



OUR CORE BELIEFS

THEOLOGICAL ESSENTIALS

About The Scripture, the Word of God

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error (inerrant) in the original manuscripts.

We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. God's intentions are revealed through the communicated words of inspired human authors. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

Therefore, the process of discovering the intention of God in the Bible (which is its fullest meaning) is a humble and careful effort to find in the language of Scripture what the human authors intended to communicate. Limited abilities, traditional biases, personal sin, and cultural assumptions often obscure Biblical texts. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is essential for right understanding of the Bible, and prayer for His assistance belongs to a proper effort to understand and apply God's Word.

About God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He eternally exists in three persons; the Father; the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

About God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is sovereign in all things, be it in power, knowledge, love, justice, or wisdom. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all people.

About Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived a sinless human life and died on a cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin making atonement for those who will believe. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

About The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with God the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He administers spiritual gifts to believers when they are saved for the building up of the body of Christ. Christians seek to live under His control daily.

About Sin

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, mankind is described as being sinful. There are many words that are used to describe sin that indicate its meaning and impact: wrongdoing, acting unjustly, turning aside, transgressing, committing an offense, evildoer, and unrighteousness. Ultimately sin is identified as that action taken by mankind by which a relationship with God is either rejected or ignored. The results of sin upon mankind produce death and destruction for all of creation. The Scriptures also teach that sin may be expressed by thoughts, actions, or attitudes that reflect an unwillingness to conform to the holy character of God as expressed in his moral law.

Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that we are all sinners (Romans 3:22-23), born into a sinful existence (Psalm 51:5), and sin results in a death sentence to us all (Romans 5:12, 6:23). None of us are good and from one's own heart proceeds wickedness (Mark 7:20-23). Therefore, God's wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness and no one is without excuse for sin (Romans 1:18-32). Sin produces consequences that leave mankind under a curse (Galatians 3:10) feeling guilt and shame (Philippians 3:19). As a result, without a Savior to redeem us, man is presently and eternally separated from God.

About Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to all who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting Jesus Christ as God's offering of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. We believe Jesus paid the full penalty for man's sin by his death on the cross. We believe forgiveness of sin is based on grace alone, in Christ alone, and through faith alone. Salvation is not based on good works or human efforts.

Jesus died to pay our debt, so that we could live eternally - " . . . but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." - Romans 6:23

You can accept Jesus' gift - "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." - Romans 10:9

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:9

Definition of the Local Church

The local church is a visible assembly of regenerate believers in the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) joined in a covenant union that expresses similar beliefs, values, and convictions. The covenant union identifies the order of authority between elders, deacons, and congregation. The covenant emphasizes the teaching of the Word, worship (including baptism and communion), and disciplines that are to be observed by the community under the headship of Christ, in honor and service to God, the Father, and to one another. Members are expected to exercise gifts given by the Holy Spirit for mutual service while offering hope to the lost through evangelistic and mercy ministries.

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

About Baptism

Baptism symbolizes the newness of life which the believer has received from Christ through his resurrection power. The power of Christ provides purification for one who has been regenerated, repented of their sin, and professed faith in Christ for his atoning work.

The mode of immersion depicts two things: the death/burial of Christ and his resurrection. The picture of unity with Christ, the death of the old man, new life in Christ, and the future hope of glorification is symbolized by immersion into and exit from water. Therefore, baptism is not to be administered to infants. Instead, baptism is reserved for those who have made a conscious profession of their covenant faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

As Christians, We Follow the Example Set By Christ

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."
- Mark 1:9

Christ Instructed Us To Be Baptized

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." - Matthew 28:19

Through Baptism We Are Identified With Christ

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." - Romans 6:4

Why Do We Baptize With Immersion?

- Christ was baptized that way.
- Everyone that was baptized in the New Testament was baptized that way.
- The word "baptize" means "to immerse."

"Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." - Colossians 2:12

About The Lord's Supper

In Luke 22:19, Jesus presented the elements of the bread and the cup during the Passover meal, the "last supper," with his disciples, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus transformed the prominent elements of the Old Testament life of Israel, which gave assurance of God's provision in the past, present, and future by way of remembrance. In the New Testament, Jesus established a new meaning for the elements of the supper as he is the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

The bread is a symbolic reminder of the suffering that Christ would experience according to prophecies and that he actually experienced on the cross. The cup represents his blood, which echoed the sacrificial elements presented by the high priest to atone for the sins of the people. The Lord's Supper should be taken consistently in the life of the church.

About Marriage and Sexuality

We believe that the term 'marriage' has only one meaning: it is that relationship sanctioned by God in which He joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive covenant union for a lifetime, as defined (delineated in) by Scripture.

Jesus taught this view in Matthew 19:3-12. He quoted Genesis 2:24, insisting on this Biblical view that is designed by God and has not changed from His creation of man and woman.

We also believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no one engage in intimate sexual activity outside of the Biblical relationship of marriage between a man and woman (1 Corinthians 7:3-8).

We further believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography, pedophilia, or any attempt to change one's gender, or disagreement with one's biological gender, is sinful and offensive to God. Scriptures that address these areas are as follows: Romans 1:24-27; Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6; Galatians 5:16-26; Colossians 3:5-9.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church as the local Body of Christ and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is

imperative that all persons who are officers of the church, members of the church staff, members of church committees, church messengers or who serve as volunteers in the functioning of the ministries of the church and its Bible studies, should abide by and agree to the statements in this Section “About Marriage and Sexuality,” conducting themselves accordingly.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Scripture that addresses these areas are as follows: Galatians 5:16-26; Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

We also believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture or the doctrines of the church.

THE GROVE CHURCH DISTINCTIVES

About Leadership

Jesus

It is vital to clearly acknowledge the headship, authority, and responsibility of Jesus in relationship to the church. In Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15-16, Paul describes a specific position held by Jesus: he is the head of the church. Jesus is the one who makes the church grow by sanctifying her, cleansing her, and presenting her as unblemished and holy.

The Church

The government of the local church has within it three offices that can be determined by a careful examination of Scripture. The three offices are the elders, deacons, and members. The office of membership is often overlooked or undervalued, yet it should not be. Therefore, by becoming a Christian and joining a local church, a person becomes a member with an office, specifically a citizen, a word that communicates the idea of being ruled while sharing in rule.

Elders

One of the most telling passages of Scripture regarding the elders of the church is found in Acts 20:17-38, in which three words are used interchangeably to describe the leadership of the church. It is important to recognize that elders operated in plurality in the New Testament. James 5:14 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church . . .” In Acts 14:23, Luke noted that Paul appointed a plurality of elders in every church: “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church . . .” In 1 Timothy 5:17, there is found a reference to the plurality of elders in the church.

Deacons

The Greek word diakonos is used in both the noun and verb forms. The noun means “servant” or “minister.” The verb means “service” or “ministry.” On five occasions the word “deacon” is used to describe an office in the church. The use of “deacon” as an office is most clear in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12. The context indicates that Paul is instructing Timothy regarding the offices of

the church.

The office of deacon is the complementary role to the elders. Elders offer pastoral oversight while deacons offer practical service to the needy. The deacons primary role is to cooperate and communicate with the elders concerning the ministry needs of the church body.

Church Membership

The concept of the office of church membership is often neglected. However, there are a number of references that identify that salvation includes with it the idea of membership. Several metaphors are used to describe believers and their inclusion in the governing of the church. Believers are described as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19), and one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

Church members are described by two more metaphors. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, they are called ambassadors. In 1 Peter 2:9, believers are called a royal priesthood. The two descriptions emphasize the position of a believer with Christ and ministry roles bestowed upon them. As ambassadors, they represent and share the ministry of reconciliation that is available through the gospel of Christ. As royal priests, the believer is concerned with the kingdom of God and the life of holiness that is to be exhibited as a church.

Church Offices Operating Together

Together the church operates in reciprocal relationships among the members and leadership offices. In Hebrews 13:17, believers are instructed to obey their leaders, because leaders will one day give an account for those under their care. In Ephesians, Paul instructs the leadership to equip the body so that the body builds itself up in the faith. This requires each member to contribute to the process of growth so that love and a likeness to Christ is achieved.

For maturity to happen, it is necessary that every member attend worship services and utilize the gifts that are bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the mutual growth of other believers and the church as a whole. Together the members and leaders serve as the final human authority for the church: admitting members, providing discipline, choosing leaders, and guarding the purity of the doctrine of the word and teaching.

All three offices work together to maintain the faith and order of the church. As Protestants, it is important to note that faith and order are not a matter of one office, but are instead a matter of the three offices of the church striving together for the purity of the apostolic gospel which is based on right principles. The right principles consist of the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18). The “keys” are the authority presented to the church by Jesus. Together, the three offices determine what doctrine and practices are consistent with the gospel and identify the objective orthodox sources to assess whether a person belongs to the church by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In order for these “keys” to be effectively employed the three offices, elder, deacon, and membership, must cooperate through mutual service and love to one another in the government of the church.

About Church Discipline

In the first letter to the church at Corinth Paul addresses several issues and exhorted the young church to employ a process of church discipline. In Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:18-20, Jesus taught his disciples about the importance of “keys of the kingdom of heaven” and “binding and loosing.” The “keys” are the instruments of discipline that are to be exercised in love toward a sinner so that by reproof the sinner is encouraged to repent of sin and return to right fellowship with God and the church.

Hebrews 12:6-11 relates love and discipline, while highlighting the benefits of discipline. For example, it says, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves.” In Hebrews 12:11, the writer explains that discipline seems painful and unpleasant, “but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Discipline is understood as an activity that produces maturity and fruit.

Formative and corrective discipline are to happen in conjunction with one another. Formative discipline offers a path that reduces the need for corrective discipline. However, proper implementation of corrective discipline is required when necessary. The implementation of corrective discipline ought to exhort church members to zealously work out their “own salvation with fear and trembling,” (Phil. 2:12) through formative discipline.

Corrective discipline is often seen as a negative aspect of church life. However, upon careful examination and proper understanding, its value and implementation should be greatly appreciated. In Galatians 6:1-2, the goal of corrective discipline is given. Paul instructs that the sinner who is caught in sin is to be restored in a spirit of gentleness. This also reminds healthy believers to watch themselves, so as to avoid temptation. All of this fulfills the law of Christ.

Steps of Church Discipline

Paul’s teaching reflects Jesus’ teaching, found in Matthew 18. Jesus begins with instructions on discipline for a personal offense. The steps toward correction begin with a personal meeting between the two individuals. The offended person is to approach the offender. The goal is that the offending party would repent, forgiveness be extended, and restoration secured. However, if the sinful offender is still not repentant, after multiple attempts by the offended, there should be a witness taken to demonstrate that the offense is not merely the opinion of an individual. The method of taking two witnesses should insure an unbiased opinion toward the offender and the issues. Hopefully, the offender will take note of the gentle nature of the witnesses who desire for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

If the two witnesses are unable to accomplish the goal of corrective discipline, the next step is to involve the church membership. This complicated step will require the inclusion of at least one elder in the process. The aim of the elder(s) is to help the witnesses, the offender, and the church body navigate the meeting by giving oversight. Restoration remains the goal of the third step.

In Matthew 18:17, Jesus describes a final step. He instructs that if the offender does not respond to the church, the offender is to be considered as an outsider, excluded from the fellowship that

proper members enjoy. The final step should be carefully considered by the elders and membership together, as it is a definitive stance on the sin of the offender and his position. The decision should be reached through much counsel and prayer. Determining the terms of exclusion is a delicate matter that should happen only after prayer and should be clearly communicated so there is unity and consistency. The church's desire is not to shame the offender.

Steps of Discipline for Leadership

There are special instructions given for the correction of leadership. In 1 Timothy 5:19-20, Paul explains that if charges are brought against an elder there are to be two or three witnesses. Leaders are often criticized unfairly so Paul indicates that there must be clear evidence, not mere hearsay, to bring an accusation against an elder. Finally, if leadership is found to be in sin, it should be dealt with more swiftly, as modeled by Paul's address to Peter in Galatians 2:11-14.