issues. We do affirm that there are instances where physical illness may have come about as a result of spiritual causes. The guilt brought on by sin for example, can have devastating effects on the body. King David declared in Psalm 32:3-4: *“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”* When the physical and spiritual dimensions intersect in these ways, both sound biblical counseling and medical care must join together both for the physical and spiritual health of the counselee and the glory of God.

Because of the popular application of psychology and advances in medical treatments within psychiatry, the distinctions between physical and non-physical phenomenon are now perceived as less distinct. While we support physicians (including psychiatrists) who are committed to a biblical view of man, the Church must ever be on guard against any so-called “medical treatments” which do not address these distinctions. If a physician, like a pastor, affirms the absolute sufficiency of Scripture, then his counsel of an individual will be based more on his belief in the truth and less on his psychiatric training. The psychological profession ultimately then becomes incidental to his biblical counseling and not a basis of it. For instance, Dr. Gary Almy, himself presently a psychiatrist at the Loyola School of Medicine in Chicago, captures the essence of what it means to be committed to true, biblical counseling:

*Masquerading as science, sounding plausible, using technical jargon, claiming but never producing good results, and appealing to the ancient human desire for self-perfection, our culture is awash in an ever-changing sea of therapists and therapies, with a willing audience ready to accept them . . . [But] without the Holy Spirit as our counselor, and without an authoritative and sufficient Word to provide us absolute truth, we are left to our own devices and to the guidance of others who are no less confused (How Christian is Christian Counseling?, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), p. 77.*

In conclusion, The Bible Church’s own membership, as well as people in the surrounding area, can expect from us a precisely biblical approach to counseling. Other churches can also expect us to provide training classes on the counseling process, with a view toward setting up their own counseling ministries. The ultimate purpose of our approach to counseling echoes Paul’s words to the Roman believers of his day: *“Concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another”* (Romans 15:14).

## Children's Ministries

The Children's Ministry at The Bible Church of Little Rock has the primary goal of seeing that children discover who God is through the Word of God so that they will be convicted of their lost condition and turn to Christ for salvation. The Bible provides two clear emphases for this goal to be achieved. These emphases are *the priority of godly parenting* (which is supported by the local church), and *the responsibility of children* to respond rightly to this godly parenting.

### The Priority of Parenting

The Bible wonderfully explains that children are both a *reward* and a *gift* of the Lord (Psalm 127:3). The miracle of children is incomprehensible, as the origin of each child is conceived of, designed, and formed by God, the Author of life. (Psalm 139:13). The Apostle Paul echoed this when he said: "*He Himself [God] gives to all life and breath and all things...for we also are His offspring*" (Acts 17:25,28). God is not only the Creator of life, He also is the designer of the family wherein children are to be raised spiritually (Psalm 128:3). Accordingly, the New Testament is very clear that parents must be the number one influence in the life of their children (Ephesians 6:4). Children who grow up in the home under a believing parent receive a spiritual advantage because they are continually being influenced in Christianity. Scripture affirms this in 1 Corinthians 7:14b, categorizing children like these as "set-apart" or "holy." This category of "set-apart" or "holy" in no way guarantees salvation, but connotes that these children are providentially positioned to respond in repentance and faith to the gospel.

The nature of sin makes raising children in godliness no easy task. Contrary to what our culture purports, children are born sinners (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:10). Sin, since the fall of Adam, has been passed down to every baby, with the exception of Christ. (Genesis 3:6-7; Romans 5:12). David reiterates this saying, "*Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*" (Psalm 51:5). Based upon children being born in sin, they will automatically rebel against their parents which is ultimately against the Lord (Proverbs 22:15, Romans 3:10-12). In response to this rebellion and disobedience, parents must lovingly administer discipline to their children, guiding them to turn away (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10) from sin to Christ (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 23:13-14).

Along with the faithful parental administration of discipline, consistently teaching God's Word is commanded (Ephesians 6:4b). In the Old Testament, Moses gave a clear mandate to the Israelites to instruct their children in the Law and its daily application (Deuteronomy 6:2-9) to insure that the fear of God would be passed down from generation to generation. Two New Testament parents who were faithful in this way were Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and Timothy's mother, Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). The Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:15, commends their godly efforts by noting they had raised Timothy in the Scriptures from "infancy."

## The Responsibility of Children

Though Scripture clearly lays the burden upon the parents to raise their children in the Lord, children also have a biblical mandate to obey God's Word. Hannah, a godly mother from the Old Testament, dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord in the priesthood of Israel. Samuel, in God's providence, evidently responded rightly as a young boy being raised in the priesthood because 1 Samuel 2:16 records that he grew "in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men" (1 Samuel 2:26). In a superior manner, Christ Jesus, being without sin from the beginning, always responded in righteousness to both his earthly parents and His heavenly Father (Luke 2:51, John 5:30). The Gospels tell us that Jesus as a twelve year old "astonished" and "amazed" those who heard His teaching (Luke 2: 42,47-48). Also, like Samuel, He increased "in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." Based upon these biblical examples and others, The Bible Church encourages children to take positive steps toward God from their earliest days (cf. Matt. 21:15-16; Mark 10:13-16).

The over-arching New Testament commands regarding the responsibility of children are found in Ephesians 6:1-2. Ephesians 6:1-3 addresses children directly saying, "*Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth*" (cf. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Colossians 3:2). In the same way, the Proverbs call children to obey their parents' instruction. The Proverbs, similarly to Ephesians 6:1-3, teach that obedience promises children a blessed and protected life (Proverbs 1:8-19; 3:1-2; 5:1-2). From these commands it is clear that children have the responsibility to obey.

The obedience of children is not slavish, but, on the contrary, a blessed obedience. As children listen to and obey the Word of God, they will become wiser than those who are their elders (Psalm 119:100), will be kept in purity (Psalm 119:9), and most of all, they will gain the "...wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). This is our greatest desire at The Bible Church of Little Rock.

## The Role of the Church

Having cited these two biblical emphases the question remains: "What does the Bible say regarding the *church* and its involvement in *children's ministry*?" Regarding the role of the church, in children's ministry, there is no direct biblical mandate. However, just as with any principles from Scripture, the church is commanded to declare the aforementioned biblical emphases by preaching and teaching (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:1-2). Nevertheless, in addition to preaching and teaching these principles, in efforts to faithfully "equip the saints," and "shepherd the flock of God" (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:2), The Bible Church presently offers particular parent and children programs.



## **Children's Programs**

We provide regular classes for parents needing instruction for raising their children. These classes not only offer teaching but also accountability for parents as they cultivate faithfulness in the home.

For children's education at The Bible Church, the preschool and the elementary age children gather for Children's Worship. Here children learn the corporate disciplines of worship such as singing, praying, and sitting under the proclamation of Scripture. During the Sunday school hour, teachers meet with children in a classroom setting to instruct them from God's Word. The teachers use God-centered curriculum so children of all ages will gain a greater understanding of God's character. This is also the setting where children have their questions answered, and the teachers pray with them. On Wednesday evenings, we provide a program called Adventure Club. This is a mid-week program for the purpose of Scripture memory, fun, and community outreach.

During the summer we offer Vacation Bible School. Each summer a theme is chosen to help children understand spiritual truth. This is one of our unique opportunities as a church to reach the surrounding community with the gospel.

Every October 31st we have a Reformation Celebration at The Bible Church where we teach families the history and significance of the Reformation through dramatic presentation and preaching.

Finally, nursery is provided so that the youngest children (birth through 3 years old) are cared for during times of worship. This is an opportunity for the Body of Christ to serve each other by freeing up parents to enjoy unhindered worship during church services. The nursery classes for the one-and-two-year-old children prepare them for preschool as they begin to hear Bible lessons and sing together on a week-to-week basis.

## Christian Literature

The Lord has blessed His church with gifted teachers (Ephesians 4:11) many of whom skillfully exercise their gifts through writing. We desire to learn from God's servants, both past and present, who have labored diligently to explain and to apply the Scriptures in print. We humbly acknowledge that we are not self-sufficient in all matters pertaining to the knowledge of God, that we are in need of being taught by those more wise than ourselves, and that we have much to gain spiritually by "listening" to those uniquely gifted to instruct God's people through their writings.

We also believe that God, by His wise providence, expands the teaching ministries of some through their writings for the common good of the church. One needs only to consider how the treatises, commentaries, sermons, and hymns of Anselm, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Wesley and Spurgeon continue to enrich the church long after their voices have gone silent. Though years separate us from some of the church's most able teachers, yet they remain with us to exhort, challenge, comfort and impart understanding through what they have written. We gratefully give thanks to God for their ongoing ministry to us.

Someone may object that we should not substitute the Word of God with the words of mere men, nor should we give the public or private reading of Scripture second place to the reading of Christian literature. We stand in full agreement with these judgments. Christian literature is useful for spiritual growth only to the degree that it accurately teaches the Word of God. Thus, we do not commend the indiscriminate reading of Christian literature. Discernment should be exercised in both its selection and use. As we read, we should imitate the Bereans who were commended because they searched the Scriptures daily "*to see whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Moreover, we affirm that in Scripture alone is the wisdom that leads us to salvation and that equips us for every good work (1 Timothy 3:15-17). Thus, the neglect of public and personal Bible reading is done at the expense of one's own spiritual vitality.

Nevertheless, we affirm the spiritual benefit of reading good Christian literature that opens our minds to the truth of Scripture and encourages us to walk in the way of love (1 Timothy 1:5). We applaud the publishing, advertising, distributing and reading of Christian literature that promotes the true knowledge of God that leads to holiness. We affirm the use of printed materials of this kind in the church's instructional ministry when such use is deemed appropriate. We aim to inform the church of sound Christian literature and to make it available as we are able. The elders do not desire to infringe upon the liberty of the individual believer, yet they recognize their responsibility to protect the church from literature that promotes erroneous teaching. Thus, instructional material used for church sanctioned ministry typically needs to be approved by the elders.

## **Church Administration**

Church administration is spiritual service to the Body of Christ, which involves the wise stewardship of God's resources for the accomplishment of the work of ministry. Church administration or management has to do with the organization of church ministry, and with the operations that govern that organization. Administration is not an end in itself, but rather it is a means for serving people effectively, while making efficient use of resources in a manner that glorifies God.

With regard to organization, we believe that the affairs of the church are to be guided by biblically qualified elders who are nominated by the congregation, approved by the Board of Elders, and affirmed by the congregation. The elders work within the directions of the church constitution, and of any bylaws the church adopts. We believe that the church constitution and bylaws are subject to the authority of the Scriptures. The elders are to be assisted in their service to the congregation by biblically qualified deacons who are nominated by the congregation, approved by the Board of Elders, and affirmed by the congregation. The elders are responsible to oversee all aspects of the church's ministry, including the service of administration. The Board of Elders must be informed and involved in important decisions, but the daily management of church finances, facilities, equipment and ministry programs can, and most often should, be delegated to deacons, administrative office staff, and other faithful church members. In this way, the elders are able to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer, and church members are able to serve the Body of Christ in accordance with their spiritual gifts.

With regard to operations, we believe that the management of church affairs should ultimately benefit people and glorify God. Moreover, we believe these management goals are served by having biblically consistent policies and procedures in writing and available for reference. Policies and procedures that give direction and definition to the "how" of ministry are desirable for the following reasons: (1) they help insure that matters are handled effectively; that is, with the goals of biblical ministry clearly in view; (2) they reduce the possibility of mismanagement and unethical behavior, particularly in matters pertaining to employees and finances; (3) they save time in the decision-making process, thus enabling the ministry to function more efficiently; (4) they help to clarify expectations, and enable people to work together in ministry with greater understanding.

We believe that those who manage ministry are given a significant trust. God is honored and believers are encouraged when church affairs are administered well. Therefore, church administrators should be spiritually mature, and able to work well with others. Also, they should be able to plan, organize, delegate, oversee and evaluate ministry wisely according to biblical principles and goals.

## Church Membership

Why should a Christian become a member of a local church? If they are truly redeemed, aren't they already a "member" of the Body of Christ? What need is there then, to officially join a local church when Christ has already accepted him into His kingdom (Romans 15:7)? There is, however, evidence to support that one who has been ushered into the kingdom of God should also be joined to a local church by membership.

It must be admitted that membership in a local church is not to be equated with salvation in Christ. Simply because a person has joined a local church does not guarantee genuine faith in Christ. It is also true that salvation and church membership are not of equal importance. As Eric Lane states, "Church membership is not essential in the way that faith in Christ is. Joining a church will not make us any more saved than we were before. Non-members who are believers are no less precious in the Lord's eyes than those who are members. Heaven is no more sure for the latter than the former. The main thrust of the Bible is to bring us to faith in Christ. About this there must be no trace of doubt, whatever else is left obscure. On some matters there is room for debate, but not on the way of salvation. So do not be surprised if you cannot see membership as clearly as you can salvation. Not all things in Scripture are presented with the same degree of dogmatism" (I Want to be a Church Member, Bryntirion, Bridgend, Wales: Evangelical Press, 1992), pp. 9-10.

Why then, is church membership important? Membership is important in a local church because it is there that a person finds his spiritual identity and where he can also exercise his spiritual giftedness. The apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 12:14, "The body is not one member, but many." He goes on to say, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body" (vv. 18-19). The obvious question about these verses is this: If someone was not a member of a local church, how could his contribution to the Body of Christ be expressed? How could he utilize his giftedness if there is no body in which to do so? The same idea could be said of a person when seen in other analogies describing the church as the family of God (Mark 3:33-34; 1 John 5:1; Matthew 6:9), the building of God (Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:19-22), and the flock of God (John 10; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4). The very application of these passages would make little sense unless we understand them within a local-body context. Another reason to affirm the idea of someone joining with a local church is to see that there must have been some sort of accounted membership in the early church, given the references to actual numbers of people. Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 6:1 speak of the actual numbers of people being added to the early church, thus implying at least the possibility of records being kept of those identifying with the Body of Christ. Additionally, since Christ loved and died for the church (Ephesians 5:25-27), and since He promised also to build the church (Matthew 16:13-20), why wouldn't a Christian desire to be publicly identified with the church?

Still another reason to believe there was some sort of membership process in the early church was the sending of "letters of commendation" which affirmed the character of Christians as they traveled from one location to another. For instance, Acts 15:23-31 speaks of a letter sent from the Jerusalem church to Antioch which commends the ministry of Paul, Barnabas, Barsabbas, and Silas for the continuing work of spreading the gospel. Indeed, Acts 28:21 seems

to imply that certain letters of commendation about a person's Christian character were *required* in the early church, implying that this was a way of discerning who was to be trusted as a sincere believer. Due to the fact that people might be moving around in various geographical regions, especially in light of the intense persecution occurring, as well as their desire to travel and preach the gospel to all creatures, the commending of their characters was essential. Paul commends the sending of letters about certain envoys of his in 1 Corinthians 16:3 (it is implied also in 2 Corinthians 3:1 and Romans 16:21-23), although he knew the Corinthians because they were "written on his heart." These series of letters implied that as Christians traveled to other areas, there was a way to communicate who was to be commended as a servant of the Lord. This would mean that traveling Christians could be more readily affirmed as bona fide members of one local congregation being sent to another. When you add the fact that these Christians would be entering other believer's homes (house-churches), it made it all the more important for a commendation of some kind. Admittedly, all of these arguments are more biblically descriptive than prescriptive; nevertheless, they are helpful in affirming that commitment/membership to a local church seems to be the most prudent way for accountability, shepherding, and the utilization of one's spiritual giftedness to take place. The New Testament clearly demonstrates (every epistle was written to a local church) the importance of commitment to the church through its structure of elders, deacons, and members. Matthew 18: 18-20 further authorizes the elders of a local church to discipline those who are in unrepentant sin, which presupposes those who are aligned with the body and those who are not. Therefore, publicly identifying with the church is both a joyful and yet solemn responsibility. Hebrews 13: 17 thus enjoins members to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

A membership process today would be similar to the early church's letters of commendation in that people could be welcomed from sister churches who could affirm their commitment to Christ. Having local congregations ask their people to give testimonies and affirm doctrinal positions would be a way to know who is willing to publicly declare their commitment to Christ. Does this mean that church membership today is merely a matter of filling out certain sets of paperwork in order to be recognized as a Christian? No. It simply means that the church has the opportunity to organize a process of determining those believers who are willing to be recognized as a part of their local church body. As in the early church, it also assists in the commending of Christians who find themselves moving to other geographical regions of the country and world. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 implies that the early church knew who the believers were who had publicly declared their faith in Christ, because it goes on to speak of certain "unbelievers" entering in. These are obviously the persons within a gathering who were not readily recognized as a normal part of the believing fellowship. If there is no process of discerning believers from the unbelievers (to the best of human ability), the line is blurred between the two. The membership process of The Bible Church of Little Rock seeks to determine those who are confessing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (baptism), and who are desiring to minister their spiritual giftedness in their local church for the glory of God (membership).

Given the fact of great persecution in this newly formed church, the public identification would signal an even greater commitment to the local church than many today realize. Jesus Himself said, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My

Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33). Those who genuinely and publicly declared their faith in Christ (usually expressed in baptism and recognized membership) during the period of the founding of the early church, could expect to be ostracized from family and friends. Their public declaration before men was rewarded by Jesus declaring His affirmation of them before His heavenly Father. Joining with a local body of believers today is a similar commitment to publicly declaring your faith.

## Discipling Believers

God has called The Bible Church of Little Rock to the indispensable task of discipleship. Both the Old and New Testaments mark out discipleship as a requisite part of ministry-not an option. Jesus, the greatest disciple-maker, from the text of Mark 3:13-15, utilized four reproducible principles in His ministry, which remain equally relevant today. They are prayerful meditation, careful selection, purposeful association, and powerful proclamation. This is the best model for fulfilling our Lord's Great Commission mandate given in Matthew 28:18-20: *"Jesus came up and spoke to them [the disciples], saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'."*

### Prayerful Meditation

The first principle of making and reproducing disciples for Jesus Christ is prayerful meditation, as contained in Mark 3:13a: *"And He went up on the mountain. . . ."* Luke 6:12-13 explains what Jesus was doing on the mountain when it says that *"He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him."* The first principle that Jesus employed in the choosing of His own disciples was all-night prayer! The choice was a monumental commitment, and the Lord faithfully bathed His decision in prayer. Any attempt at making disciples of Jesus Christ at The Bible Church of Little Rock must be saturated with prayer. This prayerful meditation includes the initial evangelization of a person to become a disciple of Christ, and their subsequent growth as a disciple. For any success to occur in the church's ministry of evangelism and discipleship, prayer is foundational.

### Careful Selection

The second principle of making and reproducing disciples for Jesus Christ is careful selection. Mark 3:13b says, *"[He] summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him."* It is only by the will of God that anyone becomes a disciple of Christ and that anyone receives discipleship training in Christ (John 1:12; 3:6; 6:44, 63, 65, 70; 8:36; 10:3-4, 16; 15:5, 16; 1 John 4:19). Subject to that same will and choice of God, disciplers should carefully select and disciple those to whom God chooses to impart eternal life. Just as the apostles led the congregation in selecting servants in Acts 6:1-6, so leaders today must carefully select others to nurture and teach for service in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). In addition, as Paul instructed Timothy to entrust spiritual truth to faithful men, The Bible Church leaders should select such men in whom to reproduce spiritual leadership. As Leroy Eims has wisely said in this regard, "Whoever is thinking about or is now involved in a ministry of making disciples. . . should think soberly about this matter of selection. It is much easier to ask a man to come with you than to ask him to leave if you learn, much to your chagrin and sorrow, that you have chosen the wrong man" (Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978, p. 29).

### **Purposeful Association**

The third principle for the discipling and reproducing of disciples of Jesus Christ is purposeful association. Mark 3:14 notes that Jesus "appointed twelve, that they might be with Him." Mark says very plainly that Jesus Christ appointed His disciples for the very purpose of being with Him. The Greek text contains a purpose clause (*hina osin meta autou*), which could be translated, "for the very purpose," or "so that," or even, "with the result," "they might be with Him." The time with Jesus was not only for the purpose of growing and learning under His teaching, but also for fellowship and refreshment through His modeling and example. Thus, effective discipling ministry will be directly related to the time spent between the disciple and discipler. The structure of such times spent together is flexible, of course, but the point is this: One cannot truly influence those with whom he does not spend time. If a discipler is going to reproduce himself in the lives of others, it will result from a purposeful association of spiritual fellowship and biblical nurturing.

### **Powerful Proclamation**

The fourth and final principle for the making and reproducing of disciples for Jesus Christ is powerful proclamation. Mark 3:14-15 says that Jesus chose His disciples so "*that He might send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons.*" As Jesus purposed to spend time with His disciples, so He also purposed for them to go out and preach with authority. The same kind of purpose clause as verse 14 is listed here, and shows distinctly that Jesus' plan was to disciple these men in order to send them out to preach the gospel with power. Although we are not commanded to cast out demons today, we still have the responsibility to preach the gospel with Holy Spirit-wrought power! Discipleship ultimately means that those disciplined must go out and preach the authoritative Word of God to others.

The Bible Church of Little Rock is committed to evangelize the lost and disciple those who respond to the message of the gospel. Each member of the body has the responsibility to share Christ with those in his or her sphere of influence. Once those whom God chooses respond to that message, we have presently several outlets for the discipleship process including a New Member class, Equipping Hour classes, Care Groups, Women's ministry discipleship classes, etc. When we are faithfully providing these kinds of teaching ministries, which occur in a relational context, only then will we be answering the mandate of our Lord's Great Commission.



## **Divorce and Remarriage**

The Board of Elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock has adopted the following statement, The Elder's Perspective on Divorce and Remarriage, published by Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, as The Bible Church of Little Rock's position on divorce and remarriage. Copyright 2001 by Grace Community Church. All rights reserved. Used by permission for the sole use of The Bible Church of Little Rock.

### **SECTION ONE**

God hates divorce, because it always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that two partners have entered into before God, and because it brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children (Malachi 2:14-16). Divorce in the Scripture is permitted as an accommodation to man's sin for the protection of the faithful partner by releasing him or her from the oppressive bondage of covenant duties that he or she cannot fulfill. Since divorce is only a concession to man's sin and is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there is no other recourse. With God's help a marriage can survive the worst sins.

In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ teaches clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage bond (Genesis 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of the "hardness of heart" exhibited by the Israelites (Matthew 19:8). Legal divorce was a concession for the faithful partner due to the disobedience of the other partner to God, so that the faithful partner no longer had to remain in a hopeless and intolerable situation (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Although He did say that divorce was inevitable in some situations, we must remember that Jesus' primary point in this discourse is to correct the Jews' idea that they could divorce one another "for any cause at all" (Matthew 19:3) and to show them the gravity of pursuing a sinful divorce. Therefore the believer should never consider divorce except in certain extreme circumstances (see Section Two), and even in those circumstances it should only be pursued reluctantly because there is no other recourse.

Both partners in a marriage have entered into a solemn covenant before God to fulfill their responsibilities in that marriage as long as they are able to do so (Malachi 2:14; 1 Peter 3:1-7). So even when adultery, desertion, or divorce occurs in a marriage, the faithful partner has a responsibility before God to forgive and reconcile if the unfaithful partner repents (Luke 17:3-4; Ephesians 4:32). When reconciliation is possible for an estranged or divorced couple, God wants both partners to pursue that reconciliation wholeheartedly through means such as prayer, biblical counseling, and even church discipline. The following are some biblical reasons for the necessity of such reconciliation:

- God's Word commands us to forgive one another (Matthew 18:35; Luke 17:3-4; etc.) and that command certainly applies in situations involving adultery or even repeated adultery, when the sinner asks for forgiveness and exhibits a pattern of obedience as the fruit of true repentance (Matthew 3:8).

- Forgiveness and reconciliation are inextricably linked in the Scriptures (Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15; 2 Corinthians 2), so much so that it would be nonsensical to say, "I forgive him but I will not reconcile with him." Our forgiveness is to reflect God's (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13), and God would never say that. In fact, the purpose of forgiveness is to remove the barrier to reconciliation.
- The grounds for divorce mentioned by Jesus in the gospels is unrepentant sexual sin, not sexual sin per se (see Section Two), because the reason for allowing divorce is as a protection and kindness for the faithful spouse who has been forsaken (either sexually or geographically). God allows divorce when there is no way for the faithful partner to fulfill his or her covenant obligations of companionship and sexual oneness. In a case where a sinning partner wants to return to that covenant relationship, the faithful partner can still fulfill those obligations and therefore would be unfaithful to his or her covenant by leaving. Those who initiate a divorce when a sinning partner is repentant are forsaking their covenant vows.
- Contrary to a common idea, sexual sin does not by itself break the marriage bond. Sexual sin is given as the cause for the divorce, which breaks the marriage bond (Jeremiah 3:6-9; Matthew 5:32). Sexual sin strains a marriage bond, to be sure, but two people are still married to one another after it happens. If this were not the case, every couple that survives an affair would have to be remarried in another ceremony.

## SECTION TWO

The only biblical grounds for divorce are unrepentant sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever.

The first is found in Jesus' use of the Greek word *porneia* (Matthew 5:32, 19:9), a general term that encompasses many kinds of sexual activity such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest (1 Corinthians 5:1). This kind of sin was mentioned in Old Testament imagery as grounds for divorce between God and Israel (Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:6-9), and in that case it was not merely the sexual sin that occasioned the divorce, but the fact that the unfaithful partner "did not return." When one partner forsakes the unity and intimacy of a marriage in that way, it becomes impossible for the faithful partner to fulfill his or her covenant obligations (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5), and thus he or she is placed in an intolerable situation. After all other means are exhausted to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the only way to bring about resolution and release for the faithful partner will be divorce.

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving mate does not desire to live with his or her believing spouse, especially because of the latter's Christian testimony (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Because "God has called us to peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15), divorce is actually preferable in such situations since peace cannot be maintained. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage will only create tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, perhaps because of chosen lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believer is in an intolerable situation of having legal and moral obligations

that he or she cannot fulfill. Because "the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases" (1 Corinthians 7:15), that is he or she no longer needs to remain married, divorce is acceptable without fearing the displeasure of God.

### SECTION THREE

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner when the divorce was on biblical grounds. So those Christians who divorce because of unrepentant sexual sin are allowed by God to marry another believer (Matthew 5:32, 19:9), as are those who have been forsaken by an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of "adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should "remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matthew 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Corinthians 7:11). The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

### SECTION FOUR

Believers who pursue divorce on unbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who obtains an unbiblical divorce and remarries is living in a state of "adultery" since God did not recognize the validity of the original divorce (Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11-12). That person is subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. If a professing Christian forsakes the marriage covenant and refuses to repent during the process of church discipline, then Scripture instructs that he or she should be put out of the church and treated as an unbeliever. When the discipline results in such a reclassification of the disobedient spouse as an "outcast" or unbeliever, the faithful partner would be free to remarry according to the provision for divorce when an unbeliever departs, as stated in 1 Corinthians 7:15-16. (Time should be allowed, however, for the possibility of the unfaithful spouse returning because of the discipline).

The leadership in the local church should also help single believers who have been divorced to understand their situation biblically, especially in cases where the appropriate application of biblical teaching does not seem clear. For example, the church leadership may at times need to decide whether one or both of the former partners could be legitimately considered "believers" at the time of their past divorce, because this will affect the application of biblical principles to their current situation (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). Also, because people often transfer to or from other churches and many of those churches do not practice church discipline, it also might be necessary for the leadership to decide whether a member's estranged or former spouse

should currently be considered a Christian or treated as an unbeliever because of continued disobedience. Again, in some cases this would affect the application of the biblical principles (1 Corinthians 7:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

Any believer who is in a divorce situation that seems unclear should humbly seek the help and direction of church leaders, because God has placed those men in the Body for such purposes (Matthew 18:18; Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 13:17).

## SECTION FIVE

Salvation means that a person begins a new life. The believer is responsible to obey what God has revealed about marriage and divorce from the point of his or her salvation.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, the believer has become a "new creature" when he believes in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Christ immediately erases painful memories, bad habits, or the underlying causes for past marital problems, but it does mean that He begins a process of transformation through the Holy Spirit and the Word. A sign of saving faith will be a receptivity and a willingness to obey what God has revealed about marriage and divorce in His Word.

The apostle Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:20, 27 is that believers should recognize that the circumstances they find themselves in when they come to Christ are from God. If they were called while married, they are not to seek a divorce (except on biblical grounds). If they were called while divorced, and cannot be reconciled to their former spouse because that spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then they are free to be remarried to another believer (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

## SECTION SIX

In cases where divorce took place on unbiblical grounds and the guilty partner later repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. A sign of true repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Corinthians 7:11, which would involve a willingness to pursue reconciliation with his or her former spouse, if that is possible. If reconciliation is not possible, however, because the former spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then the forgiven believer could pursue another relationship under the supervision of church leadership.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed and forsaken (Mark 10:11-12). God does forgive that sin immediately when repentance takes place, and from that point on the believer should continue in his or her current marriage according to biblical principles. To obtain a second divorce would disobey Scripture (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) because he or she is now bound to the obligations of the covenant made with the new spouse.

## SECTION SEVEN

The church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. First Timothy 3:2, 12 says that leaders must be "the husband of

one wife" (lit. "one-woman man"). That phrase does not mean that an elder or deacon cannot have had a divorce in his past, because none of the other qualifications listed refer to specific acts in the past (prior or subsequent to salvation). Rather, they all refer to qualities that currently characterize a man's life.

In cases where a potential leader has been divorced, the church must be confident that he has given evidence of "ruling his family well" and proven his ability to lead those close to him to salvation and sanctification. His family is to be a model of faithful and righteous living (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). It may also be necessary to examine the circumstances surrounding his divorce (whether it was before or after salvation, on what grounds, etc.) and any consequences still remaining that may affect his reputation, because God desires the leaders of His church to be the best possible models of godliness before men. If he truly desires to be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2), a potential leader will be willing to undergo such scrutiny. His marriage should be a model demonstration of Ephesians 5:22-29, the relationship of Christ to His church.

For further study on the elders' perspective, see the following materials:

John MacArthur—tape series *On Divorce* (Grace To You radio); commentary sections on Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series (Moody Press)

Jay Adams—*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Zondervan Publishers)

John Murray—*Divorce* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company)

Thomas Edgar—Essay in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, edited by H. Wayne House (InterVarsity Publishers)

## Appendix 1--The Question of a Divorced Elder/Deacon

Whenever the subject of divorce and remarriage is discussed, the inevitable question of whether a divorced and/or remarried man can ever serve as an elder/deacon follows closely behind. This discussion has led to much confusion as well as a great deal of heartache for many individuals and churches. Multitudes of men who have desired the work and service of an elder/deacon have also encountered great opposition to that desire simply because of a previous divorce. The opposition often comes from those who believe that regardless of any past circumstances, no one who has had a previous divorce is biblically qualified to serve as an elder/deacon. Yet on the other side of the spectrum, many today are advocating that we abandon all efforts to examine the nature of anyone's past marital status. They say we should appoint men to the eldership/deaconship on present tense circumstances alone. Their argument follows that because divorce is so rampant in our society, affirming non-divorced men is becoming an even greater challenge. In addition, increasing numbers of pastors are becoming divorced and remaining in positions of elder/pastoral ministry! Alexander Strauch writes that this issue "was dramatically highlighted when a leading evangelical journal in America brought together five divorced pastors and asked them to share their feelings, experiences, and views on divorce and the ministry. The journal's staff published the forum because they believed the growing problem of divorce among ministers needed to be faced openly and honestly." Strauch went on to say that the article "claimed that a recent survey of divorce rates in the United States showed that pastors had the third highest divorce rate, exceeded only by that of medical doctors and policemen!" (*"A Biblical Style of Leadership?"* Leadership 2, Fall, 1981, 119-129, cited in Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1995, 67).

The ultimate answer to this question of course, must come from the Word of God. But what does Scripture teach on the subject? What insights do we have from God's Word that could help us in this regard? Can a man who is divorced (or who is married to someone who has been divorced) ever serve at the highest levels of spiritual leadership? These crucial questions must be answered if we are to maintain the true biblical standards of spiritual leadership.

First of all, those who oppose any divorced man serving as an elder/deacon almost universally do so on the basis of the apostle Paul's language in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12. There Paul says that if a man is to serve as an elder, he must be the "husband of one wife". (This English translation comes from the Greek phrase, *mias gunaikos andra*, which when literally translated means, a "one-woman man," or a "one-wife husband"). There are generally four different ways this phrase has been understood:

- elders must be married
- elders must not be polygamists
- elders must have married only once in their life
- elders must be sexually pure and therefore totally committed to their wife (biblical monogamy)

The following will be an attempt to summarize the various views and a biblical response:

Those who take the view that an elder/deacon is to be qualified only if he is married misunderstand Paul's intent in this passage. If this were Paul's meaning here, he would be obviously contradicting himself in what he wrote to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 32-35; see also Matt. 19:12). There, he states that it would be better if believers were to remain single "even as I myself am" (v. 7). He reiterates this in v. 8 when he says, "But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I." Paul was not only an apostle, but also a pastor (he served for three years as the pastor at Ephesus, for instance), so he certainly could not be commanding Timothy to examine potential elders/deacons on the basis of what he himself was not qualified to undertake. Likewise, he also says to the Corinthians that as apostles, they had "the right" to "take along" (marry), a believing wife, "even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas [Peter]" (1 Corinthians 9:5). Even though he did not personally choose the option of marriage (or that he had in fact been married before but at the time of his statement, he was speaking as a widow, as many would contend from 1 Cor. 7:40), Paul could have served as an elder/deacon and yet have remained single. To put it another way, if one of an elder's/deacon's requisite qualifications is his marrying, then every single man would be automatically disqualified, including of course, Jesus Himself. It is obvious that this view is not a serious consideration of what the phrase, "one-woman man" really means.

The second possibility is that Paul intends to convey that no elder/deacon candidate is qualified if he has more than one wife at the same time (polygamy). This was certainly a major issue in Paul's day, but it is unlikely that this is what he had in mind. The main reason is again the use of the specific phrase, "one-woman man." Paul could certainly have used a couple of different phrases to speak against polygamy if he had truly wanted to. For instance, he simply could have said, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, having no more than one wife," or "having no more than one wife at a time." This would have most assuredly dealt with any polygamy sins which were occurring at this time. Another reason Paul must have meant something else is that the phrase, "one-woman man" occurs three other times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:12, referring to the office of deacon; 1 Tim. 5:9; Titus 1:6, referring also to the office of elder), which by their usage, help us see that polygamy was probably not in view. In the 1 Timothy 5:9 passage, the phrase is used to speak of a widow and whether or not she is to receive some financial assistance from the church. Even though Paul uses the corresponding phrase, "one-man woman," or "one-husband wife," he is essentially speaking of the same kind of qualification and speaks to whether a female widow had demonstrated a faithfulness to her one husband (who is obviously now deceased). We can conclude that because polyandry (a woman who would be having at least two husbands at the same time), was repugnant both to the Jews and Romans, Paul would have no real need to address this issue in the church. Therefore, if Paul used the corresponding phrase to refer to these polygamist men in 1 Timothy 3, he would be very confusing to his readers, and certainly should have been far more specific.

A third group of interpreters view this "one-woman man" phrase as meaning that a man could only marry once in his lifetime. This view also will often reflect the belief that once divorced a man could never remarry, with some even going so far as to say that a widower could not remarry! As in the first view however, this plainly contradicts other passages of Scripture. 1 Corinthians 7:39 distinctly says, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her

husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." Likewise, Romans 7:2 says, "The married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning her husband." Nowhere in God's Word does it state that remarriage after the death of a spouse automatically renders a man no longer "above reproach." Indeed, Paul himself urges young widows (meaning those who were still in their prime childbearing years) to "get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach" (1 Timothy 5:14). Immorality being rampant in that pagan society, and with Christianity being so new, Paul was saying the best way to avoid a lasting reproach was to become married! Finally, Paul even warns Timothy a chapter earlier that some false teachers were actually forbidding marriage (1 Timothy 4:3), and these men should be exposed. Surely, this no-marriage view in 1 Timothy 3:2 would need to be clarified since he condemns these false teachers only a chapter later! Lastly, it would also set up a very difficult double standard. Those outside the spiritual leadership of the church could marry or remarry, while those within leadership could not.

The fourth view says that Paul is simply emphasizing in this phrase, "one-woman man," the concept of marital faithfulness to one's present spouse. This seems to be the most natural way to interpret the phrase. Strauch concludes, ". . . the phrase 'the husband of one wife' is meant to be a positive statement that expresses faithful, monogamous marriage. In English we would say, 'faithful and true to one woman' or 'a one-woman man.' . . . Negatively, the phrase prohibits all deviation from faithful, monogamous marriage. Thus, it would prohibit an elder/deacon from polygamy, concubinage, homosexuality, and/or any other questionable sexual relationship. Positively, Scripture says the candidate for the eldership/deaconate should be a 'one-woman man,' meaning he has an exclusive relationship with one woman. Such a man is above reproach in his sexual and marital life" (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 192). In other words, are you completely committed to the wife you now have? Is your love for her ever growing and do you serve and love her as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). It is possible that if our English Bible translators had simply translated the phrase literally, much confusion could have been avoided. But since the phrase has been translated as "the husband of one wife," it has evoked much needless debate and anguish.

The only question which remains regards the general question of whether a divorced man should ever serve as an elder/deacon, even if he has proven to be a present and faithful husband to his wife. This matter is covered in Paul's first qualification of 1 Timothy 3:2, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach." Being above reproach means that there is nothing for which one can be accused or blamed, those things which could render a man as being able to be validly accused of sinful behavior. He must not have a chargeable character; that is, he has an impeccable reputation. He lives his life in such a way that no one, not even his critics, can accuse him of scandalizing the body of Christ in any way. They can find no fault in his character. This matter of being above reproach could even be questioned—for instance, in the case of a man who has himself married someone who has had a divorce in *their* past. In this instance, he could potentially be unable to serve.

Another very important reminder is this: we must remember that the qualifications as listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are present tense qualifications. The main evaluation of a man's life must take place in the present, not in the past. ***Does this automatically mean that a man's past***



*actions have utterly no bearing on his present life? No. A man's past could in fact, render him as reproached in some way.* What ways could this be true? A man could be disqualified if his past divorce has continuing implications. For instance, a man who has had a divorce in his past (whether it is his pre-Christian past or his Christian past), might be rendered reproachable in the eyes of the congregation if the man's former spouse is in the same community as his local church, or in the same local church itself. In some cases, this may mean he is not qualified to serve as an elder/deacon there. Another example is if his children from a previous marriage(s) are not believers or are a reproach to him in some way. It could even be true that a man himself may be qualified to serve as an elder/deacon but be unable to serve because he has married someone who has had a divorce. In other words, his spouse's prior marriage and divorce could bring a reproach on him if the details of that situation have present ramifications, including the issue of where her former husband is presently living and if children have been born to that prior marriage relationship.

It is likely that any man who has had a divorce in his past, whether pre-Christian or post-Christian, will **not** be able to serve as an elder/deacon. Usually, there are circumstances which render him as not above reproach. This does not mean that he cannot serve the Lord in the local church in a non-elder/non-deacon capacity. He can serve in a variety of ways by God's providence. *It would seem to be an extremely rare occurrence for a man who has had a divorce, whether biblically allowed or not, to fulfill the role of elder/deacon in the local church.* This is never intended to make anyone think that he, because of the fact of his divorce, is a second-class Christian, and that his divorce is a stigma which follows him forever. But it is nonetheless true that divorce itself *is* a stigma, and does in fact become a lasting and stigmatic reproach for many. God's grace can cover the sin but the consequences sometimes do have lasting effects. It is true that there are many different scenarios which the elders of any local church must consider regarding the divorced: Was the potential elder/deacon divorced before his conversion? Was his divorce biblically allowable, even after his salvation, and if so, is there any possibility of reconciliation to his former spouse? What is the present character of a man, who has been converted to Christ, and has had an unbiblical divorce while a Christian, but who has repented and walked with Christ in blamelessness since then? The answer to these questions is invariably the same: *It is very likely he, because of some marital reproach—even in the distant past—is therefore not above reproach. He would not be able to serve the Lord in the local church as an elder/deacon.*

Finally, regardless of the specifics of any one's past marital situation, the general principle is this: does he enjoy the complete and full affirmation of the leaders and people of his own congregation and is he presently living out the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? If a particular local church scrutinizes his life and ministry and sees nothing in his present character or past conduct that brings a reproach, he may, in God's good providence, serve as an elder/deacon in that place. Some have suggested that since it is so unlikely that a man with a divorce in his past could serve as an elder/deacon, there should be an **automatic rejection** of such men for these offices. While acknowledging that it is rare for a divorced man to serve as an elder/deacon, we must, however, be continually reminded of Paul's very clear warning in 1 Corinthians 4:6—"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." To **automatically** disqualify any man

with a divorce is to “exceed that which is written.” This position is not an attempt to lower the standard for the office, but rather an appeal to be as biblically precise as possible.

Elders who represent any local church should take seriously their role in examining any prospective elder/deacon, especially one who has some marital issues in his past. The elders have a tremendous responsibility to look into all of the possible implications of this man’s past, being sure they have conducted a thorough and exhaustive examination of every salient detail. Strauch again gives wise words on this matter:

What does 1 Timothy say about sexual and marital sins committed before a person's conversion to Christ? What about people who have legally divorced and remarried (assuming the local church allows for such)? What about the forgiveness and restoration of a fallen spiritual leader? These and many other painful and controversial questions are not answered directly here. They must be answered from the whole of Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage, forgiveness, grace, and restoration, as well as its teaching on leadership example and the full spectrum of elder qualifications.

All deviations from God's standard of marital behavior confuse and perplex us. Sin always confuses, distorts, and divides, so there will always be diverse opinions on questions such as these. This in no way, however, diminishes the local church's obligation to face these issues and make wise, scripturally sound decisions. In all these heartbreaking situations, the honor of Jesus' name, faithfulness to His Word, and prayer are the supreme guides" (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 192-93).

## Appendix 2--Common Questions Regarding Divorce and Remarriage

Some of the most common questions facing Christians in the local church deal with issues of divorce and remarriage. The following are questions which routinely come up and which must be answered by the elders of any local church with great wisdom and skill. The answers given are *biblical guidelines*, which can assist in the process of helping believers.

### 1. *What is the time frame for a divorced person to remarry, especially if that person's former spouse has not remarried?*

The answer is a critical one in that there are many people who are in the category of the divorced, regardless of how that divorce occurred. The first place to go in Scripture in answering this question is where the apostle Paul says: "To the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)." Although this passage is speaking to the fact of a divorce, not the time frame, it does give us a most important word on remarriage. Remember what was said earlier:

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner when the divorce was on biblical grounds. So those Christians who divorce because of unrepentant sexual sin are allowed by God to marry another believer (Matthew 5:32, 19:9), as are those who have been forsaken by an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of "adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that **a believing woman who sinfully divorces should "remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).** If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matthew 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Corinthians 7:11). **The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.**

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:11-12).

The key to answering this question in any particular case is to ascertain if the divorced person has had **a biblically allowable divorce**. If they do, then they are free at any time to remarry, but only "in the Lord" (see 1 Corinthians 7:39). This is the only person who is free to remarry. If someone has unbiblically divorced their spouse, they may not remarry, but rather should seek to be reconciled to their former spouse. If on the other hand, an innocent spouse has had a divorce initiated against them, they must seek the wisdom of the elders in determining their present and future marital status. Some elders/leaders could determine, upon the evaluation of an

individual's situation, that the innocent party is free to remarry. The all-important factor is the elders' examination of each case and their biblical wisdom on the matter.

**2. *May a Christian who is divorced remarry if he was divorced as a non-Christian?***

Yes. Paul explicitly says in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28: "*Are you bound [married] to a wife? Do not seek to be released [divorced]. Are you released [previously been divorced] from a wife? Do not seek [to be married to] a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin [one who has never before been married] marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.*" These two verses, however, only apply to those who were divorced before becoming a Christian. Paul had told the Corinthians earlier that "*each man must remain in that condition in which he was called [to salvation]*" (1 Corinthians 7:20). But he follows that up immediately with the statement that even though they have become Christians while in the state of divorce, they should stay that way. But if they nonetheless choose to remarry, he is not suggesting they are in sin. They should however, marry only a believer.

**3. *What is the time frame for the innocent party in the marriage relationship to wait and see if their spouse is going to repent of their sexual sin before divorcing?***

There can be no standard answer to this question. The ultimate perspective is, of course, what Hosea did with his adulterous wife, Gomer. He remained with her, choosing to express his covenant love, even though she was a perpetual adulterer. God brought her to the place of repentance and Hosea was honored for his commitment. Having said that, many who have an unrepentant, sexually sinful marriage partner choose not to remain in the relationship. And if they choose not to remain in the marriage, God will allow them to divorce their spouse. What the innocent spouse must do is appeal to the leadership of their church for the elders' biblical wisdom on both the nature of the unrepentant spouse's relationship to Christ, as well as the pattern of the sin and any church discipline, which would be involved to take its course. If the sinful spouse is not a professing believer, the innocent spouse should choose to show Christ's love for sinners, but should they choose instead to divorce, it should be carried out with the full knowledge and allowance of their spiritual overseers.

**4. *What is the status of those Christians who have unbiblically divorced their spouse and married another? Are they living in perpetual adultery with their new spouse? What about the concept of forgiveness? Isn't that person forgiven if they seek it, even if they have unbiblically remarried?***

Any true Christian can be forgiven of all their sins, even the sin of an unbiblical divorce. The real issue of course, is not forgiveness, but what will be the sure consequences of such sin. Mark 10:12 does say that if a person divorces unbiblically, they commit adultery, and cause the person they marry to commit adultery. If a person lives a pattern of sinful behavior, including committing the sin of adultery, it is right to question whether that person has any saving relationship to Christ. If they do, in fact, know Christ, they will be forgiven but will experience severe chastisement from the Lord. They will, if they are genuinely converted to Jesus Christ, repudiate their previous sin, seek to confess and forsake it, and begin to live in a way that is pleasing to Christ. Often however, the only salvation evidence a person has exhibited is simply

verbal. The apostle Paul warned Titus about those who had a mere verbal profession: “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16). It could very well be that those who live in adultery were never washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

**5. *What if someone has had multiple marriages and divorces? Can they ever hope to know what their marital status is and what the Lord would have them do to be pleasing to Him?***

In one sense, those who have had multiple marriages and divorces are no different than those who have committed many other types of sins. They must confess all known sin and seek at the moment of their salvation to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. The consequences of marital infidelity though, are often enormous (especially if children are involved). One may need to financially support several sets of families, or work toward mending all kinds of broken relationships, including blended family concerns.

To answer the question specifically, it is sometimes impossible to “unscramble the egg,” given all of the intertwined relationships. The general answer from scripture is this: Paul admonishes us to stay in the state we were in when we were called to salvation (see 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24). In that chapter, Paul teaches that one is to stay in the state they were in when Christ called them to Himself. So whether you are single, having never married (Paul calls this state a “virgin”—vv. 25-27), married, divorced (Paul calls these the “unmarried”—vv. 8-9), or widowed, stay in that state. In other words, whether you are presently married or unmarried, endeavor to serve God in that state with all your heart. If you are in the state of singleness—however it has occurred, heed Paul’s own lifestyle of singleness for the opportunity of optimally glorifying God. This way you will be able to serve Christ in an unhindered fashion (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 28-35).

Some may assume, given the above paragraph, that having been previously divorced, they are forbidden to remarry. This, however, does not appear to be the case. Paul tells the previously married and widows, “*It is good for them if they remain, even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion*” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). He goes on to say, “*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet, such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you*” (1 Corinthians 7:27-28). Paul himself says that it is better if they remain single; however, he acknowledges this is not a command, but a concession (see vv. 6, 28, 32-35, 39-40). If they should choose to marry, they must marry “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Given the fact that Paul allows for remarriage, one must not assume that they can confess Christ and divorce their believing spouse in order to remarry another. Paul gives a strong prohibition to those who are in Christ and who are presently married: they must not divorce. “*But to the married, I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave [divorce] her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife*” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If you should unbiblically divorce in this manner, you have the responsibility to remain unmarried

and seek reconciliation to your spouse. The only exception to this, of course, is what has been previously mentioned (cf. pages 4-5). That divorce is allowable only when your spouse is choosing to live in unrepentant adultery. Remember what was written earlier: *“Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner when the divorce was on biblical grounds. So those Christians who divorce because of unrepentant sexual sin are allowed by God to marry another believer (Matthew 5:32, 19:9).”* If you are unsure about the biblical position of your particular situation, you should seek the counsel of your church leadership before you embark on another relationship.

### **How to Become a Christian**

- Admit your sinful ways and desire to turn from them and be delivered from the judgment they bring (Romans 3:10, 23; Acts 3:19).
- Acknowledge what Christ died for sinners on the cross, which was confirmed by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 5:8; John 11:25).
- Receive Him as the only means of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 6:40).
- Appropriate His rightful claim as Lord of your life (Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:10-11).

If you have questions about how you can become a Christian, or want help in knowing how to live the Christian life, please write to Grace Community Church, 13248 Roscoe Boulevard, Sun Valley, California 91352 or The Bible Church of Little Rock, 19111 Cantrell Road, Little Rock, Arkansas 72223.

## Equipping the Saints

One of the main tasks of the leadership of any local church is that of equipping the saints for the work of ministering to others. The apostle Paul declared this in Ephesians 4:11-12: “He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” The Greek word Paul uses for equipping is *katartizo*, which means, “to furnish completely; complete; prepare” (George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968, p. 238). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the leadership of the church to prepare or complete the ministry skills of the congregation for their various duties of service and ministry. *Katartizo* is also used in Matthew 4:21 and translated “mending,” referring to James and John “mending” their nets for fishing. In order for their fishing to be most effective, they needed to “equip” their nets for optimum fish-catching. Likewise, in order for the local church to perform the most effective ministry possible, they must “equip” the believers for this task.

The two major avenues for the full maturing of the church are through preaching/teaching and shepherding. Preaching and teaching are the purest and most effective form for this maturing because it is the direct proclamation of the Word of God that matures the saints. That is why Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 4:14-15, “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.” God has declared that it is the preaching of the Word that brings men and women to faith in Christ and it is that same preaching/teaching which matures them in the faith (see Romans 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 1 Peter 1:22--2:1-3).

Shepherding is also crucial because it allows the leadership to speak directly with any individual member of the Body of Christ and give them clear and distinct spiritual counsel. Whatever has been taught from the pulpit can be directly applied to any individual who has need. This is no doubt why Paul links the two equipping means together with the title, “Pastor-Teacher” in Ephesians 4:11. The “Pastor” of Pastor-Teacher is the distinct shepherding role he must fulfill, and the “Teacher” function of “Pastor-Teacher” is the impartation of that truth into their lives through preaching.

Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 both give the command to “shepherd the flock.” Shepherding might be the more elastic term among preaching/teaching and shepherding, but it is nonetheless paramount for the elders of the church. It is true that shepherding is an aspect of the teaching role, but shepherding primarily relates to meeting individually and regularly with the flock. This could include a number of different phases of ministry, but certainly includes speaking directly with the flock about their daily needs. It will also assuredly mean that the elders must warn/instruct/counsel believers of their sinful thoughts and actions, so that they will be more fully conformed to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Paul speaks of this ministry of shepherding/admonishing in a number of key passages (see Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 6: 4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

All of the aforementioned relates to the church leadership's role in equipping the saints for the work of ministry. The elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock therefore, commit to equipping the saints in a way that maximizes ministry to the glory of God. This includes assigning every member-family of The Bible Church of Little Rock to an elder, who then is tasked with the responsibility to shepherd them personally. When they are taught God's Word from the pulpit, they can receive immediate shepherding from their assigned elder, should any need arise. If a spiritual crisis occurs, they can meet with their elder for direct counsel. Every member-family is also encouraged strongly to be actively involved in a Care Group, which gives them fellowship and interaction with other member-families. These member-families can also be involved in Sunday morning Equipping Hour classes, which further give opportunity to learn and grow in God's Word. In addition, there are a number of other classes (men's ministry and women's ministry classes, retreats, and conferences for example) where the body can continue to gain much needed input regarding any needs they might have.

All in all, The Bible Church of Little Rock exists for the purpose of equipping its members in every aspect of ministry, as Paul says, "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" (Ephesians 4:13).



## The Fellowship of the Saints

One of the sweetest aspects of ministry in the local church is the fellowship of the saints. The early church both thrived and was greatly blessed by this fellowship. The fellowship they understood came from the concept of *koinonia*, which could be defined as a “sharing in the common life.” It is understood as property and money from Acts 2:44, which says, “*All those who believed were together and had all things in common*” [*koinos*]. The same Greek word is used in Acts 4:32—“*The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common [koinos] property to them.*” The verb *koinoneo* was similarly used in Romans 12:13—“Contributing to the needs of the saints” (see also Romans 15:26-27; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Timothy 6:18; etc.).

This commonality was not simply true of the early church’s property, but was the definition of their very salvation. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:9—“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship [*koinonia*] with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Paul also opens his letter to Titus by saying, “To Titus, my true child in a common [*koinos*] faith” (Titus 1:4; see also 2 Corinthians 8:23; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 1:3, 6, 7). Jude affirms the same truth, but with a negative emphasis, concerning false teachers in his day: “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common [*koinos*] salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3; see also a similar context in 2 John 11 & 2 Corinthians 6:14). The church needed to know and understand that their salvation was part and parcel of their dynamic and unified relationship to God. Christians in this time also knew that to the degree they gave their common allegiance to Christ, they would also “share [*koinoneo*] the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 4:13; see also 1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 5:1).

The fellowship of the early church centered around the devotion “to the apostles’ teaching to fellowship [*koinonia*], to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This kind of fellowship was a gathering together for the spiritual purpose of listening to the teaching of the Word of God, sharing a common meal (called the “love feast”) and to the ministry of corporate prayer. The entire Godhead is involved in our common fellowship: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14; see also Philippians 1:5; 2:1; Philemon 6).

The Bible Church of Little Rock, therefore, affirms the need to contribute financially to the needs of the saints, as well as promote an overall sharing/participation in the common salvation we all share. This will include times of gathering together for the purpose of sharing in worship, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, informal interaction around God’s Word, and any event which specifically promotes a greater knowledge and application of the work of God in the world. This is only where and when true, genuine fellowship can exist.

## Financial Giving

One of the greatest privileges of the church is to give back to the Lord those financial resources He has given to us. The Bible is clear that giving is as much an act of worship as any other spiritual service. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 provide the best backdrop for affirming the church's mandate to give of our financial resources. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7), and the church must recognize the need to provide the proper avenue in which to see individual believers give regularly. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 teaches that each person is to bring their gifts each week to the Lord (through the agency of the local church), with the expectation that the leadership of the church will take those resources and strategically use those funds for the extension of the kingdom of God, and for the ultimate purpose of giving Him glory.

Many believe tithing (the giving of ten percent of one's income to the Lord) is the scriptural mandate for the new covenant Church. However, we are of a different understanding. Various tithes were commanded in the Old Testament theocracy for the Jews, much as our obligation today to pay income taxes to the United States government. The Jews gave funds for the support of the "government," and for the goods and services the government provided for its people. These included the support of the levitical priesthood which had no other means of financial support (see Leviticus 27:30-33; Malachi 3:8; Deuteronomy 12:10-18; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; Leviticus 19:9-10; Nehemiah 10:32-33). A comprehensive study of the Old Testament shows that there were actually several annual tithes the Jews were required to give. Moreover, other partial tithes on different designated years for the poor were expected. The total amounted to anywhere from 23 1/3 to 25 1/3 percent annually. This type of giving is rightly termed "required giving."

There was also "freewill offering," that is, giving to the Lord out of one's own "free will," for whatever need might exist in the community (see Exodus 25:1-2; 35: 4-22; 36:5-7; Deuteronomy 16:10-17; 1 Chronicles 29:6-9), and also a "first fruits" kind of giving (see Numbers 18:12; Proverbs 3:9-10). The New Testament has roughly the same two types of financial giving: required giving, as spoken of in Matthew 17:24-27; Matthew 22:15-22; Romans 13:6-7, and freewill giving, as spoken of in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9; Luke 6:38; 16:11-12; 19:1-10, 11-27, 45-48; Matthew 6:19-24; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 20:35; Romans 15:25-27; Philippians 4:10-18; Hebrews 13:16 and many places in the book of Acts (2:44-45; 11:29-30, etc).

The deacons of any local church under the oversight of the elders have the responsibility to see that those monies are spent in the most optimum way, benefiting each individual, as well as the collective body. There must be no misuse of those funds whatsoever as both deacons and elders are called to be above reproach in the handling of money (1 Timothy 3:3-5, 8, 12). Therefore, the elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock have instituted a conflict of interest policy that insures that no one can be called into question in the use of the Lord's money (see attached "conflict of interest policy"). In addition, the deacons have developed a benevolence policy to assist those in dire need of help (see attached "benevolence policy"). The Bible Church of Little Rock is committed to the teaching and the practice of all these biblical principles on giving.

## Conflict of Interest Policy

**Summary.** The purpose of this statement of policy is to assist The Bible Church of Little Rock, (hereinafter referred to as “Church”) in identifying, disclosing, and resolving potential conflicts of interests.

**Scope.** The following statement applies to:

- Each member of the Council of Elders, (hereinafter referred to collectively as “Elders”)
- All management and employees, (hereinafter referred to collectively as “Staff”)
- Each member of the Council of Deacons (hereinafter referred to collectively as “Deacons”).

**Fiduciary Responsibility.** The Elders, Deacons, and the Staff serve The Bible Church of Little Rock and have a clear obligation to conduct all affairs of the Church in an upright and honest manner. Each person should make necessary decisions using good judgment, reasonable prudence, and Christ-like ethical and moral considerations, recognizing that *“it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful”* (1 Corinthians 4:2). It is important that Elders, Deacons, and Staff maintain and abide by biblical standards of conduct, honesty, integrity, and impartiality. Shunning the very appearance of impropriety, they must be constantly aware of the need to avoid situations that might result in actual or apparent misconduct or conflict of interests. Since any such actual or apparent conflict of interests may impair public confidence in the integrity of the Church regardless of whether any improper influence or action has resulted there from.

All decisions of the Elders, Deacons, and Staff of The Bible Church of Little Rock are to be made solely on the basis of a desire to proclaim Jesus Christ through The Bible Church of Little Rock and its ministry, in accordance with our statement of purpose.

While it is recognized that Elders, Deacons, and Staff may be employed by, or otherwise hold positions with, other for-profit or non-profit organizations, (hereinafter referred to as “Organizations”) all Elders, Deacons, and Staff shall diligently endeavor to guard against allowing such affiliations to influence them to act other than in the best interests of the Church. Similarly, all Elders, Deacons, and Staff shall diligently endeavor to maintain sufficient independence to allow them to act in the best interests of the Church.

**Policy.** Elders, Deacons, and Staff agree to place the welfare of the Church above their own personal financial interests, the financial interests of family members or the financial interests of others who may be personally involved in financial transactions with the Church. To that end, and in full recognition of their fiduciary responsibilities, Elders, Deacons, and Staff agree to pursue a policy of non-participation in decisions to approve or disapprove transactions on behalf of the Church in which they, their family members or organizations with which they are affiliated would have a material, or significant, financial interest.

**Specific Disclosure.** The intent of this provision is to deter the inappropriate influence of conflicts of interest in decisions to enter or approve particular transactions. Elders, Deacons, and

Staff shall disclose fully the precise nature of their personal interests or involvement prior to approval of any transaction for or on behalf of the Church in which another party to the transaction shall include:

- himself;
- a member of his family (spouse, parents, brothers, sisters, children and any other immediate relatives); or
- Any for-profit or non-profit organization with which the Elder, or a member of his family, the Deacon, or a member of his family, the staff member, or a member of his family, is affiliated.

Such Elder, Deacon, or Staff Member shall be deemed to have a “conflict of interest” with respect to the proposed transaction.

*General Disclosure.* The intent of this provision is to deter the inappropriate influence of conflicts of interest in ongoing or future business dealings. Elders, Deacons, and Staff shall make written disclosure of all positions of employment and business affiliations. Elders, Deacons, and Staff shall also make written disclosure of all immediate relatives. In particular, disclosure must be made if any Elder, or a member of his family, Deacon, or a member of his family, or Staff member or a member of his family:

- is an officer, director, trustee, partner, employee, or agent of an organization with which The Bible Church of Little Rock has business dealings;
- is either the actual or beneficial owner of more than one percent (1%) of the voting stock or controlling interest of an organization with which The Bible Church of Little Rock has business dealings;
- is a consultant for such an organization; or
- has any other direct or indirect dealings with an individual or organization from which he is materially or intangibly benefited (e.g. through the receipt directly or indirectly of cash, gifts, favors, privileges, or other property or advantages).

Unless advised to the contrary by the Chairman or the Secretary of the Council of Elders, as provided herein, an Elder, Deacon, or Staff member shall be deemed to have a conflict of interest with respect to the Church’s business dealings with each organization designated by him in the four categories listed above.

***Reporting of Disclosures.*** All general disclosures required of Staff will be filed with the Chairman of the Elders, and all general disclosures required of Elders and Deacons shall be filed with the Secretary of the Council of Elders. Information so disclosed to the Secretary or the Chairman of the Council of Elders will be held in confidence, except when the Church’s best interests would be served by bringing the information to the attention of the Council and the officers of the Church. Elders, Deacons, and Staff members waive any objection to the release of such information when deemed in the best interests of the Church by the Secretary of the Council or the Chairman of the Elders.

***Restraints on Participation.*** Elders, Deacons, and Staff who have a conflict of interest with respect to any proposed transaction shall refrain from participating in the vote to approve or disapprove the proposed transaction. They may, however, propose a transaction in which they have a conflict of interest and may participate in the discussion of the merits of the proposed transaction. And the Council may request information or interpretation from the person or persons involved. If the proposed transaction is approved, the Elder, Deacon, or Staff member with the conflict of interest shall abstain, to the extent practical, from the management or supervision on behalf of the Church of the approved transaction.

Elders, Deacons, and Staff who have a conflict of interest with respect to any of the Church's ongoing business dealing shall abstain, to the extent practical, from the management or supervision on behalf of the Church of such ongoing business dealings.

***Challenges to Participation.*** Elders, Deacons, and Staff recognize both the residual vulnerability of all believers to sin and the inherent tendency of all believers to be unaware of that sin (Psalm 139:23-24). Elders, Deacons, and Staff further recognize the importance of a plurality of godly leadership in the Church to guard against that vulnerability. Accordingly, Elders, Deacons, and Staff recognize that challenges may need to be raised concerning possible conflicts of interest. Any question as to whether an Elder, Deacon, or Staff member may participate in a particular vote shall be made and responded to graciously, prayerfully and in Christian love. Such a question shall be carefully considered, in the light of all pertinent facts and law, by the Council of Elders and Executive Pastor who may consult legal counsel as needed. Regardless of the decision reached concerning the question, no disciplinary or retaliatory action shall be taken against the individual raising such a challenge. Elders, Deacons, and Staff agree that in doubtful situations, it is best for the challenged Elder, Deacon, or Staff member to abstain from voting on a particular transaction.

***Determination of Possible Conflict of Interest.*** Any individual who is uncertain about a conflict of interest in any matter shall disclose such possible conflict to the appropriate individual as noted above. The Chairman of the Elders or the Secretary of the Council shall then refer the matter to the Church Administrator/Executive Pastor or Chairman of the Deacons for analysis. As needed, the Chairman of the Elders, the Secretary of the Council, the Church Administrator/Executive Pastor or Chairman of the Deacons may then refer the matter to legal counsel for further analysis.

If a potential conflict of interest arises, the Elder, Deacon, or Staff member is responsible for advising of such an occurrence as soon as possible but no later than thirty (30) days after the occurrence. After giving such notice, the Elder, Deacon, or Staff member shall assume that conflict of interest does exist and shall act accordingly with regard to any specific transaction unless he is notified otherwise by the Secretary of the Council, the Chairman of the Elders, the Church Administrator/Executive Pastor or Chairman of the Deacons.

***Failure to Disclose.*** Each Elder, Deacon, and Staff member is required to comply with this Conflict of Interest Policy. Such compliance is a requirement for continued service as a Staff member, Elder or Deacon of The Bible Church of Little Rock. Knowing failure to disclose a potential conflict of interest, or other knowing violation of the conflict of Interest Policy, shall

constitute grounds for termination of Staff employment or service on the Council of Elders or Council of Deacons.

### **BCLR Benevolence Policy**

**Purpose.** The purpose of this policy is to represent the church family in evaluating and responding to those individuals or families who demonstrate need of assistance in obtaining adequate food and covering for basic survival and health. Every attempt will be made to provide such assistance in a context and manner that encourages the spiritual and emotional development of those in need.

The needs of church members, including widows as defined in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, are to be met first, then others within our church and community, such as individuals or organizations known to experience economic need, may be considered. Unbelievers should be presented with the gospel message as a part of our concern for them. The New Testament furnishes clear exhortations regarding caring for the widows and working in order to provide for one's own needs, as well as the needs of others (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8, 6:17-19).

The questions arise: Who are the poor and the needy? What is poverty?

**Defining “The Needy” Biblically.** In defining who the poor or needy are or what poverty is, we look to the scripture for clarification rather than our surrounding culture with its relative levels of poverty and wealth and appropriate lifestyles. The most commonly used word for this idea in the New Testament is the Greek word *ptochos*. It refers to those who are without basic sustenance and who have no means of obtaining it without assistance from others, in other words, those who are truly destitute.

**Poor Defined.** Lacking in material or spiritual goods. Poverty, the state of being poor, is mentioned in two ways in Scriptures. In the secondary way, encountered primarily in Proverbs, poverty is the consequence of moral lassitude, especially laziness (Proverbs 13:18; 20:13). In the primary sense, however, when the poor are encountered in their need or treated as a group, their situation is understood not as a consequence or personal failings, but as a result of social factors, particularly injustice (Proverbs 13:23).

The view of the poor is revealed in the chief Hebrew terms for the poor, which address them as needy, without power, an abused by those with greater power. Leviticus defines the poor as those who are lowly because their ‘power [lit. hand] wavers; (25:35) or is insufficient (14:21). They do not have the capacity to provide for themselves the essentials of life. Their deficiency in life-supporting power is understood to exist in relation to the rest of the community, represented by the phrase ‘with you’, repeated twice in 25:35 (cf. ‘beside you’ in v. 36); that is, their crisis is based in the network of power relationships that form society. Behind such poverty lies economic conflict (Ecclesiastes 4:1). The intensity of the conflict is reflected in the prevalence of slavery (Nehemiah 7:66-67; Exodus 20:17).

The extent of poverty increased to a new level in the time of the eighth-century B.C. prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Economic conditions in the preceding two centuries had produced a commercial and landed aristocracy. Inequities increased and the new elite was able to exploit the poor through sharecropping arrangements (Isaiah 3:14-15). Through foreclosures, land became concentrated in fewer hands (Isaiah 5:8). The peasants lost their patrimonies in the land (Micah 2:1-2). From the standpoint of one of the prophets, a whole class was being wiped out (Amos 8:4).

**Responsibility to the Poor.** The responsibility of redressing the plight of the poor is fundamental to biblical faith. At the basis is the nature of God as one who hears the cries of the poor (Psalm 12:5). The deliverance from Egypt is presented as the great exemplar of God's justice to the needy (Psalm 68:5-10; Exodus 2:23-24). As their dilemma is grounded in injustice, their need is for justice (Isaiah 10:2). As their condition is loss of power, the response required is empowerment. A literal rendering of "you shall maintain him" in Leviticus 25:35 is, "you shall make them strong." This demand is extended outside the chosen people, for almost the same wording is used in condemning Sodom, which did not 'make strong the power [hand] of the poor and needy' (Ezekiel 16:49).

In the law, attention is given to social structures that affect the poor. The land is to be left fallow every seventh year "*that the poor...may eat*" (Exodus 23:11). In this year the landed means of production are to be given over in their entirety to the poor and the debts of the poor are to be cancelled (Deuteronomy 15:2). That the landless poor have rights in the land is also supported in their claim to immediate sustenance from the fields (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) and in restrictions on reaping and gleaning so that some harvest is left to them (Leviticus 19:9-10). The law also restricts the processes that tear people down. The empowering in Leviticus 25 includes a proscription of interest on loans intended to relieve the distress of the recipient (23:36-37). A collateral (pledge) is prohibited if it were one that would further weaken the debtor (Deuteronomy 24:6) or cause the debtor to suffer (Exodus 22:26).

Finally, there is to be open-handed sharing with the poor. Jesus' statement that "*You always have the poor with you*" (Mark 14:7) is a citation of the strong command on giving to the poor in Deuteronomy 15:11 and a reminder of the permanence of this obligation, one also commanded by Jesus (Luke 12:33).

The ideal for the ruler is to be one who fully assumes the responsibility of delivering the poor and crushing their oppressors (Psalm 72:4). It is part of the messianic expectation (Isaiah 11:4) seen fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 1:52-53; 4:18-21). The hope for "*good news proclaimed to the poor*" (Luke 4:18; 7:22) was ancient (Psalm 68:10-11; Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:4-6). The beatitude concerning the poor in Luke emphasizes God's siding with the poor against their afflicters (6:20,24). In Matthew 5:3 "*the poor in spirit*" are those who have the attitude of dependence upon God associated with poverty (cf. Zephaniah 2:3; 3:11-13). A major concern of Paul was to make a collection for the poor (Romans 15:26) in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9). His purpose was "*that there may be equality*" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

This definition does not limit our church from giving to others from time to time who do have such critical needs, but it does help in determining who truly qualifies for *systematic* charitable assistance.

There are a lot of different situations that could be addressed concerning benevolence. However, the church's response to self-caused poverty must be carefully examined so as not to reinforce sinful habits of laziness or irresponsible spending; rather, such individuals must suffer the consequences of their sin. Any habitual financial assistance must be accompanied by and indeed, contingent upon, the willingness of those in need to receive financial counseling and to be equipped to live responsibly within their means and/or to improve their financial situation by obtaining additional employment or job enhancement training.

***Defining Standards for Benevolence Assistance.*** Once it has been determined that an individual or family qualifies for benevolence assistance, questions arise concerning how much assistance is appropriate and what expectation, if any, should accompany the aid. Calvin Beisner, in his book *Prosperity and Poverty* (pp. 203-209) and in an article entitled "The Poor Among Us: How Should Your Church Help?" (Discipleship Journal, Issue 49, pp. 17-19), distill the principles of gleaning (described in Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22 and illustrated in Ruth 2) and the instruction of Paul in 1 Timothy 5-6 into our four standards of a church's *systematic* support of the poor:

1. It should go only to the truly poor, which in Scripture means the destitute-- those who will not survive without it.
2. It should go only to those who cannot support themselves and cannot be supported by their families (2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:4-8).
3. Its aim is to provide food and covering sufficient for basic survival and health (1 Timothy 6:8) not a given standard of living. Support beyond subsistence is not wrong, but it must not foster dependency or waste, and it must not deplete resources needed to provide subsistence to others that are truly poor.
4. Recipients must, insofar as they are able, serve the Church—not the institution, but its members—in return for charity (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

***Policy.*** The Bible Church of Little Rock will support a local charity for the purpose of giving assistance to those individuals who are non-members and call the church for benevolence assistance (i.e. #4 below). The charity supported is to be determined by the Council of Deacons. The amount of the support and to whom the support is given may be changed at any time. However, if the Benevolence Fund's balance is \$2000.00 or more the donations will stop until the fund can support the donation. When there is less than \$200.00 in the fund but not greater than \$2000.00, the money will be taken from the general fund. Funds will be disbursed, as they are available, through the church office.

1. Amounts under \$200.00 for BCLR members will require approval by phone of at least two benevolence committee members.
2. Amounts over \$200.00 for BCLR members will require an application to be filled out by the member making the request.
3. Amounts under \$200.00 for non-BCLR members will be referred to one of the local charities that the church supports. These are much better equipped to evaluate the needs of such individuals or families and to respond to those needs (i.e. Union Rescue Mission, St. Francis House, etc.).



4. Amounts over \$200.00 for non-BCLR members will require an application to be filled out which we will mail with a SASE if necessary.
5. In most cases the disbursement of funds will be made in the form of a check to the provider of the product or service, rather than directly to the person in need.
6. Financial counseling will be made available for those who require such assistance.
7. The council of deacons must approve amounts in excess of \$1000.00.

## Gender

We affirm the Bible's teaching that God has created all people biologically either male or female (Matthew 19:4, Genesis 1:27), being equally made in His image (Genesis 1:27-29; 1 Peter 3:7), but having different, complementary roles to live out in our relationships with one another (1 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:8-15). Those who are tempted to deny this reality must instead trust God's Word and obey His commands to be and affirm who God created them to be (Isaiah 56:4-5; Matthew 19:12).

### Male and Female as Distinct Creations

The Bible Church of Little Rock is complementarian, which means we believe that in Genesis 1-2, when God created mankind, He made them distinctively male and female. The New Testament also affirms this. When Jesus was asked about the issue of divorce, he referred back to the creation account stating, "Haven't you read that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female" (Matthew 19:4). Paul, similarly, in dealing with the issue of men and women in the leadership of the church grounds his reasoning in Genesis 1-3 saying, "For Adam was created first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed" (1 Timothy 2:13-14).

Genesis reveals God created the world in 6 days and explains His intention to "make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Then, verse 27 states, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). No other creature is given this unique status of being God's image bearer; the man and woman are said to equally be God's image, and verse 28 gives them equally the responsibility to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it." The New Testament repeats this as husbands are told that their wives are equal heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). Jesus had women who learned from Him like the men (Luke 10:39), and this in regards to salvation, there is no distinction between male and female (Galatians 3:28).

This equality in worth does not negate the fact that God has also designed men and women for differing roles that complement one another. We can see this from the beginning as God sets Adam up as the leader by creating him first (1 Timothy 2:13), then allowing Adam to name the woman (Genesis 2:23), a symbol of leadership in the biblical world. He calls woman a suitable helper to come alongside the man (Genesis 2:18-20). In the home God calls women to submit to their husbands as the church submits to its leader, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24), while husbands are called to emulate Christ's self-sacrificial love toward His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25). Men get to be like Jesus in their godly leadership over their wives, and women get to be like Jesus in their godly submission as the Son submits to the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3). Men and women are given different roles by the Creator. "There is an organic connection between biological sex and gender roles. And one's biological sex determines what one's gender role should be."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Burk, Denny. *What Is the Meaning of Sex*. Crossway: 2013. 19-20

## The Issue of Intersex or Transgender

We view any attack on not just gender roles, but on the definition of gender and sex itself, to stand in violation of our understanding and belief in God's Word and design for us. This is seen in the transgender movement when, for example, a biological male states he believes he is female and should be treated as such, often undergoing treatments and/or surgery to make himself appear as a female. The idea that determining one's gender is the choice of the individual rather than the prerogative of the Creator is rebellion against the authority of the Creator over His creation. This is an example of the depravity that is characteristic of all mankind as a result of the Fall. In the vast majority of cases, "gender confusion" is a sinful rejection of God and His sovereign design. However, Denny Burk explains an issue that is sometimes used in defense of these changing standards:

A young girl in his group had recently decided that she wanted to become a boy... But there was more to this young girl's story than a spontaneous desire to change genders... This particular girl had been born with a rare biological condition that made it difficult at birth to determine whether she was a girl or a boy. The condition is known as intersex, and intersexed persons are born with reproductive anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical pattern for female or male.<sup>2</sup>

Burk goes on to say that some studies indicate that 1 in about 1,000 babies born have some sort of intersex condition,<sup>3</sup> also known as "hermaphroditism," due to errors in sexual differentiation, an enzyme deficiency, or some anatomic problem.<sup>4</sup> Some claim this gives scientific reason that the genders are not rigid, but lie along a spectrum. However, the Bible does not present such a spectrum, but instead teaches that those born with an "intersex" deformity are suffering the effects of a fallen Creation (Romans 8:19-23).

Jesus spoke of those who are broken because of sin in the world. In Matthew 19:11-12 he referred to eunuchs who, similar to the "intersex" of today, were not able to procreate. While, Deuteronomy 23:1 denies them an entrance into the assembly of the Lord, and though they were often the pariahs of society due to their inability to continue the family lineage through descendants, our Savior says these people can be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, calling them to holiness in their physically-broken state until God's great promise of restoring them takes place in the resurrection (Matt. 19:11-12). Thus, those who suffer from the intersex condition have the same call to live holy as a male or female depending on their overall biological sex (determined by genetics and physiology), not their deformity.

But to those who are simply tempted to switch their gender, Christians must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and let them know that their hearts are deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9). Though they may feel like they don't fit or identify with their biological sex, they must not believe this lie, and instead embrace and affirm the biological sex God designated for them at birth. Just as there is no true intersex gender, there is no changing one's gender or

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Pg 19-20

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 173

<sup>4</sup> Human Physiology from cells to systems by Lauralee Sherwood. 6<sup>th</sup> edition Pg 738-739

sex, for God is the one who created and chose our gender and sex. God has specific responsibilities and ways of living for men and women, and God has a promise for those who follow Him: "For thus says the LORD: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off'" (Isaiah 56:4–5).

## **Conclusion**

While it may be the case that western culture pushes for a minimizing of the differences between the biological male and female sexes and a maximizing of individual sovereignty in their own lives, it would be unloving for Christians to concur. God has created us either male or female with differing yet complimentary roles and responsibilities. Therefore, living the way our Creator designed us is the only way to live as we are designed to live and fulfill our life's purpose.

There may be some who struggle in the brokenness of this world that sin has brought, which should lead us all to proclaim the gospel of Jesus' perfect life being able to forgive our failures and give us the power to live holy lives. We long for the day when He will remove sin and make every physical problem right as we see in part now (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In a time of gender confusion, only God's Word offers true certainty and the hope everyone needs.

## Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

The Bible Church of Little Rock affirms Scripture's clear teaching that God approves sexual activity only within the confines of a lifelong marriage covenant and exclusively between one biological male and one biological female from birth. We believe that sexual complementarity between one biological male and one biological female is God's revealed will for mankind and a chaste and faithful expression of this orientation, in singleness or marriage, is the ideal to which God calls all people. Acts of adultery and fornication, that is, sexual activity outside of God's ordained marital union, is unambiguously condemned by God as sin (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18; Matt. 15:19; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 5:19; Heb. 13:4). Further, the Bible explicitly prohibits and unequivocally categorizes all same-sex activity as sin, even condemning all lustful homosexual thoughts and desires as 'degrading passions' (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). We therefore affirm that individuals should seek biblical counsel in the battle against all improper sexual temptations and behaviors.

We believe that Scripture prescribes two life-enhancing options concerning human sexual behavior: 1) celibacy, that is, a chaste and faithful singleness in which there is an abstaining from sexual activity (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:7); and 2) the conjugal 'one flesh' marital union of one biological male and one biological female from birth (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:5-8). Both are good gifts from God, given as He wills for His glory and the good of those who receive and rejoice in His gift to them. For one to deny the reality of God's created order and to live contrary to the expressed commands of Scripture is a suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Scripture affirms and therefore we believe that through one man, Adam, sin has entered into this world (Gen. 2:17; 3:6; Rom. 5:12). Consequently, all of humanity is corrupted by sin. Sin, as our inherited spiritual condition, is universal and comprehensive (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:1-12; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:3). Moreover, all sin, including every form of sexual sin, is a consequence of idolatry, namely, a worshipping of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25-27). Specifically, same-sex activity distorts what human beings were created to do, robbing God of proper worship and gratitude (Rom. 1:21). Furthermore, same sex relations are contrary to nature and violate God's creational intent for men and women.

Such a biblical framework and understanding of mankind's fallen nature is essential to any discussion of human sexuality and sexual orientation. By this, sexual orientation ideology is found to be completely antithetical to a Christian view of the human person. Both Denny Burk and Heath Lambert rightly assert, "sexual orientation, as an identity-defining element of the human condition, is foreign to Scripture—except as a feature of human sinfulness."<sup>5</sup> Burk and Lambert add:

God's purposes for us are obscured if we make our sinful sexual attractions the touchstone of our being. God gives us a bodily identity that indicates his purposes for us sexually, and those purposes are unambiguously

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<sup>5</sup> Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing 2015), 37.

ordered to the opposite sex within the covenant of marriage. To embrace an identity that goes against God's revealed purpose is by definition sinful.<sup>6</sup>

This pervasive sin nature, however, does not mean that all people are prone to the same sinful desires and actions. Whether a person is born with a predisposition to a particular, defining sin, or whether the desire for that sin is the result of circumstances in which one's character has developed, all specific sins, including same-sex activities, are indicative of one's alienation from and enmity with God. By this, we do not believe that homosexuality is an inherited condition (genetically, biologically, environmentally, etc.), but a sinful deviation from the Creator's plan for human sexuality. Sam Allberry, a pastor who has personally fought against same-sex attraction, helpfully explains, "my circumstances may be the occasion for my sin, but they are not the cause of it."<sup>7</sup> Hypothetically speaking, even if it were discovered at some point in the future that we are genetically inclined to certain sinful behaviors like drunkenness (alcoholism), anger, or homosexuality, such a discovery would not acquit us of the responsibility for our actions, nor would it suggest that these actions are not sinful in their nature. Quite to the contrary, Scripture insists that all humans are slaves to sin from birth (Rom. 6:6, 17), yet morally culpable for capitulating to the sin that serves as our master.

While Scripture is unequivocal in its testimony that sexual immorality is sin and therefore incurs the judgment of God, it likewise gives witness that such men and women can be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). As the apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth, he states that those who engage in same-sex activity and sexual immorality are among those who cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Yet, by the grace of God, such individuals were delivered from the power and enslavement of sin. Such freedom comes through faith in Jesus Christ, by the transforming, life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. God freely offers redemption and restoration to all who would repent, confessing and forsaking their sin and seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Isa. 55:7; Jn. 5:14; 8:11; Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 15:34; Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 2:11).

As a church, we affirm that our members should speak truth in love to people ensnared by same-sex temptation and action as well as other forms of immoral sexual desires and behaviors, patiently counseling them in the Scriptures, never treating them with disdain. We believe that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and should therefore be accorded human dignity. Though sin certainly mars and defiles this dignity, no sinner should be treated with contempt because of the nature of his or her defining sin. To this end, we repudiate hateful, harassing speech or action, and promote truthful, forthright reasoning of the Scripture concerning the immorality and accountability of such sexual behavior with these individuals. Irrespective of the nature of the sin to which an individual is prone, we maintain that no sinner is beyond the hope offered through the message of the Gospel. There is hope for all sinners, including those enslaved to all manners of sexual sin, because Jesus Christ offers freedom to know and experience one's true identity in Him.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Allberry, *James for You* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2015), 34.

## Leadership

There are many definitions of leadership, however Alex Montoya skillfully summarizes them all by observing that “all the definitions of leading have one thing in common: the leader is one who leads others to the accomplishment of a common goal. If no one follows, he is obviously not a leader, regardless of what titles and degrees may precede or follow his name” (Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, John F. MacArthur Jr. and The Masters Seminary Faculty, Word: Dallas, 1995, p. 283). Chuck Swindoll writes, “At the risk of oversimplifying . . . it’s the word *influence*” (Leadership, Chuck Swindoll, Word: Waco, 1985, p. 19). The Bible uses a variety of terms to describe the unique dimensions of a leader in the local church. Terms such as elder/overseer/bishop/shepherd are all synonymous terms which describe biblical leadership and supply fuller meanings and applications to the definition of a godly leader.

The characteristics, qualifications and goals of a godly leader are preserved in God’s Word. An elder is a “spiritual” leader in the local church. He is a man who aspires to the “office of overseer” (1 Timothy 3:1). He is a man of God charged with a mandate and required to embody in his person the ideals of the faith he proclaims. He is to practice what he preaches. Montoya says, “The New Testament tells the Christian leader what kind of man he ought to be (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-8). To be a leader, one needs to be aware that he must first *measure up* to these traits as a qualification to *enter* into the office of pastor (elder), and then he must *maintain* these qualities in his life if he is to stay in the pastoral ministry . . . . The same applies to the office of deacon” (Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, p. 286). It is important that every godly leader first understand what God would have him be, before he takes steps toward what God would have him do.

Godly leadership in the local church is of inestimable value. Montoya writes further, “The entire history of God’s dealings with His people is actually God’s involvement with a particular person whom He used to accomplish His will.” He continues: “The New Testament spells out in clear terms that God had a designated leadership for His church. The apostles were the first designated leaders appointed by Christ and ordained with the authority to lead and make judgments among the people (Matthew 10:1-42; 18:18-20) as well as to serve as the very foundation of His blessed church (Ephesians 2:20). The establishment of the church and the office of elder and deacon surfaced as spiritual leadership to lead the congregations. The eldership by its very nature is leadership. Elder implies age and experience – essential ingredients for those assigned to lead congregations (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5). The elder was also an “overseer,” one assigned the task of watching over the congregation (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:5-6)” (Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry; p. 284).

Yet as vital as godly leadership is in the eyes of God, it is often difficult to find men who exhibit this kind of leadership. There are many that will pursue the perceived benefits of leadership. There are many that will bask in the shallow glory that is occasionally associated with leadership, but it is only a superficial salve for their souls. Yet they will neither weather the criticism that comes with it, nor take the time to consistently serve others in obscurity as a faithful shepherd who cares for his sheep. Nevertheless, godly leadership is not optional; it is essential.

Consequently, The Bible Church of Little Rock places high priority on both training and selecting godly men who are tasked with biblical leadership. We believe the Bible provides a recognizable standard for local church leadership, and displays a wise method of discipleship of its leaders which is indispensable to the ongoing health of the body.

Godly leadership does not “just happen” in the local church. It must be cultivated. It must be deliberately developed. As a result, we must have a plan. What do we plan to do? We believe it is vital to both equip men and provide opportunity for hands-on discipleship training. The multi-year equipping and discipleship training process will generally include the study of systematic theology, an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and qualifications of an elder, training in hermeneutics and homiletics, and instruction in “shepherding the flock of God among us” (1 Peter 5:1-5). This training plan, however, is not intended to exclude a man who has had comparable training and experience in a prior ministry from pursuing a leadership role at The Bible Church of Little Rock. In order to cultivate this kind of valued leadership with the appropriate knowledge and skill at The Bible Church of Little Rock, it is our goal to offer regularly scheduled equipping venues and “hands-on” training for potential future elders, as well as provide on-going teaching opportunities for all current elders.

Many questions surface that correspond to the topic of leadership. Some common questions are:

**Can women serve in the role of an elder?** It is the position of The Bible Church of Little Rock that the Bible clearly describes distinct gender roles, reserving the leadership role in the local church for men. Scripture describes women and men as fully equal in personhood, and spirituality, but unique in their roles (see 1 Timothy 2:9-15; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3-11). These differences are something to be enjoyed, explored more fully, and developed throughout life – not eradicated or hated. (For further study on the biblical roles of men and women, please see Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Crossway: Wheaton, 1991).

**What if a man has been divorced?** It is *unlikely*, yet *not impossible* for any man who has had a divorce in his past, whether pre-Christian or post-Christian, to be able to serve as an elder/deacon. For further insight regarding the position of The Bible Church of Little Rock, please reference the Divorce and Remarriage Philosophy of Ministry document.

**How would you describe the difference between the role of an elder and the role of a deacon?** The most obvious difference between the elder’s and the deacon’s role is that the elder is “apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9). The elder’s primary emphasis is the ministry of the Word and prayer. This occurs while providing for the spiritual needs of the local church and “shepherding the flock of God among us” (1 Peter 5:1-5). The role of the deacon is to help the elders attend to the people’s many practical needs (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons are the church’s ministers of mercy. The Board of Deacons is responsible for the care of all matters pertaining to the physical properties and the finances of the church, subject to the oversight of the elders. They are also responsible for such temporal duties as ushering at church services, caring for the needs of the church’s widows and orphans, and administering the benevolence fund.



## The Lord's Supper

Like the other ordinance instituted by Christ for observance by the church (baptism), communion has its roots deep in both Jewish and Christian history. Communion reminds us of the Passover meal, designed by God to celebrate the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and from their bondage under Pharaoh. God, in response to Pharaoh's unwillingness to let His people go, promised a plague against all of Egypt's firstborn. To protect themselves against this plague, the last in a series designed by God to cause Pharaoh to free the Israelites, the Israelites took the blood of a slain lamb (by dipping hyssop in the blood of the sacrifice), and put it on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. Always faithful, God's promise came to pass and the Israelites' firstborn were spared. They then ate the roasted lamb along with unleavened bread and some bitter herbs, a meal that later became known as the "Passover meal" because the angel of death passed over the Israelites (Exodus 12:1-43).

As in those Old Testament times, Jews still celebrate the Passover feast today as a way of remembering the deliverance of their nation from bondage to the Egyptians. However, it is a much more wonderful and dramatic deliverance for which the Passover was a foreshadowing. According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, is God's perfect provision for man's greatest need. Christ Himself is the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7)! What comes into focus in the Lord's Supper is Christ's death on the cross—the shedding of His blood on behalf of those whom God has chosen, the covering of their sin by that blood, and their ultimate deliverance from eternal death and damnation. Though the Jewish faith still celebrates Passover, many are unaware it is the precursor to this much greater and more significant event. Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of deliverance from sin and death when he submitted His body to be crucified and His blood to be shed. The Lord's Supper (or communion as it is sometimes referred) is to be celebrated as a remembrance to His life and death.

The apostle Paul gives us the New Testament formula for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is to be celebrated just as Jesus Christ Himself both initiated and instituted during that final meal with His disciples in the upper room. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, he said, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Like Passover, communion is the celebration of God's chosen being delivered by the blood of a lamb, in this case the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ. All sin deserves death (Romans 6:23), but because of Christ's great sacrifice, all believers are "passed over" from their deserving death. Only believers are united in Christ and His sacrifice for their sin. It was this union with Christ in which we see the early church sharing in the Lord's Table in love and obedience to Him. Believers practiced communion as the Lord's prescribed way of honoring His sacrifice, deliverance, and soon return (Acts 2:42, 46). In direct response to His command to "do this in remembrance of Me," Christians today, like these early believers, participate in communion as an act of obedience (Luke 22:17-19, 1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Christ's comment to the disciples

was that His body was given for them and His blood was poured out for them. In loving obedience and honor to Him and His command, Christians are to participate in the Lord's Supper both regularly and reverently. Scripture leaves no doubt that not to participate in the Lord's Supper both regularly and reverently is to sin.

Apparently, the church at Corinth was guilty of abusing this ordinance of the Lord. According to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, the Lord judged some of the professing Christians in that community by causing them to be sick and others to die. This sober act by the Lord clearly communicates the seriousness God places on this ordinance. Paul said that to eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner was to be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27). Understanding the context, what Paul is saying here is that to eat the bread or drink of the cup in an unworthy manner is to violate the very covenant of Christ. Without Christ, all are condemned. For if we don't eat and drink to the "new" Passover, we are like unbelievers, celebrating a Passover that falls short of our need, the need for a Savior to save us from our sin. Without a Savior, we are still in our sins. And therefore, like those who unjustly crucified Him, we are guilty of His body and blood. And if we harbor secret sins and do not confess those sins before His Table, we are in danger of being judged ourselves.

By dishonoring the Lord in communion, one acts as if he cares nothing about Christ's body and blood, as if he counts "the blood of the covenant, by which all believers are sanctified, an unholy thing." Anyone who does this profanes the ordinance, and in a manner, crucifies their Savior over again. Instead of being cleansed by His blood, they stand guilty of it (Hebrews 10:29). The argument might be made that only unbelievers could do this. If so, all the more reason unbelievers should not participate in the Lord's Supper. Whether young children who are still unregenerate, those adults who profess Christ but who are living lives of disobedience, or anyone who does not fully obey Christ should not participate in this holy, sacred act of obedience. Paul follows his exhortation about unworthy conduct with words regarding worthy or appropriate conduct for communion—that a man may *examine* himself, judging himself rightly. The Greek word for "examine" means to put to the test. A rigorous self-examination of our lives including our motives, attitudes, and actions toward the Lord, others, and His Supper is called for. As believers, we need to recognize we, though regenerate we are, are still sinful, and are therefore in constant need of God's forgiveness. This special time of self-examination allows us to confess our sins and once again walk with Christ in an unhindered manner.

What Paul is *not* saying here (as is the understanding of some regarding this ordinance) is that the bread and the wine have somehow miraculously become Christ's body and blood. Christ's purpose in instituting communion the night before His death is the same as His desire is for us today: to remember Him—His life and subsequent death on the cross. Like other figurative or illustrative language used when referring to Himself (the Door, Light of the World, etc.), Jesus refers here to the bread as *representative of* His physical body and the wine as *representative of* His blood (the Greek word "is" frequently means "represents"). He is teaching His disciples by way of a very graphic, visual illustration that His body would be given (not "broken," as some suggest, in perfect fulfillment of Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:1; cf. also John 19:33, 36) like the bread is given out at a Passover meal, and His blood would be poured out like the wine. The obvious question then, is this: How could the bread literally be His body? At that Passover meal in the upper room, His body was physically there before His disciples for all to

see. How could the wine literally be His blood? His blood was still pouring through His veins when He makes these statements in the disciples' presence.

The Lord's Supper is a sacred memorial to the One who lived and died for believers, a time of Holy Communion with Him, a proclamation of the meaning of His death, and a sign of anticipation of His return. The sacred and comprehensive nature of communion requires that we treat it with the honor and respect He deserves. To remember in the way that Christ commands us to, is to recapture as much as possible the reality and significance of His life and death on our behalf.

(See appendix on Children Receiving the Lord's Supper, pg. 58).

## Appendix--On Children Receiving the Lord's Supper

When the topic of the partaking of the Lord's Supper is discussed, the question of whether young children ought to receive communion is often asked. If parents are encouraged to teach their children to pray, read the Bible, serve in ministry, give money to the Lord, etc., why wouldn't they encourage their children to experience the joy of partaking in the Lord's Table? Surely, this is a tangible way for young children to be reminded again and again of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ upon the cross, isn't it?

Upon further reflection, however, we believe it is wise to advise parents to be very circumspect in this matter of their children partaking of the Lord's Supper. The reason for this caution is straightforward. The Bible teaches that these ordinances are only for believers. While parents ought to train their young children in prayer, Bible reading, serving, and giving (among other spiritually oriented endeavors), children, who are as yet unregenerate, ought not be encouraged to partake of the church's two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the same manner that a young person should not be prematurely baptized—that is, before their parents and the leaders of the church have had the opportunity to examine the fruit of their profession of Christ—a child's partaking of communion should be encouraged only after their parents and church leaders see what they perceive to be true evidences of spiritual life and that they understand the sobering significance of this spiritual duty. Indeed, Paul himself reminded the Corinthians of the need for their careful self-examination. This would especially hold true for a child's obvious need to mature beyond their childishness: *"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 11:27).

It is often difficult to discern precisely when a young person has been converted. If a young person isn't outwardly rebellious, obeys his parents in the home, and attends church services, it can appear as though they have become Christians. Conformance to an external standard of conduct does not necessarily mean they have been delivered from their sins. The parents and shepherds of the flock ought to work in concert to determine (to the best of their ability) the true nature of spirituality in these young men and women. If, after careful examination—which may involve a protracted time frame—the parents and church leaders believe there is manifest evidence of the Spirit's calling, they certainly should encourage those children to be both baptized (Matthew 28:18-20), and to obey the command of the Lord *"to do this [communion] in remembrance of [Him]"* (1 Corinthians 11:24).

## Marriage

We at the Bible Church of Little Rock believe that God created human beings in His own image, and that He wonderfully and absolutely creates each person. In His plan He has given two distinct and complementary biological sexes, male and female, which together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). It is these two biological sexes that we believe Scripture indicates can be joined in the covenant of marriage. We believe God, not man, created marriage with the purpose of creating families as they are described on the pages of Scripture. We believe the Bible teaches that the covenant of marriage is sacred and lifelong. In Gen. 2:24, the passage emphasizes the complete identification of the two sexes in marriage. It also tells us that God instituted marriage and that it is to be an exclusive union of the two persons, one biological male and one biological female. Jesus added that it is to be permanent and in Mark 10:7-9, verse 9 specifically says, *what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate* (See BCLR's position on divorce and remarriage).

We at the Bible Church of Little Rock believe that the Bible gives us God's design for marriage. We believe God created marriage for the purpose of one man and one woman glorifying God as one flesh, parenting godly children (if the Lord gives them), and enjoying one another with physical intimacy. He (God) has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant union between one biological male and one biological female for life, these individuals are and have been male and female from birth. Further, the leadership (Pastors, Elders, Deacons) and the staff of the Bible church shall only participate in weddings and solemnized marriages between one biological male and one biological female for life. Finally, the facilities and property of The Bible Church of Little Rock shall only host weddings between one biological male (from birth) and one biological female (from birth) for life.

This statement does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. We believe that the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments, is the very Word of God. It therefore speaks with supreme and final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, and is the sole and final source of all we believe and practice - it gives us all things pertaining to life and Godliness (2 Peter 1:2-3).

Scriptural confirmation:

Genesis 1:26-27, *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Genesis 2:18-25, *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.*

*The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

Hebrews 13:4, *Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

Romans 1:26-27, *For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

Ephesians 5:31, *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*

1 Corinthians 7:1-4, *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

Mark 10:6-9, *“But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh, so they are no longer two, but one flesh. “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*

## Missions

The Bible Church of Little Rock defines a missionary as a servant of Christ called to proclaim the gospel, often across geographical and cultural boundaries, in obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-47). Frontier missionaries, like the Apostle Paul, aim to take the gospel to people who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ, and do not have access to gospel-preaching churches in their own culture (Romans 15:19-23). Cross-cultural missionaries, like Timothy, travel far to serve where the church, though perhaps fairly established, benefits from a missionary's service (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:3). Missions ministry, then, is the task of taking the gospel beyond the immediate influence of the sending church in order to evangelize and to instruct in the Word of God those who have little or no opportunity to hear the gospel, for the purpose of establishing and strengthening local congregations.

The church is entrusted with fulfilling the Great Commission. The Spirit-led advancement of the gospel until all God's elect are gathered from throughout the world is Christ's great purpose (Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16; Acts 1:8). Through missions ministry, the church participates in God's plan on a world-wide scale. Thus, global missions ministry should be a priority of every local church. It is a way in which congregations and individuals fulfill the will of God.

The proper motivation for world missions is a passionate love for God's glory united with a Christ-like compassion for all peoples. We yearn to see God truly honored as God throughout the world (Matthew 6:9). Therefore, we pray with the psalmist, "*God bless us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.*" (Psalm 67:7). We desire, like the Apostle Paul, "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles *for His name's sake.*" (Romans 1:5). Moreover, as Jesus Christ was a compassionate and merciful servant to the lost so that God might be glorified for His mercy (Matthew 9:35-36; Romans 15:8-9; Jonah 4), we pursue missions with hearts of compassion and a readiness to sacrifice all for those without Christ (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1; 2 Timothy 2:8-10). We, too, affirm: "a heart for the glory of God and a heart of mercy for the nations make a Christ-like missionary." (John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993, p. 30).

Missionaries are set apart by the Holy Spirit for service (Acts 13:2). A person's call to missionary service will be evident by his or her qualifications. A godly character, faithful service in a local church, and an accurate and thorough knowledge of Scripture are key qualifications of a missionary. In addition, those who are sent out as pastors to establish and to lead churches are to meet the biblical qualifications for an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Through prayer, counsel and observation the Spirit will lead a church to discern and confirm the qualifications and calling of persons to missions ministry.

The church has a responsibility to pray for, identify, train and send only those who are qualified to be missionaries. A missionary is ultimately accountable to the sending church, and serves under the authority of the church (Acts 13:3; 14:26-27). We strongly discourage a missionary candidate from pursuing service with a missions agency before seeking the counsel and blessing of his or her church. Missions agencies have a legitimate and useful role in the

sending of missionaries by identifying strategic opportunities for service, and by providing administrative support, specialized training, and on-the-field supervision. However, the missions agency is not a substitute for the church but a partner with the church. For such a partnership to be workable, both church and missions agency should share substantial agreement in doctrine and philosophy of ministry.

The church is responsible to send missionaries “*in a manner worthy of God*” (3 John 6). Since they go forth as God’s representatives, the church is to send them in a way that will honor God in every respect. This means the church provides substantial support by money, prayers, and other practical means of assistance. In so doing, God is glorified, and the church has the privilege of being a partner with the missionary in spreading the truth (3 John 8).

The pattern of New Testament missions ministry is the proclamation of the gospel with the view of establishing and strengthening self-propagating local churches. Therefore, we believe that evangelism, church planting, and ministry that serves to strengthen churches is the primary work of missions ministry. As of first priority, we are committed to sending pastors to evangelize, to establish churches, and to strengthen churches through preaching, teaching and prayer. We affirm with Dr. Thomas Hale, former medical missionary to Nepal, “The essential core ministry in missions is the winning of people to Christ and forming them into congregations—that is, evangelism and church planting . . . . It is useless to win people to Christ and then leave them on their own as a bunch of individuals; they will quickly fall away. Not only must there be churches for new believers to join, but also it is the church that is going to be responsible for ongoing evangelism. Hence, in the same breath with church planting, we need to include discipling new believers and imparting to them the vision for further evangelism.” (Thomas Hale, On Being A Missionary, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995, p. 252).

We recognize that the gospel has access to some countries only, or most strategically, through community development initiatives such as healthcare services, agricultural projects, and education. In these cases, we will support qualified persons who are committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ as they serve through their respective professions or trades, and who have as their ultimate aim the formation and strengthening of local churches. While biblical missions ministry is more than humanitarian assistance, nonetheless, it can include such service as an expression of Christ’s love, and as a means for securing a hearing for the gospel.

We recognize, too, that support missionaries are sent out to provide vital services. Many such as pilots, mechanics, administrators, engineers, and school teachers, are qualified church leaders and mature believers who embrace biblical ministry priorities. In addition to providing administrative or technical assistance, they proclaim the gospel whenever possible, model godly life-styles, and teach the Word of God. As a secondary priority, then, we will send qualified support missionaries who are committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ in their spheres of influence.

We believe that it is desirable for missionaries to commit themselves to a life-time of service, while recognizing that God might providentially direct their steps otherwise. Short-term service is usually inadequate for understanding culture and language, building relationships, making disciples and establishing churches. Thus, the most strategic use of a church’s resources



is to support career missionaries. Short-term missions service can be useful for ministry training, for educating a church about missions, for tactical support of existing missions ministry, and for the personal encouragement of career missionaries. For these reasons, we will encourage and support short-term missions, especially service with and to our own career missionaries. Nevertheless, short-term missions should be secondary to the training and sending of career missionaries.

Lastly, we believe that the very existence and success of missions ministry depends ultimately upon God. We are committed, then, to petition the Lord of the harvest unceasingly to send out workers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38). Further, we devote ourselves to help those who are sent out by our earnest prayers (2 Corinthians 1:11), so that they may have opportunity and boldness to proclaim the Word (Colossians 4:3; Ephesians 6:19), and to witness the rapid spread and acceptance of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 3:1). We pray, too, that they will continue to conduct themselves honorably (Hebrews 13:18), and be kept safe from all evil (2 Thessalonians 3:2; Romans 15:30-31), until that Day when the missionary task is finished.

## Outreach

Outreach encompasses the service and evangelistic ministries of the church to the community that lives and works within its immediate sphere of influence. Outreach ministries find their impetus in the commands to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20); to do good to all people (Galatians 6:10); to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:27-37); to let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16; see also Acts 10:38; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 4:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; Titus 2:14, 3:8; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27).

Christians must be involved in outreach ministries in their communities, not isolated from them. We must take the initiative to build relationships with neighbors in order to serve others in the name of Christ and to proclaim the gospel. Separation from sinful lifestyles does not require isolationism with respect to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). In this way, the Christian's responsibility to do good to all balances the "one another" commands of the New Testament. We are to serve one another in many ways, but not to the exclusion of those outside the fellowship of believers. This is true on the corporate level as well as the personal. As a part of the overall ministry plan, church leadership should attempt to balance ministry to members with service and evangelistic ministries to the community.

"Service" or "helping" ministries often address practical needs with biblical solutions for God's glory. The need for food, clothing, housing, tutoring, employment, transportation, medical care, visitation, and marriage and financial counseling are just a few opportunities for this kind of outreach. These matters may be addressed as Christians take personal initiative to reach out to those in need through church programs, or through Christian agencies such as S.T.E.P. Ministries, and International Friendship Outreach.

Christians should always consider their service as an opportunity for evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel in dependence upon the Holy Spirit for the purpose of calling people to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (John 3:4-8; 16:8; Acts 18:4; 19:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20). As we serve in meaningful ways to our community, we are ambassadors of God, and must reflect His love, compassion and character to those being served. We must be prepared to give a clear and accurate explanation of the gospel when a suitable occasion arises (1 Peter 3:15). The greatest good a Christian can do for an unbelieving friend or stranger is to give him the gospel. Therefore, evangelism should be the ultimate goal of every service-oriented ministry to the non-Christian community.

Evangelism is a responsibility of all Christians, and must be a high priority as they go into all the world. The church should encourage evangelism through instruction and prayer. The church may also plan and hold special events for unbelievers to hear the gospel. However, while Lord's Day services should certainly include the gospel, the primary purpose of the church gathered is worship and edification rather than evangelism.

## Prayer

The ministry of prayer in the local church is closely aligned with the expository proclamation of the truth. As the apostles of the early church declared, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). James Rosscup has written, “God’s Word makes clear that a proper blending of the Word with prayer is the most strategic approach to ministry . . . . Prayer derives its purpose, commitment, passion, values, and priority from the Word” (Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, Dallas: Word, 1995, pp. 165, 177). Throughout the book of Acts, the early church was marked by individual believers who prayed, as well as intense corporate prayer (see Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:31; 12:5; 14:23; 16:25; 28:8). Therefore, The Bible Church of Little Rock must devote itself to the same. Rosscup also says, “Jesus has cast prayer in a role of profound significance. Whoever serves Him can demonstrate he is His true follower in doing the same. A Christian’s fruit reflects his discipleship in John 15:8, the secret of the fruit being prayer (v. 7)” (Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, p. 170).

This corporate prayer of The Bible Church may be seen in several ways. First, each and every public worship service includes protracted prayer. As the Pastor-Teacher leads the congregation in prayer, the people are collectively brought to the Lord, for the purpose of the adoration of God (Acts 4:24), the confession of sin (Proverbs 28:13), prayers of thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:18), prayers of supplication and intercession (both the unsaved, Isaiah 53:12; and the saved, 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Galatians 6:18; Colossians 1:9-12). Second, individual classes engage in regular and systematic prayer. Third, each Care Group regularly prays for their own groups, as well as for the church in general. Fourth, many of the ladies come to the church several times each week to pray for all the known requests. Fifth, prayer request lists are regularly distributed to the membership. Sixth, the congregation gathers when there is a fifth Sunday month to pray collectively. Seventh, several faithful believers gather together every Sunday morning for prayer. Eighth, the Pastors and Elders pray weekly for the various needs of the congregation. Ninth, the men gather for prayer and study of the Word on Friday mornings. Tenth, the congregation is routinely encouraged to pray for the church and its leadership, and for the impact of the church in the world.

Just as the centrality of the Word of God is held up by the church, so prayer must be emphasized. “The Word is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and Christians are to pray in the Spirit (v. 18). The Spirit teaches the Word together with God’s will (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13) and helps Christians respond to God’s will in their praying” (Rosscup, Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, pp. 176-177). We are simply following our Lord and His model praying (see Luke 6:12). He taught the necessity of prayer (Luke 11:2-4, as well as other matters related to prayer, according to Luke 11:5-13). Jesus likewise, urged His disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

The Bible Church will continue to investigate ways in which we can devote ourselves to prayer. Paul gives us wise words in Colossians 4:2-6 regarding the crucial link between our prayers and our evangelistic efforts: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the Word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with

wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

## Preaching and Teaching

The philosophy of ministry of any church must include the ministry of preaching. By preaching, we mean the bold proclamation of the gospel (Matthew 28:20), and the accurate explanation of the truths of Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15). The mandate of God's Word for preaching is clear: "I [Paul] solemnly charge you [Timothy] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and His kingdom: *preach the Word*" (2 Timothy 4:1-2; see also Romans 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:4-5; Ephesians 4:11-12). Preaching the Word brings the knowledge of the truth that results in godliness (John 17:17; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 5:26). Preaching encourages believers to live in hope and fortifies them to endure suffering (Acts 14:21-22). Preaching is therefore, the most indispensable element of church life and ministry (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:1). If we are to be Christlike, we will emulate the very ministry of the Savior, who said, "I must preach the kingdom of God . . . , for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). Through preaching, Christ saves, sanctifies, and strengthens His church.

Preaching and teaching will be preeminent in our church, and by preaching we specifically mean *expository preaching*. Expository preaching can be defined as explaining Scripture by setting forth its meaning, clarifying what is difficult to understand, and making appropriate application (Nehemiah 8:8). This will come predominately from selecting Bible books and then teaching them in a verse-by-verse manner, paying close attention to the historical-grammatical aspects of each passage. The Bible Church then, must center its life and focus upon the preaching of God's Word. This preaching will be most prominently featured in its Sunday services, but will also be pervasive in all aspects of our ministries.

The clear result of this crucial aspect of ministry is ultimately the maturing of the saints. Paul informed the Ephesians that God "*gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, to the building up [maturing] of the body of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Likewise, Paul explained his ministry of proclamation to the Colossians in this way: "*We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28). There is simply no such thing as a New Testament Church if expository preaching is not being carried out. The Elders therefore, are committed to maintaining a strong pulpit ministry of exposition, which becomes the primary vehicle for the continuing growth of the body and the ultimate glory of God.

Having established the imperative of preaching, we call upon the body of believers assembled as The Bible Church of Little Rock to faithfully and attentively commit themselves to hear and obey the preached Word of God (James 1:22).

## Appendix

### Clarifying Statement on the Relationship of Members, Teachers, and Elders the Constitution, Doctrinal Statement, and Philosophy of Ministry

#### Members

Article III, Section 1, of the Constitution, regarding both the doctrinal and intentional declaration of a member, states the following:

*The membership of the church shall . . . subscribe to the authority of the Bible in matters of faith, church order and discipline, and submit to the Doctrinal Statement and Constitution of the church.*

We interpret this statement to mean that in order to be a member of The Bible Church of Little Rock one must affirm the essential elements of the Christian faith. Where the Bible speaks to those matters that define what men must believe (*primary beliefs*), all members are required to adhere to these truths. This does not mean, however, that there couldn't be latitude in some other areas where Christians have historically differed. In areas where clear differences have occurred between true Christians, we affirm the existence of such *secondary* matters. We recognize, for instance, that some Christians can and will differ with us on our stated eschatological scheme, namely our belief in the pre-tribulational, premillennial return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Likewise, not everyone, for example, will agree with our particular process in selecting leaders, as stated in our Constitution. Further, within our Philosophy of Ministry, there may be disagreement with our position, say, on divorce and remarriage. When those who wish to join The Bible Church of Little Rock differ on the *primary* elements of the Christian faith, we must reject their request to join. However, when true believers (whether in or beyond The Bible Church of Little Rock) clearly differ on *secondary* matters, we should seek an earnest preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Our official response to these differences is to acknowledge that our Doctrinal Statement, Constitution, and Philosophy of Ministry contain *primary*, *secondary*, and even *tertiary* elements. *Primary* elements of these documents would include (but are certainly not limited to) any statements which speak to the singular authority of the Bible, the Persons and work of the Godhead, and our salvation in Christ. (These *primary* elements can be seen in the Latin phrases drawn from our Reformation heritage: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, *Soli Deo Gloria*). These *primary* truths are not negotiable and must be affirmed by all members of The Bible Church of Little Rock. *Secondary* elements would include (but are certainly not limited to) our positions on the events directly preceding and succeeding the return of Christ to the earth, the mode(s) of baptism, and the various views of divorce and remarriage. These truths are very important, but a person is not bound to affirm these statements in order to be a member. *Tertiary* elements would include (but are certainly not limited to) our positions on the scheduled times and structure of our worship services, the schooling choices for our members' children, and the use of hymns rather than choruses. These things are only preferences and are not binding upon the conscience of a member. A member of The Bible Church of Little Rock should inform the leadership whenever he or she has a question that could potentially cause division within the

body, and this should be done regardless of whether these questions constitute either the *primary* or *secondary* areas. The Elders of The Bible Church will then make a determination regarding these questions and, through dialog with that member, should be able to come to a mutually agreed upon solution which seeks to preserve our unity in the Spirit.

## Teachers

Article VIII of the Constitution, regarding those who teach at The Bible Church of Little Rock, states the following:

*All teachers shall submit themselves to the Constitution and Doctrinal Statement.*

We interpret this statement to mean that every person who assumes a teaching position at The Bible Church—whether this is in a regular capacity or not—should, wherever possible, adhere to the *specific* elements of the church's Doctrinal Statement. We realize, however, that the Doctrinal Statement is written as a set of broad, propositional truths which gives the teacher a *basic framework* in which to proclaim what he believes. It is not intended to be an exhaustive statement that defines *all* that one might teach. Neither does our Constitution or Philosophy of Ministry determine every conceivable method of proclaiming various biblical convictions. *Still, it is very important to recognize only those teachers who can generally affirm the Doctrinal Statement, Constitution, and Philosophy of Ministry.*

We believe this practically means that every recognized teacher at The Bible Church will not openly criticize, dispute, or otherwise promote any *primary* or *secondary* area of doctrine other than that which is stated in our Constitution, Doctrinal Statement, or Philosophy of Ministry. We recognize that there may be some areas of teaching where we have no officially stated position (for instance, an interpretative question on a particular verse or passage). Further, we recognize that for the purposes of conducting formal theological education, many different doctrinal positions may be presented. For these types of teaching opportunities, the teacher should submit the proposed content to the Elders for review. He would then be free to teach opposing views, but only for the purpose of full-orbed instruction.

When there are times no certain, official position has yet been articulated by the Elders, the teacher is free to teach his own position on the matter. If there is a question in his mind as to what position the Elders might or might not teach, especially on a potentially controversial area not previously covered, he is encouraged to speak to an Elder before teaching. The teacher and the Elders will then determine a mutually agreed upon solution as to whether to teach or not teach that subject. *The ultimate decision, however, about both the content and method of teaching, rests with the Elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock.*

## Elders

Article III, Section 2, Subsection B: [The] Duties of Officers, 1., [The] Board of Elders, of the Constitution, states the following:

*It shall be the duty of the Elders (compensated and noncompensated) to lead and care for the spiritual condition of the church, to guard the purity of doctrine and life of the church . . . preach and teach the Word [to the church] . . . and supervise the . . . doctrinal content [for the church].*

We interpret this statement to mean that men who serve as Elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock must—in unanimity—affirm the *primary* and uphold the *secondary* elements of the Doctrinal Statement, Constitution and Philosophy of Ministry. As stated above, by using the word “*primary*” we mean that he must not only affirm that these elements of the Doctrinal Statement define what Christians must believe, but that his personal adherence to them is also *required*. This is crucial because of his dual role as both teacher and protector of the flock.

When we state that an area within our Doctrinal Statement is considered “*secondary*”, understanding that even these areas are *important* for Christians, we don’t see it as essential for the Elders to personally affirm only one position. As to the question of which particular areas of the doctrinal statement are deemed either *primary* or *secondary*, the matrix contained in appendix two serves to clarify the position of The Bible Church. An Elder must, however, ensure that both the *primary* and *secondary* statements in the Doctrinal Statement be taught as the official, doctrinal position of The Bible Church of Little Rock. (The *tertiary* elements for an Elder, however, are not *required* to be adhered to in his role as an elder, and would, of course, be a matter for his own conscience).

We believe this to be the best course of action, because the role and function of the Elder is to uphold each element of the Doctrinal Statement, Constitution, and Philosophy of Ministry, *whether it is his own position or not*. Further, we believe this to be an important step, because if the Elders do not properly maintain the official statements of the church, there is potential to cause unnecessary confusion and division. Therefore, in order for a man to be affirmed as an Elder, he is not only to be a *member* who *generally* subscribes to these documents; not only a *teacher* who adheres to the *specific* statements of these documents; but also an *Elder* who *leads* the congregation in the understanding and support of the overall positions of the church. With all these things in mind, each Elder candidate must state what his positions are, relative to the *primary* and *secondary* aspects of the Doctrinal Statement, Constitution, and Philosophy of Ministry documents. In addition, each Elder will annually give an account of his stance on the official positions of the church. If any of his positions change, he must state, in writing, what those changes are, and submit them to the chairman of the Elders. The chairman will then decide what course of action will take place.

Having stated the above, it is clear that at various times the specific *interpretation* of these documents by the Elders (especially the Constitution and Philosophy of Ministry) could differ. In addition, we acknowledge that as fallible men, we understand the difficulty of achieving total unanimity on the *implementation* of these things. However, our undying effort will be to attempt to lead and feed the flock with integrity and faithfulness, endeavoring to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Our sincere desire echoes the wise words of the great Augustine himself who said, “In essentials: unity; in non-essentials: liberty; in all things: charity.”









## Public Reading of the Word of God

The Word of God calls upon believers to make the public reading of Scripture a regular part of the worship services. The most explicit text in this regard is 1 Timothy 4:13—“Until I [Paul] come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.” Even though the word *public* is not mentioned in the original Greek text of 1 Timothy 4:13, its inclusion for the sake of the context is quite evident. The text does include the definite article before the word *reading* and therefore must mean that this is to be a reading in public, along with the public exhortation and teaching of that Scriptural reading.

Normally, in an early church worship context, the public reading of God’s Word was crucial because very few of the believers had their own personal copy of the Scriptures. When they came together, God’s Word would be read in order for the exposition of that Word to be properly understood. This followed very closely the context for worship in the Jewish synagogues of that time. Luke 4:16-30 is an example of Jesus’ public reading and preaching of the Old Testament Scripture:

*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.’ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’ And He said to them, ‘No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal Yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elijah the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.’ And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way.*

With each of the classic steps as outlined in 1 Timothy 4:13, Jesus publicly read God’s Word, He exhorted (applied) God’s Word (in this case applying it directly to Himself), and He taught (exegeted or expounded) God’s Word. Because He believed the Scriptures to be the very Words of God Himself, He was also living out the expression of 2 Timothy 3:16—“All Scripture

is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” After the public reading of the Word, the public exhortation of God’s Word meant to “come alongside” the people with the challenge, reproof, correction and training that 2 Timothy 3:16 includes. The public teaching of 1 Timothy 4:13 includes also the systematic explanation of God’s Word. This is where the verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture can be Biblically defended.

The same concept of the public reading and teaching of Scripture is clearly seen in Nehemiah 8:1-8:

*And all the people gathered as one man at the square, which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium, which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating [explaining] to give the sense so that they understood the reading.*

The early church can be seen regularly alluding to the public reading of the Old Testament. Acts 15:21 states, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” To that Old Testament reading, the early church added the reading and teaching of Jesus’ own words (see Acts 20:35), as well as the reading and teaching of the Apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2; 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; etc.).

The Bible Church of Little Rock therefore, is committed to the public reading, teaching, and application of the whole of God’s Truth (see Acts 20:27). This will be primarily directed toward, but is not limited to, the public worship services on the Lord’s Day. It will also occur in Sunday School opportunities, Care Groups, Bible studies, Men’s and Women’s ministry studies and events, etc. It is the desire of the Board of Elders of The Bible Church of Little Rock to follow as closely as possible the pattern of the early church, so as to rightly represent the accurate presentation of God’s Word, which we believe will bring Him great glory.

## Spiritual Gifts

We believe the sovereign plan of God to bring glory to Himself involves the obedient activity of the church to perform His will on earth. Essential to our mission is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, enabling our service, and endowing us with gifts fit for the task we have been called to perform. We believe the Holy Spirit distributes special and supernatural abilities to believers so that they may serve others in the Body of Christ. These abilities are known as spiritual gifts. The gifts are not only essential in enabling our effective ministry to others, but help to remind us that all true service of God is “*‘not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6).

At conversion, the believing sinner is placed into the Body of Christ (the church), and endowed with a spiritual gift or gifts for serving other members of the body. 1 Corinthians 12:7 states, “*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*” Thus, every believer is spiritually gifted, and should use his giftedness in service to others. Service in the body is the overarching principle regarding the spiritual gifts, as opposed to incorporating them in private worship. The entire reason God has given us gifts is for the purpose of serving others. No gift is given for selfish purposes or even self-edification. 1 Peter 4:10 states, “*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”

Because we believe that every believer is spiritually gifted, we are committed to helping our membership identify their own particular giftedness, and to use that giftedness in ministry to others. Thus, new members are interviewed to determine where they have previously served in the Body of Christ, and where they believe they can best use their spiritual gifts to serve in our local body. Also, regular teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts is provided in our Equipping Hour classes, helping members become familiar with the various gifts. Perhaps the best way to identify spiritual giftedness, however, is through an individual’s service in the church. Believers may identify their spiritual giftedness as they serve others in ministry, and receive affirmation from other members of the Body of Christ. We affirm that every believer is called to perform certain responsibilities within the life of the church (e.g., showing mercy), and yet some believers are particularly gifted in these areas. As each individual member of the body serves and performs his own responsibility in the church, the particular giftedness of that member becomes evident. “As you regularly and faithfully fulfill all the responsibilities of life in the Father’s house, you should spend the most time and energy serving in those areas in which you have the greatest giftedness. And you should be very careful not to expect other believers to be as successful as you are in those ministries” (Wayne Mack and David Swavely, Life in the Father’s House, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1996, p. 122).

A collective look at the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:11a, yields the conclusion that the gifts can be divided into two general categories: (1) Gifts For Service in the Ministry of the Word of God; (2) Gifts for Service in Good Deeds. This distinction between the speaking gifts and the serving gifts can be found as we continue reading in 1 Peter 4:11, which says, “*Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ...*” Because of the variety of needs

within the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts to the church, and has sovereignly bestowed these gifts on believers. 1 Corinthians 12:11 states, *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”* Believers are to delight in the giftedness they have received and are to zealously pursue ways in which they can minister to others. As a body, believers are to affirm the variety of gifts given by the Spirit, and are to recognize that each gift is indispensable to the growth of the body (Ephesians 4:16). No Scripture either teaches or implies that all believers are to pursue one particular gift, or that all believers will possess a certain gift as a confirmation of their salvation. To the contrary, 1 Corinthians 12 is a treatise on the fact that believers do not have the same gifts, and that everyone’s giftedness is essential to the health of the whole. Verses 29-30 ask rhetorically, *“All are not apostles are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?”* The expected answer is “No!” The clear teaching is that believers possess gifts that differ, gifts that are all necessary for the edification of the Body of Christ. As a collective body, we are to desire the “greater gifts”, those gifts that most edify and build up the body (1 Corinthians 12:31), and to minister our individual gifts in love toward one another (1 Corinthians 13). We need to remember that the possession of a particular gift is not to be equated with spiritual maturity, but that our level of spiritual maturity is dependent on the manner in which we minister the gifts that we have to others.

Because our gifts differ, we are not to become proud and look down on others who do not have our particular gift, but are rather to acknowledge that we need each member of the Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:14-25, Paul mentions two equal, but opposite dangers individual members of the Body of Christ might fall into regarding spiritual gifts. The first is pride. A helpful guard against spiritual pride in the possession of particular gifts is to remember that any ability we have in ministry, and anything good we may accomplish in the name of Christ, comes solely through the power of God alone, Who is to receive all the credit and glory for our spiritual successes. A second danger is that of self-pity, which is demonstrated by believers who think that they have no ability with which to serve the Body of Christ and are not needed by the body. This attitude often results in a failure to serve, and the entire body suffers.

Finally, we teach that certain spiritual gifts were intended only for the apostolic period of the church and have now ceased. These gifts would include any that were given by God in order to communicate new revelation to the church (prophecy, tongues and their interpretation, revelatory aspects of the word of wisdom and knowledge), and those given to authenticate the message of the apostolic circle (gifts of healing, miracles, apostles). These “sign” or “miraculous” gifts are distinguished from the other speaking and serving gifts because they were essential to the writing of the New Testament canon, and were no longer needed by the church once that canon was completed. We affirm that the canon of Scripture is both complete and sufficient for everything “pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), and thus God is giving no further revelation. These “sign” gifts were foundational in the building of the church (Ephesians 2:20), and were no longer needed after the foundation was finished (For more information concerning the controversy surrounding the “miraculous gifts”, see Robert L. Thomas, Understanding Spiritual Gifts, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1999, and Richard Gaffin, Perspectives on Pentecost, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979).

We believe that God continues to perform miracles in the present day, and that God continues to grant healing when it is His will to do so. However, we do not believe God uses “miracle workers” or “healers” to accomplish these works of mercy and compassion, but rather heals in answer to prayer (James 5:14-16). Instead of seeking the “miraculous” gifts, we are now called to continue building the Body of Christ with the speaking and serving gifts that remain, *“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”* (Ephesians 4:13).



## **Student Ministries**

### **Purpose Statement**

Student ministries, in cooperation with adult and children's ministries, exists to glorify God by assisting parents in the calling of students to faith and repentance, and equipping them in the service of Jesus Christ.

### **I. Student Ministries**

We affirm that Junior and Senior High school students are maturing young adults, responsible to God for their sin, called to obey God and their parents, and able through faith to walk in holiness (Psalm 119:9-11; Proverbs 3:1-4; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Ephesians 6:1). Biblical examples of those who have walked with God in holiness as young adults include: Joseph (Genesis 37:2; 39:1-2); Ruth (Ruth 2:5-6); Samuel (1 Samuel 2:11; 3:19); David (1 Samuel 17:42); Josiah (2 Kings 22:3); Esther (Esther 2:8); Daniel (Daniel 1:3-7); Mary (Luke 1:27); Timothy (2 Timothy 3:15); and even Jesus Christ Himself, who as a young adult, "continued in subjection" to his parents, "increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke. 2:51-52). With this biblical foundation, we affirm that young adults can serve their Creator in the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1), and reject any ideology which permits or excuses young adults to have experiences with sin under the misguided teaching of a "developmental stage" or "transitional period" in their lives commonly referred to as "adolescence." It is our hope and conviction that as we train students by precept and example to think biblically, and hold them accountable for their thoughts and actions, they will mature both in their faith and in their responsibility to society. We believe this is best accomplished through the teaching of God's Word in worship services, Sunday School, mid-week Bible study, and small group discipleship programs.

### **II. In Cooperation With Adult and Children's Ministries**

We believe that students should be incorporated into the life of our church, which as the Body of Christ is made up of many members of all age groups (1 Corinthians 12:12). Thus, student ministries will endeavor to integrate our young adults into other ministries of the church both to serve and to be disciplined by mature adults. Student ministries should not be an isolated effort divorced from other ministries of the church and so become a "church within a church." We will cooperate with both the children's and adult ministries to train parents in child rearing and family worship (Colossians 3:20-21). We acknowledge the importance of having a mindset exist within the church which sees ministry to students as a responsibility of the entire body of Christ. Therefore, it is our responsibility as a church body to proclaim Christ, "admonishing *every* man and teaching *every* man with all wisdom, that we may present *every* man complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

### **III. Exist to Glorify God**

The purpose of student ministries is to both glorify God and to lead others in the worship of God. To glorify God is to acknowledge that He alone in His glorious nature is worthy of our

reverence, obedience, and praise (Revelation 7:10-12). The church exists to glorify God who has saved us “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Ephesians 1:4-6). We acknowledge that God has redeemed a people for His name who will “proclaim the excellencies of Him” who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We affirm that God receives glory when we worship and obey Him with hearts of gratitude and devotion. God receives glory when others see the fruit of our transformed lives, and when we praise Him with our lips from a pure heart. Our desire to glorify God will determine everything we do in student ministries (1 Corinthians 10:31), and thus the contrast between our ministry and the world will be radically different.

We affirm that young adults should glorify God in all the ways in which the church worships Him: music, prayer, giving, teaching, preaching, the Lord’s Supper, baptism, evangelism, missions, holy living, gratitude, and loving service to others, etc.

#### **IV. By Assisting Parents**

We affirm that God has placed upon parents the responsibility of presenting the good news of Christ to their children that they might receive Him and be trained to obey His commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Matthew 28:18-20). We also affirm that God has made fathers the primary spiritual leaders of their own children, and that fathers are responsible to raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Thus, we believe that fruitful ministry to young adults is really an extension of the ongoing ministry of parents to their children. We will not usurp the responsibility or authority of parents in the biblical discipleship of their children, but rather will assist them in the process. Therefore, we seek to minister to both parents and students, and encourage parental involvement in the ministry.

#### **V. In The Calling Of Students To Faith and Repentance**

We affirm that the church exists to evangelize the lost (Matthew 28:18-20), which also involves helping parents to confront their young adults with the gospel of Jesus Christ, calling them to repentance, turning from sin and embracing Christ through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:28). We believe student ministries and parents together are to extend the gospel of Jesus Christ beyond the walls of our church, calling all to receive Christ as Lord and Savior (John 1:12).

#### **VI. Equipping Them In the Service of Jesus Christ**

We affirm that the church exists to equip believers to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). This is accomplished through training students in personal Bible study, prayer, evangelism, service, and social interaction. We believe that students are a vital part of the church, and that when they are trained to exercise their spiritual giftedness (1 Corinthians 12:7) in the fellowship, the entire body will be strengthened and built up in the faith. We design enjoyable activities for the purpose of stimulating fellowship, evangelism, and service rather than for mere entertainment. In summary, we teach students the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), so that they may be equipped both to perform good deeds (Galatians 6:10; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14), and to provide leadership in the church in the years to come (2 Timothy 2:2).

## Worship and Music

At The Bible Church of Little Rock we are committed to pursuing worship that pleases God both in our corporate worship services as well as our private times of adoration. Jesus offers one of the most concise and explicit statements in all of Scripture about the kind of worship that God requires:

True worshippers shall worship the Father in *spirit and truth* for such persons the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is a spirit and those who worship Him must worship in *spirit and in truth*. (John 4:23-24, emphasis added.)

The phrase “such persons the Father seeks to be his worshippers” could be translated “such persons the Father requires, demands, or expects.” Thus, worship in spirit and truth is required by God as the only worship that He will receive. As individuals and as a church, we must carefully evaluate every aspect of our private and corporate worship in the light of such clear teaching in order to be certain that we are “true worshippers.”

*Worship in spirit* is worship that engages the spirit or the heart of a person. True worship flows from the inner dimension of a man and involves the intellect, the emotions, and the volition as illustrated in the following texts:

Psalm 45:1    My *heart* overflows with a good theme.  
 Psalm 103:1    Bless the Lord oh my soul and *all that is within me* bless His holy name.  
 Psalm 51:17    The sacrifices of God are a broken *spirit*; a broken and a contrite *heart*,  
                     O God, Thou wilt not despise.  
 Romans 1:9    God whom I serve (worship) in my *spirit*.

Worship “in spirit” stands in stark contrast to worship that is mere outward ritual. Such worship is rejected and strongly condemned by God throughout Scripture (Is 1:13,15; 29:13, Jer. 7:9-10, Matt. 15:7-9). The corporate worship of our church must be devoid of all such hypocrisy, deceit, or pretense. Worship “in spirit” will be characterized by earnest, sincere, authentic, and passionate expressions of love and adoration for our God.

*Worship in Truth* is worship that occurs in response to God’s gracious revelation of Himself in both creation (general revelation) and the Word of God (special revelation). True worship cannot occur apart from an understanding of who God is (Acts 17:23), and thus every aspect of worship must conform to the truth of God’s Word. Each facet of our corporate worship must be carefully evaluated in the light of scriptural truth in order to protect and enable “worship in truth.” Worship that is saturated in Scripture will be protected from unworthy or errant thoughts about the object our worship, God Himself. Biblically based worship will retain God and His glory as its central focus thus avoiding a man-centeredness. When scrutinized in the light of God’s Word, worship will emphasize both the transcendence and immanence of God (Is. 57:15, Ps. 113). Worship submitted to the authority of God’s word will insure that songs can accurately teach and admonish as commanded in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Scriptural worship will balance the subjective expression of our thoughts to God (Psalm 18:1,2) with the objective impression of God’s thoughts to us (Dt.6:3; Is 1:18-20) .

Hebrew 13:15-16 teaches that “worship in truth” will bring glory to God not only through songs of the worshipper but also through the life of the worshipper:

Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of *lips that give thanks* to His name. And do not neglect *doing good and sharing* for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (emphasis added)

This passage defines worship both in terms of praise on the lips and good works in the life (see also Matt 5:16). In the New Testament, worship is expressed not only in terms of the singing of praise but good works such as personal evangelism (Rom. 15:16), financial giving (Phil. 4:18), and any faithful act of obedience in the life of a believer (Rom. 12:1-2, 14:13, 18 Ps 95 I Cor. 10:31).

## Music

### Created for His Glory

Like the rest of creation, music is designed by God for His own glory (Is 48:11, Rom 11:36). Music should be used as a tool to facilitate worship, not as an end in itself. Music enhances our expression of adoration of God beyond that of the spoken word alone (Ps 147:1.)

### The Place of Excellence

Music in worship should be offered in such a way that the message of a song is enhanced. Worship can be distracted by music that is unprepared or done poorly, thus the biblical imperative to “play skillfully” implies acquired abilities, training as well as rehearsal for worship (Ps 33:3). Distraction from the text can also be caused by pretentious performances that are calculated to engender men’s praise. Just as Paul in his preaching chose to divest himself of “cleverness of speech” (I Cor. 1:17b) which he had acquired through his training, so musicians involved in worship leadership have a unique responsibility to reject the performance mindset often acquired in their training. Natural, undistracting excellence that draws the listeners’ attention to the text must always be the goal of the musicians involved in worship.

When rehearsing for public worship, it is critical to pursue not only artistic excellence, but spiritual maturity as well. The teaching of the Word of God should have a prominent place in all rehearsals. While there is great value in developing musicians and singers within the church, the active, whole-hearted participation of the entire congregation is a greater priority than “running a music program”.