

My Statement of Faith

This statement of faith is my current understanding of basic doctrine and represents the scope of my teaching ministry. I hope my knowledge of God will always be growing, and I am continually humbled and amazed as I study His Word.

*Romans 11:33 - O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

I. Of the Scriptures

- Purpose** To reveal God and His purpose for mankind. The effective purpose of Scripture is to invite people into fellowship with their Creator which brings Him glory (Rev. 4:11).
- Necessity** Nature, history, and man himself (natural revelation) points to the existence of God (Ps. 19:1). Natural revelation is sufficient to condemn man for unbelief (Rom. 1:20) though it is not sufficient to give knowledge of salvation or objective knowledge of God's character. Because of this, the Word of God (special revelation) is necessary for mankind to truly know God (Rom. 10:17).
- Inspiration** Inspiration refers to the words of Scripture being literally "God breathed." (2 Tim. 3:16). Inspiration therefore refers not to the writers but the writings. Inspiration ensures that what God wanted to communicate was accurately conveyed.
- The writers though were not automatons; they were instruments that were moved by its divine author, the Holy Spirit (2 Pt. 1:20-21). God used these men's knowledge, ability, upbringing, and the culture in which they lived to convey His truth. Scriptures origin though was from God. What was conveyed was far beyond the knowledge of the writers. The writers recognized this and studied their own writings to know God and His plan better (1 Pt. 1:10-11)
- The scope of inspiration is the entire Bible (2 Tim. 3:16). The Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15) and the New Testament (2 Pt. 3:15-16) were both recognized to be inspired during the time of the apostles.
- Inerrancy** Inerrancy says that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. Scripture is free from error (Prov. 30:5) and is truth (Jh. 17:17). While the Bible is reliable for faith and practice, it is also trustworthy in the fields of history and science. While it is not a textbook for any of these, it is still free from error when speaking on these topics.
- Inerrancy is not negated by a lack of modern technical precision such as: observational descriptions of nature, reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole, rounding of numbers, topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.
- Infallibility** The Bible is infallible in all matters of which it speaks. Whether doctrine, reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness, we can be confident that it will not fail. Because of this, all Scripture is profitable and is to be believed, obeyed, and embraced (2 Tim. 3:16).
- Sufficiency** Though God has communicated with man in many different ways, all that we need to live a godly life is found within the Bible. God's Word is all we need to know God and His plan for our sanctification (2 Peter 1:3).

Preservation While inspiration strictly speaking refers to the originals, God has providentially kept His message through the ages in accordance with his promise to preserve His Word (Isa. 40:8; 1 Pt. 1:23).

II. Of the True God

Essence Before God created the heavens and the earth nothing existed except God Himself (Gen 1:1). God is a spirit and is not composed of matter and does not possess a physical nature (Jh. 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16).

Personhood There is only one true and living God (Deut. 6:4; 4:35, Js. 2:19). Yet, God eternally exists as three persons: Father, Son (Jh. 1:1-2; Jh. 17:5), and Holy Spirit (1 Pt. 1:2). Each are fully God and have always existed in perfect harmony (Jh. 17:24).

Attributes God's attributes are permanent and intrinsic qualities, which cannot be gained or lost. They are inseparable from His being. Some of these attributes are qualities that are at least partially found in humans (communicable) while there are also unique qualities in which no counterpart can be truly found (incommunicable).

Scripture does not single out one attribute as more important than the other. When properly understood, everything God does is fully consistent with all that He is. God's whole being includes all of His attributes, and they complement and relate perfectly to each other.

Incommunicable Attributes God is infinite in His very being. He is infinite in His presence, power, and knowledge. Because of this, God has no need for anything and is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. He is unchanging in His nature, being, purposes, and promises (Ps. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6). God is both transcendent and immanent over all things and at all times (Jer. 23:23-24; 2 Pt. 3:8). He is present and active within His creation but superior to and independent of anything He has created.

Communicable Attributes God is also the ultimate good. He is perfect in His character and without flaw or sin. This is clearly seen in God's truthfulness, love, mercy, holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath towards man.

III. Of Creation

Purpose God's purpose for creation was to invite mankind into a relationship with Himself (Eph. 2:7). Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in the ages to come.

Universe God spoke the world into existence out of nothing (Jh. 1:3; Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3). This includes all things that are seen and unseen (Col. 1:16). God created all things in six twenty-four hour days and rested on the seventh, at the end of which He declared that all things were very good (Gen 1:31-2:1).

Heavenly Realm God created a place where His presence is especially evident, namely heaven (Neh. 9:6, Rev. 10:6, Acts 4:24). Here, angels, other heavenly creatures, and believers who have died engage in worshipping God.

Heavenly Beings Scripture records that God created several heavenly beings (Neh. 9:6): angels, cherubim, seraphim, and other living creatures around God's throne (Ezek. 1:5-14, Rev. 4:6-8) for His glory.

Scripture gives us the most insight into angels. They have moral judgment, high intelligence, and are much more powerful than human beings. The Word of God indicates that angels glorify God (Ps. 103:20), minister to Christians (Heb. 1:14), are messengers from God, and assist in carrying out God's plan. Angels are subsequently divided into ranks to accomplish God's purposes (Col. 1:16).

Human Beings

Man was created on the sixth day after God had made all other creatures. Man was the pinnacle of God's creation and its primary focus (Heb. 2:16).

Man was created with three parts: a body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). The body includes all the necessary organs that make up the physical part of man. The soul is the immaterial part of man related to earthly functions and is the basis for reason, personality, and emotion. The spirit is the immaterial part of man as related to God and enables humans to perceive spiritual matters.

Man was also created in the image of God. While there is much disagreement to its meaning, within the context of Gen 1:26-27 it is made clear that it deals with the authority God has given mankind to rule over the earth. The command to have dominion over all and to cultivate the earth is bookended and attributed to being made in the image of God. This also will not end with the present age for we will also be ruling over angels (1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 2:7). Therefore, man is to be a wise steward of God's creation and seek to see human society flourish.

God created woman equal in personhood and importance though different in their role and authority. Marriage is the joining together of a man and woman for the glory of God and is to picture Christ's love for His church. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. The wife is to submit herself to the Scriptural leadership of her husband as the church submits to the headship of Christ. Sex is a gift from God that is only to be enjoyed in the institution He created. God has also ordained the family to be the foundational institution of civilization and for parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Man was created in innocence and moral purity. God gave him a home in the Garden of Eden and instructed him to keep it. God also gave a command to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that if they ate of the tree they would die. Man was left to the liberty of his own will, which was subject to change.

IV. Of Sin

Sin's Definition

Sin is a failure to live in accord with God's character and commands. This applies to both our acts, attitudes, and very nature. All sin is in some way a failure to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).

Sin's Permittance

While God did not cause anyone to sin (Js. 1:14-15), He was not surprised by the fall. He gave His creatures free will and did so with the knowledge of their voluntary choice to sin. The fall of man in reality, as all things do, gives God glory (Col. 1:16-17). God is glorified in His just punishment of unrepentant sinners though His desire is for all men to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Peter 3:9). With both outcomes, God and His character are revealed and glorified.

Sin's Author

Sometime after creation but before the fall of man, a number of angels sinned and rebelled against God. This was led by the angel Lucifer (Satan). In his desire to be like God, he fell and drew after him a host on innumerable angels.

As the author of sin (Jh. 8:44; 1 Jh. 3:8), Satan is mankind's supreme adversary (1 Pt. 5:8; Eph. 6:12). He is also the enemy of God, the accuser of the saints, the author of all false religions, and the leader of all the powers of darkness. Satan and his demons now continually work evil in the world. Their hope is to oppose and destroy every work of God, and they will use lies, deception, and every kind of evil activity to turn people away from God.

Though powerful, Satan and his demons can only do what God allows (Job 1:12; 2:6). They are destined for defeat at the hands of God's own Son and His saints (1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 16:20) and will receive eternal justice in hell which was prepared for them.

Man's Fall

Some point after creation, Satan tempted Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This she did while also giving the fruit to Adam to eat. Through this willful and sinful act, sin entered into the world (Rom. 5:12). Immediately, every part of man was corrupted. His body began to physically die (Rom 6:23), his soul was defiled (Titus 1:15), and his spirit died (Eph. 2:1). In Adam, the entire human race fell, inherited a sinful nature and became alienated from God, utterly unable to change his lost condition.

Sin's Effect

While sin is harmful in many ways, its lasting effect is that it separates man from God. Sin is directly opposite of all that is good in the character of God and subsequently separates the sinner from Him. The immediate result for Adam and Eve was separation by being banished from the garden. Ultimately, sin will separate human beings from a holy and loving God for all eternity in hell if they are not redeemed.

V. Of Christ and His Work

His Divinity

Jesus Christ has always existed and is eternal (Jh. 1:1-2; 8:58). He is a part of the triune God, and Scripture ascribes every attribute related to God to Him.

His deity is also seen in His work in eternity past. As God, he was part of the purposes of God in creation and salvation and was in actuality the executor of these purposes.

His Incarnation

The incarnation of the Son of God is the central and exceptional fact of Christianity. To deny Jesus' humanity would deny the very heart of Christianity (1 Jh. 4:2-3) and Jesus' ability to be our sacrifice (Heb. 2:16-17).

Jesus' incarnation was not a lessening of His deity, but He was fully God and fully man (Phil. 2:6-11; Jh. 1:1-14). This union resulted not in two persons but one and is everlasting in the keeping with the everlasting character of both the human and divine natures (Jh. 14:3, 17:24).

Christ also choose to give up the independent use of His divine attributes while here on earth and relied on the power of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:17; Mt. 12:28; Acts 10:38). Though the divine nature was infinite and immutable, through his human nature he could hunger, suffer, and learn (Lk. 2:52; Heb. 5:8).

Though Jesus was fully human, He was without sin (Heb. 4:15) and without the capability to do so because it would contradict His divine nature (Js. 1:13). Through His human nature, though, Jesus understands and helps us in our temptations.

The incarnation was announced to Mary and Joseph and prophetically prepared by John the Baptist. The virgin Mary was told that her child would have no human father, and that He would be the Son of God who would fulfill the promises made to David through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35).

His Sacrifice

Christ's sacrifice was necessary to fulfill both the love and justice of God to redeem us to Himself (Jh. 3:16; Rom. 3:25-26). God was so holy that He could not allow us into His presence with unpaid for sins, yet was so loving that He would pay them for us.

For Christ's sacrifice to be effective, it required a life of complete obedience to God's law and will as our human representative (Phil. 3:9). It also required the sufferings necessary to pay the penalty for our sins. In a true sense, Christ's entire life was one of suffering. He was truly a man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3), and this suffering intensified as He drew near the cross. On the cross, Jesus experienced the pain of death and shedding of His blood, of bearing sin (1 Pt. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21), of abnourishment from the Father (Mt. 27:46), and bearing the wrath of God as a substitute for us (Rom. 3:21-26; 1 Jh. 4:10).

As the infinite God, Jesus made a complete payment for sins on the cross (Jh. 19:20, Rom. 6:9-10). His sacrifice was not limited to just the elect but to the whole world and even those who will not accept His gift of salvation (2 Pt. 2:1). Therefore, Christ can truly be called the Savior of the world (1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Jh. 2:2).

His Resurrection

The Word of God clearly affirms the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the tomb (Mt. 28:1-20). It is an event based in history as seen in the New Testament documents, the human witnesses, the empty tomb, the dramatic change in the disciples and accompanying divine power, and very origin and advancement of the church. These all point to the validity and belief of the physical and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (Lk 24:39).

Jesus' bodily resurrection was not simply coming back from the dead. Rather, it was a resurrection to new life and body that was made perfect. His resurrection was done by the Father, Jesus Christ Himself, and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:4; Jh. 10:17-18; Rom. 8:11).

The resurrection is vital because it ensures our regeneration (1 Pt. 1:3), justification (Rom. 4:25), and bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 6:14). In short, our faith would be worthless without Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14-17).

His Ascension

After Christ's resurrection, He was on earth for forty days (Acts 1:3) before He ascended in a cloud to the heavenly realm (Acts 1:9-11). There He received the glory, authority, and honor He had not received while on earth (Jh. 17:5; Acts 2:33; Mt. 26:64; 1 Pt. 3:22). He now is at the right hand of the Father while also engaging with His present work (Acts 7:56).

His Present Work

Christ currently has authority over angels, authorities, and power (1 Pt. 3:22). As its head, Christ is directing, growing, and perfecting His bride, the church for their prepared place and marriage (Heb. 13:20; Eph. 5:23-29; Col. 2:19; Phil 4:13).

Jesus as our great High Priest gives us access to the heavenly throne room through His sacrifice (Heb. 10:19-22) and continues to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

VI. Of Salvation

Salvation's Definition

Salvation is wholly by grace and is the application of the work of Christ to the lives of believers.

Election	<p>God chose all who would believe before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5). God's predestination of people, though, had some element of foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29). This foreknowledge was not based in individual believers' choices but in the entire scope of God's plan (2 Tim. 1:9).</p> <p>Election is based in the will of God that all men should repent (2 Pt. 3:9; Eph. 1:4-5). In his sovereignty, God chose the current reality we live in out of the many possible choices through His providential work in the world. This did not take away free will from any individual, rather it ensured that as many people as possible would freely accept His offer of grace (1 Tim. 2:4).</p>
God's Call	<p>God has given light and grace in some way to all people and called them to repentance (Acts 17:30; Titus 2:11-12). After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jh. 16:8-11). In fact, Scripture indicates that God even gives grace to give people time to repent (2 Pt. 3:9-10). What prevents a sinner from accepting this call is a voluntary rejection of God's gracious call to repentance (Jh. 3:16-19; Heb. 10:29; Prov. 1:24-30).</p>
Salvation's Method	<p>The gospel is the proclamation that Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4). A mere knowledge and intellectual assent in the historical work of Christ does not save. It is placing your faith and trust in His work (Rom. 10:9-10).</p> <p>Saving faith also includes and presupposes repentance. A person will not be saved without a true and heartfelt sorrow for sin and a sincere desire to forsake it (Acts 20:21; 2 Cor. 7:9-10; Lk. 24:46-47). Saving faith is a turning from our sin to Christ.</p>
Regeneration	<p>Regeneration, or being born again, is the mysterious work of God (Jh. 3:8) in which He imparts life to our spirit (Rom. 8:10; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13; Titus 3:5) and in many ways the work of new life is begun in our entire being (2 Cor. 5:17). Regeneration is wholly of God (Jh. 1:13) and is worked in us through God the Father and the Holy Spirit (Jh. 3:8; Eph. 2:5) which results in a changed life (1 Jh. 3:9; 2:29; 4:7; 5:18).</p>
Justification	<p>Justification is the legal act of God declaring sinners forgiven and righteous in His sight and no longer liable to sin's punishment (Rom. 3:20, 26; 4:5; 8:33-34). Our past sins are not only forgiven but the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us (Rom. 4:3, 6).</p>
Adoption	<p>Adoption is the act of God whereby He makes us members of His family (Jh. 1:12; Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4-7). Through this, God truly becomes our Father, and we experience His favor, direction, and care in our life (Jh. 15:14-15; Rom. 8:14-17).</p>
Sanctification	<p>Though our spirit was completely saved (regeneration) at salvation, the soul in a sense is progressively saved (sanctification) (1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 1:6). Sanctification therefore is the progressive work of God (1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Cor. 3:18) in the life of the believer whereby we become more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives (Eph. 4:1).</p> <p>Sanctification begins when our old sinful nature is crucified with Christ so that we can live a life pleasing to God (Rom. 6:6-8). This change comes through a yielding to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:13-16) and will not be completed in our souls until death (1 Jh. 1:8-10; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21:27)</p> <p>Many motivations can cause us to obey, Scripture shows though that the true and lasting motivation for change is faith in God and His promises (2 Pt. 1:3-4; Eph. 3:16-19; 5:25-33; 2 Cor. 8:9). True change comes not through the works of the flesh (Phil. 3:9-10) but a desire to please God and yield to Him (Titus 2:11-12; Gal. 5:16-26).</p>

Eternal Security All those who have truly been born again will never lose their salvation. (Jh. 6:38-40; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:30). Scripture also indicates that those who have been born again will continue in true faith till the end of their life (Jh. 8:31-32; Matt. 10:22; Col. 1:22-23; Heb. 3:12-14; Matt. 7:21-23).

Glorification Upon death, believers go to be with our Lord in heaven and the sanctification of our souls is perfected (2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 1:19-26).

Glorification is the last step in God's plan and redemption for us (Rom. 8:30) and is the salvation of our bodies (Phil. 3:21; 2 Cor. 7:1). When the church is raptured, Christ will resurrect the bodies of all believers who have died to a perfect resurrection body like His own (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-17).

VII. Of the Holy Spirit and His Work

His Divinity The Holy Spirit is not a force but a person who has intelligence, feelings, and a will (Rom. 8:27; Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor. 12:11). He is also God. He has attributes that belong to God alone (1 Cor. 2:12; Ps. 139:7; Ps. 104:30) and actions that only God can perform (Lk 1:35; 2 Pt. 1:21; Gen 1:2).

His Past Work The Holy Spirit was at work during creation (Gen. 1:2), prophetic and Scriptural revelation (Ezk. 2:2; Num. 24:2; 2 Pt. 1:21), and came upon individuals for acts and ministries of service (Gen. 41:38; Num. 24:2; 2 Chron. 15:1).

The Holy Spirit also did a work of regeneration in the life of Old Testament believers (Deut. 29:19;20; Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Sam. 10:6) and a work of sanctification in the them throughout their life (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1, 8). Though the Holy Spirit did not indwell believers, He certainly was influencing the lives of Old Testament saints.

The Holy Spirit was greatly used during the life of Jesus. He was the active agent in the virgin birth of Christ (Lk.1:35), empowered His ministry (Mt. 12:28; Lk. 4:18-21) and was a part in Jesus' resurrection (Rom. 8:11).

His Advent While the Holy Spirit has always been present in the world, He came in a unique way on the day of Pentecost as Jesus had promised (Jh. 14:16; 16:7). On that day, there came a special manifestation of the Spirit's presence among the believers who were praying in the upper room (Acts 2:1-3). They were baptized in the Spirit (Acts 11:15-16), and they began to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4).

The Holy Spirit's advent was a special gift and is now the primary manifestation of the Trinity in the world and especially the church. He convicts the world (Jh. 16:7-8) while also giving assurance to Christians (1 Jh. 5:10), and helps in prayer (Rom. 8:26), guidance (Rom. 8:14), and growth in Christ (2 Thess. 2:13).

Spirit Baptism It refers to the time at salvation in which Christ baptizes us in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:13) and all the ministries of the Holy Spirit begin in our life (indwelling, sealing, etc.). Spirit baptism also results in us being placed into the body of Christ.

In the book of Acts, we see that Spirit baptism came after regeneration as the gospel went out to new people groups (Acts 2:2-4; 11:15-16; 8:15-17; 11:15-16). They experienced this because they were living during a time of transition. Spirit baptism is now a one-time, non-experiential occurrence that happens to all believers (Eph. 4:5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

His Indwelling

At conversion, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the believer literally making his body God's temple (Jh. 14:16-23; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). His indwelling is a gift for all true believers and is permanent regardless of their level of faithfulness (1 Cor. 5:5; 6:19).

Closely related to indwelling is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. At salvation, the Holy Spirit indwells believers and through this we bear God's identifying mark of sealing in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:20-22; Eph. 1:13). This sealing marks us as God's eternal child and motivates us to live a life of purity (Eph. 4:30).

His Gifting

A spiritual gift is any ability or office that is empowered by the Holy Spirit for use in the ministry of the church (1 Cor. 14:26). There also seems to be three categories of gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6): ministry for individual Christians (Rom. 12:6-8), offices for the church (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28), and manifestation or sign gifts that involved revelation (1 Cor. 12:8-11).

The ministry gifts are given at salvation and every believer has at least one for the purpose of ministering to other believers (1 Cor. 12:7). They are given according to the Spirit's will and are not an indication of spirituality (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7).

With the completion of the canon of Scripture, the imperfect manifestation gifts along with their accompanying offices were no longer necessary and have passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-11).

Spirit Filling

Spirit filling does not refer to the amount of the Holy Spirit in us since at salvation He indwells the believer. Rather, it speaks to allowing Him to work through us more fully. Therefore, Spirit filling refers to the level of control that the Spirit has in a believer's life through his yieldedness to Spirit (Rom. 6:16; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16). Subsequently, rebellion against the Spirit quenches His influence (1 Thess. 5:19).

In Peter's life there were several points when he was filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 23, 31). Though Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:3,5), he received a fresh filling as he was being stoned (Acts 7:55). Also, Eph. 5:18 carries the sense of "continually being filled with the Spirit." Spirit filling then also speaks of God's sovereign act of empowering us for times of greater ministry, spiritual growth, and communion with Himself and allowing the Holy Spirit to work more fully in our lives as part of our ongoing sanctification.

VIII. Of the Church

Its Nature

The church (assembly) is universal in nature. This use is in its nontechnical sense and speaks of the community of all true believers, both living, dead, and yet to come to the end of the church age (Eph. 5:25; Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 2:11-22). This church in prospect (body of Christ) is being built up by its head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:23).

The church (assembly) is also local in nature (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2). This is its technical usage within the New Testament and will be the focus for the rest of this section. The local church is made up of believers and sometimes those who have made false professions (2 Tim. 2:17-19; Acts 20:29-30). A local and true church regularly assembles to worship and fellowship together in Christ's name around the faithfully preached Word of God and faithful administration of the ordinances. This is an important point because while a home Bible study might have true teaching and assembling, if it began baptizing its own converts and regularly participating in the Lord's supper it would signify the intention to function as a church since these are commanded of true churches.

Also, the church is never used to refer to a physical structure. While the church is an institution consisting of leaders, members, and objectives, the church is singularly about people.

Its Purpose

The church's purpose is ultimately to edify (build up) believers for the glory of God (Heb. 3:12, 10:24-25; Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:7; 1 Pt. 2:5). This is done through regular worship (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:16-19), teaching (2 Tim. 4:2; Col. 1:28), fellowship (1 Cor. 12:25; Rom. 1:12, 1 Jh. 1:3), serving together (Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 6:35-36; 2 Cor. 5:18-21), and serving each other (Lk. 22:24-26; Rom. 5:12; Js. 5:16).

Its Beginning

Christ promised that He would build His church implying that it was not yet in existence. There is no way that a church could properly practice the ordinances until after Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor. 11:26; Mt. 28:18-20).

The ministries of the Holy Spirit were also a necessity for any church function. For instance, its members need the Holy Spirit to serve each other through the use of their spiritual gifts which are given by Him (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:7-8). Therefore, the church began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first began to indwell believers.

**Baptist
Distinctives**

While "church" is never used to refer to a denomination, God's Word does not prohibit them. In fact, Scripture tell us of the importance of believers having oneness of heart in their purpose and essential doctrine. There should always be fellowship in the gospel, yet denominations are important so that people can come together and serve in unity. While some people speak of denominations as showing divisiveness, in reality they are about fostering unity within each local church (1 Cor. 1:10).

Bible Authority

Because of the inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture, the Word of God is our sole authority for faith and practice. No creed, tradition, or person(s) function as an interpreting authority to the local church. Everything needed for life and godliness can be found within the Bible (2 Pt. 1:3).

**Autonomy of the
Local Church**

Fellowship and cooperation with churches of like faith is edifying. Each individual church though is independent of outside control and is directly responsible to Jesus Christ alone (Mt. 18:15-18; Acts 13:1-4). Therefore, the church elects its own officers (Acts 6:1-7), disciplines its own members (1 Cor. 5:1-13), and conducts its own business (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 14:23-40; Rom. 14:1).

**Priesthood of the
Believers**

There is no longer any need for a sinful human mediator between us and God (Heb. 7:11-9:28). Rather, all Christians are priests because of Christ's completed sacrifice (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). All believers are capable of relating to God directly, have access to Him, have the Spirit indwelling them, guiding them, and have been gifted by Him.

Because of this, each individual should have a voice in church government. This gives a special sense of ownership and fellowship among the members, and all major decisions and election of leaders are to be held democratically (Acts 1: 6; 13:1-3).

Two Offices

Within the local church, two offices are prescribed in the New Testament for the proper functioning and care of church members.

The Scriptures speak of an office of teaching and ruling. This office is most commonly referred to as an elder in the Bible though the term shepherd, bishop, teacher, and preacher are all used to designate the same office and its

different functions (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). Today, we refer to him as a pastor (shepherd), and he is called to be a faithful undershepherd to Christ who teaches correct doctrine, models correct behavior, and is faithful in these two major areas.

The Scripture also speaks of an office for serving (deacon). At its basic function, a deacon is to help the pastor and the church fulfill its calling. It is an office of helps and not one of ruling.

**Individual Soul
Liberty**

Family members, the state, or a church has no right to coerce anyone to believe a certain way. Each person may choose what to believe in regards to God and are only accountable to Him (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

This is not an excuse though to live a lifestyle that does harm to other Christians (1 Cor. 8:9-13; Rom. 14:13). Rather, our liberty in Christ should always be guided and used to uplift others (1 Cor. 10:28-29).

**Saved Church
Membership**

The New Testament clearly shows that when believers assemble there are believers and unbelievers in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Because of this and the very idea of congregational governance, membership is vital for a healthy church (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Mt. 18:17).

The church's members are only to be professing Christians with a good testimony within and without. No one can be added to the local church without being saved and obediently following Christ in baptism (Acts 2:41; 47). This is why church discipline is prescribed in the New Testament. A church cannot maintain meaningful church membership and purity without church discipline.

Two Ordinances

Jesus Christ has given two ordinances to the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances do not convey grace and have no inherent power to change those observing it though both are meant to be significant and edifying occurrences in the Christian's life.

Baptism is Scriptural only when the one being baptized is already a believer and is immersed in water (Acts 2:41; 8:36-39). Baptism does not wash away sins but is an outward symbol of an inward reality. It symbolizes our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12) through Spirit baptism and is a testament to others of an intention to follow Christ (Acts 2:38).

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ (Mt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-30) and its purpose is to remember His sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:24) and point to His return (1 Cor. 11:26). The elements are unleavened bread and unfermented wine to signify Christ's body and blood (Mk. 14:22-25). The Lord's Supper is clearly for those who can partake worthily and therefore should be restricted to baptized members of churches of like faith (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

**Separation of
Church and State**

God instituted both the church and the state, and both are accountable to Him (Rom. 13:1; Mt. 16:18). The State is called to maintain order in society and justly punish offenders (Rom. 13:1-7) while the church's goals are strictly spiritual. Since each institution has separate functions, they should not formally interfere with the other. When they mix the result is an impure church and oppressive state.

IX. Of Things to Come

- Rapture** Before the tribulation commences, Christ will rapture His church (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 3:10). After the rapture, Christ will judge the works of believers (1 Cor. 3:12-15), the church will be presented to Christ, and the marriage supper of the lamb will take place (Rev. 19:7-9).
- Tribulation** The tribulation is the 70th week of Daniel and will subsequently last seven years (Dan. 9:27). It will begin with the anti-christ signing a peace pact with Israel (Dan. 9:24-27) and will not end until Christ's return. The purpose of the tribulation is an outpouring of God's wrath on unrighteous humanity worldwide (Rev. 3:10; Jer. 30:7) and to prepare Israel for its coming King (Mal 4:5-6).
- Christ's Return** Christ will return from heaven to destroy the forces of Satan and bind Him (Rev. 20:1-3), judge the earth, and usher in His millennial reign (Zech. 14:1-11; Rev. 19:11-21; 20:4). Those redeemed survivors of the tribulation will be ushered into the millennium as its populace to be ruled over by Christ and His body (Matt. 25:32-34; Rev. 20:4-6).
- Millennium** Christ and His body shall reign over all the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:6). At its end, Satan will be loosed and those who had been born but not redeemed during this time will gather with him to oppose Christ (Rev. 20:6-9). This revolt will be put down swiftly, and its participants will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10-15).
- Eternal Age** The eternal age will be prepared by God by His purging creation (2 Pt. 3:10-12); judging all sinners and banishing them to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:12); and making a new heaven and new earth (Is. 65:16; 2 Pt. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Thus, the believers' eternal resting place will be secure, and they will experience God's exceeding goodness, grace, and kindness for all time (Eph. 2:7).