

Core Doctrines of the Church

Inspiration of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible is inspired by God, which is to say that God inspired people to write what he would have them write; and though these writings took on the personalities of the writers in terms of form, their content was directly from God.

Inerrancy of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible, as originally written, is inerrant, which is to say without any falsehood or error in what it affirms when properly interpreted. This belief recognizes that in the Bible there is accurate reporting of human and satanic falsehoods, there are literary styles such as metaphor and hyperbole, and there are cultural idiosyncrasies such as rounded numbers and paraphrasing. It also recognizes that there are some apparent contradictions within the text and with other sources of truth, but assumes solutions exist. We believe the current English translations of the Bible are close enough to the original writings to be sufficient to God's purposes.

Authority of the Bible: Because of inspiration, we believe the Bible has authority in our lives. Because we believe in the authority of the Bible, we use it as the basis for all we believe and as a guide in all that we do.

Sufficiency of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible is sufficient for achieving God's purposes for it. The Bible itself provides clear purposes: leading people to the salvation offered by grace through faith in Christ, instruction in Christian living and spiritual growth, encouragement and hope, effectiveness in ministry, and inspiration to worship.

Reliance on the Bible: Because of the sufficiency of the Bible, we rely on it for developing the theology of the church. While we see value in understanding historical views and in using reason to help understand God's revelation, the diversity of the views developed over time suggests it is wise to check all teachings from tradition and reason against the Bible. Likewise, while we value personal experiences with God and personal inspirations from the Holy Spirit, the diversity of views which develop in groups of Spirit-led believers suggests it is wise to check all conclusions from personal experience and inspiration against the Bible. Because the Bible is God's inspired word, we know that we should interpret all things by this revelation, and that no thoughts which conflict with the Bible can be from God.

Canonicity of the Bible: We believe the books of the Bible have been correctly gathered and preserved into the "canon" – the collection of authentic sacred books – we call the Bible, which is to say that there are no books in the Bible incorrectly included and no books outside the Bible incorrectly excluded.

Interpreting the Bible: Our understanding of the Bible depends on proper interpretation. While the application of a biblical passage might be unique to each person reading it, there is only one true meaning, only one thing the authors – both human and God – meant to communicate to the contemporary audience. Our goal is to understand that original meaning and then discern how it is applicable today.

Progressive Revelation in the Bible: We see that as history unfolds, God reveals more and more about himself, the Messiah-savior [Christ], and the content of the gospel. Earlier revelation informs and provides a context for understanding later revelation, while later revelation can expand or clarify earlier revelation. What people were required to believe to be in a saving relationship with God changed over time as God revealed more. With the New Testament writings, we have the full gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dispensations in the Bible: In scripture, we see that some things never change, such as the character of God and his original purposes for people, while some things do change, such as how God interacts with people, how he works out his plan in history, and what specifically he requires of people. In each biblical time period, God's relationship with people was based on certain promises and requirements, especially those included in certain biblical covenants. We recognize that the church is enjoying benefits of the New Covenant with God, which replaced the Mosaic Covenant under which Israel lived. This New Covenant was promised to the Jews, but is enjoyed partially now by all who accept Jesus as the Messiah-savior [Christ]. The benefits will be fully realized when Jesus returns to rule on the throne of David.

Perfections of God: We believe God is perfect in every way, and is eternal, holy and pure, righteous, truthful, loving, unchanging, infinite and present everywhere, all knowing, all powerful, and sovereign.

Triunity of God: We believe there is only *one* true God. However, we also believe God has revealed himself in *three* distinct entities: God the Father, God the Son [Christ], and God the Holy Spirit. We believe the Father, Son, and Spirit are each in unity with the others and each of the same essence as the others, yet unique in personality and function. Each is all of God, yet God is all three. This belief is commonly called Trinitarianism. This is different from *Tritheism*, the belief in three Gods: we believe in only one God. This is different from *Modalism*, the belief that God is one entity who shows himself in three ways: we believe the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct individuals, though of the same essence and in the same Godhead. This is different from *Arianism*, the belief that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct entities but not part of the Godhead: we believe Jesus and the Holy Spirit are just as much God as is the Father.

Jesus: We believe Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth and was born as the human baby to the virgin Mary. We believe Jesus is fully divine and fully human, and thus was able to live a sinless human life. We believe Jesus has both a divine nature and a human nature, and that these are united within him but without mixture. Thus, on Earth Jesus had a human will and a divine will, but Jesus was only one person, and thus made only one moral decision for himself. We recognize Jesus as the greatest prophet, our high priest, our future judge, our savior, and our righteous king.

Image: People, both men and women, are created and procreated in God's image. Being God's image bearers, we are to reflect God's character, represent God in daily life, reproduce God's image through evangelism and raising up children to walk with God, and rule as God's stewards over our resources as we reach all people groups for Christ.

Multiplication: God desires his image – character and representation – to spread throughout the Earth, through properly raising children to be followers of Christ and through worldwide evangelism and discipleship.

Christ as Image: Christ is the ultimate image of God the Father, being both the Son of God and human. God the Father has anointed Christ to be his ultimate representative on Earth, and has placed all things under Christ's authority.

Christians as Image: We in the church follow Christ's leadership and cooperate in the Holy Spirit's work to transform us to be more like Christ, so that we can better represent God and reflect his character to the world.

Acts of Sin: All people in the world commit acts of sin [thoughts or actions that are against the will or character of God], though believers seek to grow less and less sinful.

Imputed Sin: All people in the world are held guilty by God for the first sin by Adam and Eve.

Inherited Sin: All people after Adam and Eve are born with a corrupted human nature.

Depravity: Sin [imputed, inherited, and our own actions] separates us from God, corrupts us in every way, and destines us for eternal separation from God as just punishment. None of us can overcome this problem in our own power; there is nothing we can do ourselves to reconcile with God. We need a savior.

What Jesus Did: Jesus was crucified on a cross, buried in a tomb, and then bodily raised from the dead, appearing to many before ascending into Heaven.

What Jesus Accomplished: In his death, Jesus paid our penalty for sin, so that everyone who believes in the promise of this deliverance can be saved from eternal death and have new spiritual life reconciled with God, all as a gift of grace.

Freedom: Through Jesus' sacrifice, God offers to free us from bondage to sin, death, evil, and the Mosaic Law.

Justification: Through Jesus' sacrifice, God declares us to be righteous even though we remain flawed and sinful, because God accounts to us the righteousness of Christ [imputed righteousness].

Forgiveness: Through Jesus' sacrifice, God forgives us of our sins so we no longer face punishment for them.

Adoption and Positional Sanctification: Through Jesus' sacrifice, God welcomes us into his family as adopted children and separates us out from the world for his purposes.

Regeneration: When we accept deliverance through Jesus' sacrifice, the Holy Spirit regenerates us to new spiritual life.

Our Need: All people are sinful and need the salvation Jesus offers. There is no other way to new eternal life or reconciliation with God.

Our Faith: We accept the salvation Jesus offers by believing in his gospel, which essentially means to believe in God's promise of deliverance through Jesus, by believing in who Jesus is [both the divine Son of God and the human Messiah-savior known as Christ] and in what he did on the cross.

Our Perseverance: Once we are truly saved, we can never lose that salvation, because salvation is a gift of grace dependent on Christ, not our merits.

Our Assurance: There are evidences God provides to assure us we have salvation, including growth in our desire to obey, growth in our ability to walk with God instead of the world, growth in our love for other believers, and growth in our ability to discern, believe in, and confess the true gospel.

Purpose of Progressive Sanctification: God intends to grow and transform every believer to become ever more like Christ, like the image of God people were created to be.

Our Attitude: God commands every believer to engage in learning about him and how to live like a member of a holy people.

New Birth: Every believer has been spiritually born again with a renewed nature that desires to seek after God and his ways. As the believer does seek after God and his ways, the believer will experience a process of progressive transformation to become like Christ.

Dependence and Submission: This process of progressive transformation requires dependence on God, submission to Christ's leadership in life, and an attitude of being yielded to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will then guide the believer into growth steps leading to living out the promises of freedom from sin's control, confession with cleansing and healing, and willful obedience.

Spiritual Disciplines: The Holy Spirit also will lead the believer into spiritual disciplines which God has revealed as a means for his work in us, including participation in worship [with baptism and communion], prayer of all sorts, biblical community, study of scripture, and serving in the ways guided by scripture and spiritual giftedness.

Cycle of Growth: The sanctification process is a cycle: we depend on and submit to Christ and yield to the Holy Spirit, and thus we are blessed with cleansing, healing, and growth, which in turn leads us to depend on and submit further to Christ and yield more fully to the Holy Spirit, and thus increase the blessings, and on and on. Growth and victory are expected to be partial and growing over time, as God gracefully works in us.

Universal Church: The universal church represents God on Earth as the body of Christ in this time period [dispensation]. It began with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after Jesus ascended to Heaven. The church does not replace Israel, God still has plans for national Israel when Christ returns to be king, but now Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Christ are one people for God, called Christians.

Local Church: The local church is an organized group of people who have professed faith in Christ and his gospel.

Purpose of the Church: The church should pursue the Great Commission of making disciples of Christ and the Great Commandment of loving God above all else and others as ourselves.

Goals of the Church: From those two scripture passages, we know the church should seek to empower people to develop strong relationships with God and each other, developing lives of passionate worship, sacrificial love, and spiritual development.

Baptism: Everyone who comes to faith in Christ should receive the ordinance of water baptism, even if they had been baptized before they came to faith; and the church should baptize only those who have faith.

Lord's Supper: Believers who have received water baptism and confessed their sins and forgiven others, and only those believers, should partake in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, in thankful remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Pastors/Elders: The pastors/elders are responsible for ensuring the spiritual and functional health of the church, while submitting to the teachings of scripture at all times.

Spiritual Leaders: Other spiritual leaders are responsible for helping the pastors/elders, under their authority.

Senior Pastor: The senior pastor/elder leads and cares for the team of pastors/elders, and has the ultimate responsibility to Christ for the doctrinal purity and spiritual health of the church.

Qualifications: Following the evidence of scripture and other early church documents, all pastor/elders will be men of outstanding character and spiritual maturity, and all other spiritual leaders will be men and women of outstanding character and spiritual maturity.

Evil: We believe Satan is a former angel who led a rebellion against God, and now is ruling on Earth, hindered in his evil only by the Holy Spirit. The angels who joined his rebellion are now called demons. Christ already has won victory over Satan in the crucifixion and resurrection, so his fate of eternal judgement is sealed.

Eternal Destination: Those who die in this time period having had a true faith in Christ as savior are immediately and consciously present with God in Heaven. Those who die without that faith are immediately and consciously in torment from being completely apart from God. Christ will resurrect all the dead for a final judgment. All people deserve condemnation to Hell, but those who have trusted in the person and work of Christ to save them will be saved to an eternal life on a renewed Earth.

End Times: At any moment, Christ could rapture believers to Heaven, starting the Great Tribulation, a seven year period of suffering and trial. After this, Christ will return to conquer the enemies of God and rule on David's throne from Israel for a thousand years. There will then be a final judgment and the start of Christ's eternal kingdom.