

FBC Life

A Guidebook to Knowing, Joining and Getting Involved



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WELCOME TO FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

What a joy it is to know Jesus Christ by the grace of God and to be a part of his church. What a privilege it is to identify with him who first identified with us and to belong to his people. We believe that when you belong to the church it is both a blessing and a privilege.

We are grateful to God for you – for your desire to participate in the body of Christ (the church), to worship our great God and grow in the grace and knowledge of God with us. We hope and pray that you have found our church to be a warm and welcoming place for all, and a place where God and his Word are valued and the gospel is faithfully proclaimed.

We hope that you will consider taking the next step and join our church family as we commit ourselves to the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to one another to the glory of God and the good of our own souls.

Our process of joining is meant to give people time to understand who we are and the values that are most important to us. We try to stress that we believe membership to be a significant decision for which we have high regard and high expectations, but also believe there to be high reward.

If you have any questions or concerns about our church or membership, or if there is any way that we can serve you, please don't hesitate to contact us.



HOW TO JOIN OUR CHURCH FAMILY

The basic process of joining our church is the same for everyone (as outlined below), but the time spent in the process and with pastoral counsel will vary according to each person's need. Each person's journey to this place in their life is unique, and so every path to membership may be slightly different. Our desire is ultimately to make sure that you clearly understand the gospel and have found this church to reflect your beliefs and values before you make the commitment to join.

Who can join?

The members of Jesus' church are first and foremost those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and desire to follow him (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, you must first belong to Jesus Christ by faith to belong to the church.

Secondly, to belong to this church you must have made a public profession of your faith through believer's baptism (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). This means that if you are a new believer or have never been baptized as a believer, then through the process of joining we will discuss believer's baptism with you.

Finally, we believe that it is important that you share the same faith and beliefs as we do about the most important matters. So, through this process we will spend time discussing what we believe and why.

If you are coming from another church of similar beliefs and are in good standing with them (you were a regular attendee and not under church discipline), then when you join we can request your "church letter" from your previous church.

Steps to Membership

- Attend a “Discovery Class.” In the Discovery Class you are given the opportunity to hear who we are as a church (our values, our priorities, our organization) as well as what we believe. This is a great chance to not only hear from us, but also to ask questions about the church. However, the Discovery Class is only offered a couple of times a year, and so sometimes because of the timing of when the next class is offered, this step may occur later in the process.

- Read through the FBC Life Manual. Take note of any questions this may raise for clarification or discussion with the pastor. And then fill out the Membership Application and return it to a pastor or the church office (if married, both of you should fill this out separately).

- Meet with a Pastor to talk about your testimony (how you came to saving faith in Christ), discuss and sign the church covenant, discuss any further issues or questions. This brief meeting gives you the opportunity to get to know your pastor and gives us the chance to get to know you and discuss your church and spiritual background.

- Formal presentation to the church on a Sunday morning. You will be presented before the church on a Sunday morning in order for our church family to welcome you and to be able to identify you as now a member of our church family.

Again, every person and situation is unique – some have been Christians for a long time and are moving from a church of similar belief and practice, and others are new believers who have never been a part of a church before, and so pastoral involvement in your process will be important. Please feel free to stay in close contact with a pastor throughout with any questions or concerns that you may have.

And if in the process you decide that this church is not a good fit for you, then we would love for you to share your thoughts with us. We will never pressure anyone, but we highly value church membership and hope you will too. We want you belong to our church family and will do everything we can to help you.



WHY JOIN A CHURCH ?

We live in a culture that is increasingly closed and individualistic – where most people avoid commitment and accountability. However, we believe that commitment and accountability are an essential part of the Christian life. When God calls us to faith, he calls us to a faith community. Never in the New Testament do we read of a person being saved and then not becoming a part of a local church. The Bible simply does not give us the option of believing in Jesus without belonging to His church. So, to belong to the church is to belong to Christ (Ephesians 5:31-32). The Bible also speaks of church membership as belonging to a “family” (Ephesians 2:19), or a “flock” (John 10:16), or being connected as a part of a “body” (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12,27).

Although the Bible doesn’t use the word “membership,” it does imply the importance of commitment to a local church in a way that indicates an understanding of membership. In Acts 5:13, Luke uses the word “join” to describe the relationship that some people had with the church in Jerusalem and others refused to have – it means to give yourself firmly to others. While dealing with sin in the church in Corinth, Paul makes a distinction between those “inside” the church and those “outside” the church (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). It seems clear that the only way the Corinthian church knew who was “inside” was by having a membership list. How would the church know whether or not the “whole church” came together apart from a list of names of people who had joined the church (1 Corinthians 14:23, 2 Corinthians 2:6)?

So, membership is a biblical idea and God’s intention, and it is a matter of obedience to the Word of God for every believer (Hebrews 10:25). Yet, it is so much more. There is also great blessing and benefit in belonging to a local church. In the Bible we are taught to see it as an honor and a joy to belong to the church. We believe that belonging to a local church is both important for the good of your own soul and for the good of the church (God’s people).

The following are some of the blessings that you can expect to receive when you join a church.

1. The Blessing of Committed Fellowship

There is a greater depth of fellowship and relationship that is found in mutual commitment to one another (for example, the deeper relationships of a committed marriage or friendship). And so when you join a church, you come to belong to the church family. And there ought to be a special relationship among the members of a church because they have made a commitment to one another – a commitment to care for, love one another, support and help one another spiritually. This commitment transcends social class, race, gender or politics. This means that we share life together (both good times and bad). We truly were made for such relationship.

2. The Blessing of Spiritual Growth and Fruit

The place of greatest spiritual growth and fruitfulness is in community with one another. God works through community because he has made us to belong to one another in Christ. The Bible tells us that every believer is only one small part of a larger body – the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:15-16). And so if you are to live and flourish (spiritually) you need your brothers and sisters in Christ. And it is through the church that you receive encouragement, teaching, admonishment, and training. So, it is in the context of the church that God grows and matures his people.

3. The Blessing of Using your Spiritual Gifts

In the Bible we are told that every believer is given spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). And these gifts are given for the purpose of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:7 – “each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”). This means that spiritual gifts are not to be private experiences, but are given to you for use in serving others (in serving the church). This means that God expects for every believer to be committed to and a part of a church where they are involved, where they can actively serve the church. And so it is our hope and expectation that church members don’t just come to sit and receive, but members are expected to find a place in our church where they can give and serve others. There is tremendous blessing in being faithful with what God has entrusted to you.

4. The Blessing of Spiritual Protection

The reality of the Christian life is that every one of us is prone to wander (spiritually) away from God. Hebrews 3:12-14 tells us that we must “exhort one another” so that we may not be deceived by sin in our own lives. We need accountability, or someone to watch over us (even pastors!). The Bible compares us to sheep, who without a shepherd will wander into trouble and danger and often need rescued. But God has provided a means of spiritual protection and accountability in the church, and pastors are to keep watch over your souls and will give an account to God for you (Hebrews 13:17). The church provides a community of spiritual protection for us.

5. The Blessing of Identifying with Christ

When we visibly belong to the church, we are publicly identifying with Jesus Christ and his people. And in this way we are demonstrating that we are not ashamed to be identified with Christ (see Mark 8:38). So joining a church is moving from a casual observer to identification with Jesus and his people.



PURPOSE AND PRIORITY

God has not only created the church, and loves and cares for the church, but he has given the church a mission and a purpose to fulfill. The church is primarily called to faithfulness.

We believe that the following summarizes God's purposes for the church (as given to us in the Bible). Therefore we see these as our main priority and focus. Everything that we do is connected to one or more of these priorities, and it is our hope and goal to balance each of these in the ministries and life of the church. It is also our desire to encourage, help and equip every member to pursue these purposes and priorities in their own lives.

1. God-Centered Worship

Our church is focused first and foremost on God – he is our primary audience. Worship (to glorify God) is the ultimate reason that we exist. When we gather as a church, we gather to worship the living God.

Singing is an important part of worship as it leads our hearts and emotions to embrace the truth of God. But, worship is more than just singing. It is responding in every way to who God is for us through Jesus Christ. Therefore, our worship together includes praying, preaching, fellowship, and responding to the Word of God. Each of these is meant to bring our hearts and minds to God and communion with him in true worship.

Because our worship is centered on God and not on the individual, our services are not intended to cater to the preferences of any one group of people. We would encourage members to bear with one another in matters of preference and remember that it's not ultimately about "YOU" the individual, but "US" the body of Christ.

2. Word-Centered Teaching (Nurture and Growth)

In the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus calls the church to focus on discipleship (that is teaching others to follow Christ). And according to Jesus, the church

accomplishes this by “teaching them to observe all that [Jesus] has commanded.” Therefore, it is the goal of the church to train and instruct believers in the Lord with the purpose that they might grow in love and obedience to Him.

And the church’s only source for teaching is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And therefore, so much of what we do at church is centered upon the Word of God (preaching, Sunday School, children’s program, Bible studies, etc.). It is our desire that through the teaching of God’s Word that we may “present every person mature in Christ” (see Colossians 1:28).

This means that what is most important to us is not what others have done, or church tradition, but what God says in His Word.

3. Gospel-Centered Evangelism (Outreach)

The church is not only to be focused on growing up, but also reaching out. And an important part of the commission given to the church is to “go to all the nations” with this gospel message (Matthew 28:18-20). So the church is to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all people everywhere both by speaking the message of the gospel to others and by exemplifying the gospel in our love and service to others. In this way, the church becomes God’s presence in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). And so it is our goal to be always reaching out and loving those who do not believe the gospel, both in our community and throughout the world.

4. Love-Centered Community (Fellowship)

Finally, the church is the place where believers gather for community. The church exists to help, encourage and admonish one another – and all in the spirit of love. In fact, this priority of love is to be the hallmark of the Christian church (John 13:35). And God has given us the church because we were not created to live the Christian life alone, but together with others in loving community. Throughout the New Testament the church is called to a “one another” relationship (love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, admonish one another, teach one another, etc.). And so it is our desire that in our church you find a place of genuine love and fellowship with other believers in Christ.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER ***(RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS)***

There are many blessings to belonging to the church. Yet, we also believe there are many responsibilities. And these are not in conflict with one another. In fact, we believe that the blessings of fellowship with Christ through the church of Christ actually come through obedience to Christ.

Each member of this church is only a single part of a larger church family. As we already pointed out, the Bible speaks of church membership as belonging to a “family” or being connected as a part of a “body.” This indicates that there are roles and responsibilities for every part or member. And it is only when the church’s members fulfill their God-given purposes that the church can truly function as the “body of Christ,” and in this way glorify God. You do not join a church to see what you can get out of it. You join a church to sacrifice for the mission of God.

The following statements summarize what we believe the Bible teaches regarding the commitments we make when we join the church.

COMMITMENTS OF MEMBERSHIP

“I will worship.”

The most important thing that we do when we gather as the church is we worship the one true and living God – our Creator and Redeemer. We worship through preaching and teaching (Acts 2:42) and we worship through the singing of songs (Colossians 3:16). Therefore, God commands believers not to forsake the time when the church assembles for worship (see Hebrews 10:24-25). So, following the Lord’s command, we expect people to attend worship services regularly, and we expect them to participate in worship with both heart and mind (John 4:24).

“I will grow and mature.”

God intends for the Christian life to be a journey of spiritual growth towards maturity (Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 6:1). Therefore, we expect people to be actively engaged in pursuing Christ and growing in the grace of God through the means that God has provided (the Bible, prayer, the church, and mutual relationships of encouragement).

“I will serve.”

God created us to serve. He gifted us to serve. And He commands us to serve. Every member should function in the body, and this functioning happens through service. Not everyone is expected to serve in the same way, for we each have different gifts. But God has given spiritual gifts to every believer to be used in serving one another in the church.

“I will give.”

The Bible indicates the importance of giving financially to the church to support its ministries and its work in the gospel (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). In this way you will invest in the church that is spiritually investing in you. Generous and sacrificial giving to the Lord and his church is also a means of guarding against the idolatry of our age – greed and materialism. It reminds us that all that we have belongs to God and is not meant solely for our enjoyment, but to be used for God’s purposes. So, we expect members to give their tithe, their time, and their resources for the mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

“I will seek unity.”

Divisiveness and disunity destroys (Galatians 5:15), but the church is called instead to love one another and be devoted to one another above all else (Romans 12:10). Therefore, the Bible admonishes the church and its members to “maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3-6). This kind of love and unity is opposed to gossip and slander and bitterness of all kinds (2 Corinthians 12:20). We expect members to be committed to the unity of our church above disputes and differences – for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

“I will pray.”

As members of the church, the Bible commands each of us to “pray for one another” (James 5:16). The ministry and the gospel fruitfulness of the church is dependent upon the work of God through the prayers of his people. We expect members to be committed to prayer both individually and corporately (when the church gathers). The church is dependent upon God through prayer.

“I will sacrifice.”

Membership means sacrificing one’s personal preferences for the greater goal of the work of the gospel. It is also a sacrifice of one’s own needs and desires in order to meet the needs of others (see Philippians 2:3-4). Membership reminds us that it is not ultimately about us. Sometimes for the sake of others or for the sake of God’s greater purpose, we have to set aside our personal preferences about musical styles or church decorations or any number of other secondary matters. We expect members to be willing to make such sacrifices.

“I will follow.”

God has given the church spiritual leaders in its pastors (sometimes called “elders”). Pastors are given the charge to lead the church as they are led by Christ and His Word (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the Bible calls members of the church to joyfully “obey your leaders and submit to them” in the church (Hebrews 13:17). We expect members to encourage and support the leadership of the church and to follow their leadership as they faithfully follow Christ and His Word.

EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

Just as there are expectations for being a meaningful part of a family, so there are also expectations for being a meaningful part of the church. These are the most basic ways that you can maintain biblical faithfulness in your commitment to the church.

Attendance at worship

This is the first and most important ministry of every member of the local church. Being present, being known, and being active are the only ways to fulfill the commitments of membership. The New Testament teaches that believers in the church share a deep and committed fellowship that is impossible without regular spiritual involvement with one another (see page 16 for the biblical commands given to the church).

The most important fellowship of the church is the Sunday morning gathering when believers and members of this church gather together as “one body, in one spirit” to worship the Living God and proclaim the gospel to one another (Ephesians 4:1-6). This is foundational for every believer’s spiritual life and growth. This is the significant moment in which we together are gathered as the body of Christ, and expect to see the work of God and hear the voice of God through the regular preaching of the Word of God and celebration of the Lord Supper and Baptism.

Church attendance is not just a good suggestion, it is God’s will for believers. Hebrews 10:25 says we should “not forsake meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We believe that every member should make the local church a priority in their lives, and as often as they are able commit to meeting together in worship regularly.

Serving the Church

First Peter 4:10 says “each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” Membership in the church must not be passive. It is not simply adding your name to a list or roll. But, every part of “the body” must contribute to the whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

We believe church members should always be asking “what can I do to serve God and others with what God’s so generously given to me?” Romans 12:4-6 tells us that as members of the church, we belong to one another.

Meaningful participation in the church means being actively involved in ministry and service. For some that is through outward and visible opportunities (teaching, leadership, evangelism, etc.), but for others that means serving “behind the scenes” (praying, notes of encouragement, giving, visitation, etc.). What’s important is that you find your place of giving and serving in the life of the church.

Going Deeper

It is our expectation that members are not content to remain anonymous in our church. It is important that believers pursue deeper, spiritual relationships with one another for mutual edification and to bless one another. There are any number of ways that members can participate in the life of the church in a deeper way: Sunday School, Gospel Life Groups, Ladies’ and Men’s Ministries, etc.

The following biblical commands (next page) given to every believer demand that we move beyond Sunday morning worship together.

The “One Another” Passages of Scripture*

<p style="text-align: center;">Love and be kind to one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">John 13:34-35; Rom 12:10, 13:8; Gal 5:14; Eph 4:32; 5:1-2; Heb 10:24; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:22, 4:7; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7-21</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Forgive and reconcile with one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Matt 5:9-15; Mark 11:20-25; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Matt 5:21-28</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Encourage, build up and bless one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 14:19, 15:2; Eph 4:16, 29; Heb 3:13; 10:25; 1 Thess 4:18; 5:11</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Give thanks and glorify the Lord with one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 15:6; Eph 5:19-20</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Honor, respect, be humble and patient, submit to one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 12:10; Eph 5:21; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Pet 5:5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pursue peace and maintain unity with one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 12:25; 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:3; Col 3:14</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Rejoice, confess, pray and give thanks always</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 12:12,15; 1 Cor 12:26; 1 Thess 5:16-18; James 5:16</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Hold fast and draw near to Christ with one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 12:9; 1 Thess 5:21; Heb 4:14-16; 10:22-23</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Comfort, weep and suffer with one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 12:15; 1 Cor 12:26; 2 Cor 1:3-5</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Teach, admonish, rebuke and exhort one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Col 1:28, 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:13</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Restore one another who is in sin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:1; James 5:19-20; Jude 23</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Help and bear the burdens of one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rom 14:19; Col 3:13; Gal 6:2; Eph 4:2</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Do not repay evil for evil but do good to one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Col 3:9; 1 Thess 5:15, 22</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Do not lie and grumble or speak evil against one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Eph 4:15; James 4:22, 5:9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Serve, contribute to the needs and show hospitality to one another</p> <p style="text-align: center;">John 13:14; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:9-10; Rom 12:13</p>

* Taken from *God Redeeming His Bride*, by Robert Cheong



CHURCH COVENANT

Our expectations of church membership and our commitment to the “One Another” passages of Scripture (p. 16) are expressed in our church covenant. If you choose to join this church we will ask for you to sign a copy of the covenant, not as a contract, but as a solemn reminder of the promises that you make when you become a part of this church.

WHAT IS A CHURCH COVENANT?

A church covenant is a summary statement for life.

While our Statement of Faith is a good summary of what we believe, our church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live. More importantly, it is a summary of how God intends for us to live. It does not include every explicit command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ and to belong to his people.

A church covenant is a promise and a commitment.

It is a promise that you desire to live for Christ and be obedient to His Word. It is, therefore, a commitment to follow Christ. It is a promise made to God. It is a promise made to the local church. And it is a promise made to one’s self. And our covenant promise reflects our desire to be held accountable to a standard of life that is consistent with a life that is “worthy of Christ and the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

You will find the CHURCH COVENANT located in the APPENDIX of this manual.



CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Discipline in our culture has become a decidedly negative term. However, good discipline is a very good thing. It is corrective and restorative. And it is a means of accountability and growth. Discipline is not just for children, but for all of us – as a measure of protection against the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). It is the means that God uses to bring his people back to faithfulness and obedience to him.

Therefore, Hebrews 12 reminds us that the discipline of the Lord is not to be regarded lightly or despised, but it is to be valued as the evidence of the love of God and that we truly belong to him (see Hebrews 12:3-17).

God has commanded the church to be actively involved in the process of discipline – and so we believe this is a matter of biblical faithfulness for the church. So, overlooking habitual and unrepentant sin in the lives of its members is not a biblical option for the church.

The Bible clearly instructs the church to “judge” those who are “inside” the church (1 Corinthians 5), and the steps of church discipline are given to us by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20.

BENEFITS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE (WHY IT’S A GOOD THING)

Shepherds who really shepherd

Pastors are called to the task of shepherding the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2). And the most important tasks of a shepherd would be protection and rescue – to protect his flock from danger and to rescue those who have wandered away from his protection. In the same way, this church desires to protect and rescue its members – to protect believers from the danger of living in sin (Hebrews 10:26-31) and to rescue those who are walking in disobedience to God.

This means that we that we take sin seriously. We believe that sin is dangerous and destructive not only to ourselves, but to those around us. Therefore, we want to help one another avoid the danger of sin in our lives.

A Church that is involved in your life

If you join this church, we will regularly pray for you and seek to have spiritual conversations about what is going on in your life. Church discipline is just not possible if we do not know and love you and you, in turn, do not trust us. Therefore, we have all the more reason to view our members not as members of a Country Club, but as beloved members of our family that we care about.

Therefore, we would say that it is not only in obedience to the Word of God, but also a love for people and hatred for sin that motivates our desire to rescue those who have fallen into sin.

WHAT IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE ABOUT?

Church discipline is better defined as a rescue mission. It is the effort of the church to rescue those who have fallen into a pattern of habitual and unrepentant sin – and we believe that both of those factors are important (habitual and unrepentant).

We understand that no one is without sin, and even as believers we continue to sin and struggle with sin (see 1 John 1:8-10). However, as believers when we sin God calls us to repent (turn back to God) and to receive God’s forgiveness through the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9).

No corrective discipline (or rescue mission) is therefore necessary for the believer who has genuinely repented of his or her sin and is no longer “walking” in sin. However, we believe that such action is warranted when someone professes to be a disciple (or follower) of Jesus Christ, but the habit of their life is that they are no longer following Christ – when sin remains unrepented of and has become the habit of one’s life. Therefore, if you choose to willingly continue in sin without regard to God, then we will love you enough to call you back.

We believe that our rescue mission becomes especially urgent in matters of moral purity, sin that compromises one's public testimony as a follower of Christ, actions that undermine the unity of the church, and leading others to embrace false teaching that undermines the message of the gospel.

HOW IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE HANDLED?

It is our desire (and the admonition of Scripture) to handle matters of sin with gentleness, kindness and patience (Galatians 6:1). It is to be instructive and encouraging. And the goal of church discipline is always that of repentance and restoration – to Christ and to the church.

The pattern that we follow is the instruction that Jesus set forth for the church in Matthew 18:15-20 summarized in the following steps.

1. We will commit to praying for you throughout this process and seek to meet with you confidentially in private to hear from you about the issue in your life, and if it is a matter of sin, then to encourage you to forsake your sin and return to Christ.
2. (If you will not repent), we will seek to meet with you with a few trusted, godly brothers or sisters in Christ who can join in the conversation with you about the issue in your life. And they will join in praying for and encouraging you to repent.
3. (If you will not repent), the matter will be brought before the church in a member's meeting, and the church will consider the final action of removing your membership.

The final step in church discipline (of removal) is how the church is finally to respond to the continued, stubborn, willful continuance in habitual and unrepentant sin despite every warning of the church. And in essence it communicates that those who choose to act and live as an unbeliever will be given over to the life that they have themselves chosen.

Yet, even this last step is not meant to be punitive in nature, but corrective – the goal of removing someone from membership is still to awaken the sinner to the seriousness of his sin and his need for the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:5). A person is removed with the hope that one day they would return and be fully restored in joyful fellowship with the church.

Notice that the instruction of Matthew 18 (above) is given in the context of the shepherd searching for his lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14) and the urgency of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). Because Church Discipline is the practical application of these biblical principles.

Membership in the church then is a commitment to both the tender love of encouragement, and the tough love of confrontation. It is our desire that with grace and gentleness we all learn to give it humbly when others need it and to receive it without defensiveness with we ourselves need it.

YOUR COMMITMENTS*

** (taken from **What Is a Healthy Church Member?** by Thabiti Anyabwile)*

1. Receive the Word of God with Meekness

Receiving the Word with meekness means accepting the Bible by faith, with a friendly and submissive heart, and with the testimony of God's Spirit. Specifically, we accept the fact that the Bible is true, that it's the only sufficient authority for shaping our lives, and that it must govern how we feel and think. By doing so, a healthy church member is prepared to be trained and corrected by the Word.

2. Learn to Recognize Chastisement as Evidence of God's Love

If you are troubled by the perception that church discipline is unkind and unloving, consider the fact that the Bible tells us that God himself is a loving Father who disciplines his children (Hebrews 12:5-6). Discipline is an act of love, not of vengeance or hatred.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one’s community back from the path of sin.”

3. Humbly Accept Correction from Others

The Lord’s correction often comes through other members in the church, saints who care enough not only to encourage in good times but to confront and correct when necessary. “Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7), but it is the nature of true godliness, maturity, and health in church members to accept the loving instruction and rebuke of others.

4. Take Seriously the Responsibility to Discipline Others

It is a basic responsibility and privilege of every church member to help sustain the discipline of the local church. This is why the classic passages, such as Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, dealing with unrepentant sin conclude with a final and decisive action by the congregation. But not only does correction belong to the congregation as a whole; it begins as each individual is proactive in love and seeks to restore those who are caught in sin.

5. Don’t Forget to Rejoice

The entire process of discipline, from the formative work of the Word to the corrective work of the church in sometimes removing an unrepentant member, should be undertaken with hope and the goal of repentance that leads to rejoicing and comfort (2 Corinthians 2:6). We are endeavoring to win our brothers and sisters to the truth (James 5:19-20), and when that happens we are to rejoice along with the courts of heaven.



CHURCH STRUCTURE

(HOW WE FUNCTION)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme head (or leader) of the church (Colossians 1:18). But, under the lordship of Christ, the Bible has given us specific instructions for how to structure and order the church to effectively function and fulfill its divine purpose (1 Corinthians 14:40). Therefore, the local church is to be organized after the pattern given in Scripture. The following points summarize the biblical principles for the overall organization and function of the church.

THE CHURCH IS CONGREGATIONAL

The biblical model of church leadership presents the local congregation as the final authority in matters of the church (for example the important decisions of Acts 15 and matters of church discipline in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5). And because the Lord has gifted every believer with equal access directly to God to seek and know his will, the direction and decisions of the church lie ultimately in the hands of the congregation. Therefore, as a member, you will have the opportunity to be involved in Member's Meetings where the most important decisions of the church are discussed and voted on. Members are an important part of the health, function and future of the church. This means that it is important for all of our members (as they are able) to participate in our regular members' meetings.

THE CHURCH IS LED BY PASTORS (ELDERS)

The central leadership figure in the New Testament church is the elder (also referred to as overseer or bishop). This term is also used interchangeably in the New Testament with the title, pastor. Pastors (Elders) are granted the God-given ministry of leadership and vision for the church. God has instituted that the church be led by men of godliness, above reproach, who are able to teach and lead the church in faithfulness to the Scriptures and are qualified according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Therefore, within this structure, the church follows the leadership and vision of the elders because the elders are men of respect and godliness who under the trust of the whole congregation earnestly seek the will of God.

Pastors (Elders), then, are called to faithfully lead the church through:

- Faithfully preaching biblical truth (2 Timothy 4:1-2)
- Living as an example of godliness to the church (1 Peter 5:3)
- Being diligent in prayer and ministry of the Word (Acts 2:42)
- Working to care for the spiritual needs of the church (1 Peter 5:2)
- Protecting the church from error and false teaching (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9)

When Pastors (Elders) fulfill their ministry under the authority of God, then the church is called to respect and obey their leadership (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17).

THE CHURCH IS SERVED BY DEACONS

The office of deacon is to be one of selfless service to the church. In order to allow the pastors to focus on spiritual needs, the deacons are called upon to give themselves to the physical needs of the church. This seems to include the handling of finances, upkeep and maintenance of the church building, attendance to those who are sick, and other matters of organization and service. Deacons are to be qualified according to the admonition of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It is helpful to note that the qualifications refer primarily to character—the deacon is not required to be able to lead or teach (the two distinct functions of the pastor or elder), but a deacon is called to lead in serving the practical needs of the church.

THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH DO THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Each person who has been born again has received a spiritual gift so that they may personally be a part of God's work in this community and in the world. God does not save us so that we may sit in a pew, but so that we might serve our Lord. One of the purposes of a pastor is to equip the membership to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Therefore, the work of ministry (evangelism, discipleship, prayer, encouragement, etc.) is not just for pastors, but for every believer. So, we look to our members to carry out the work of ministry.

CHURCH POLICY ON SERVING IN MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

In order to serve in any capacity in the church you must first be a member. We believe that before you commit to a ministry you need to first be committed to the church of that ministry. In this way, the church both affirms the importance of its ministries and the importance of membership.

As we have already stated, it is our expectation that members be involved in the ministries of the church (and there are many from which to choose). However, we want to take some very important time to get to know you and for you to become more familiar with the needs and opportunities in our church for you. Therefore, we have a brief **3 month waiting period** after you join before you can jump right in to serve. This does not mean that you are not allowed to participate in the ministries that would be for you (for example: attending bible study, singing in the choir, etc.). But, this would exclude any position where you might be asked to serve others or be entrusted with responsibility (for example: helping with AWANA children's program, helping with youth, etc.).

Special Requirements for Teachers

Because of the importance of the teaching ministry of the church and our desire to protect the church from teaching that is contrary to the essential truths of Scripture, you must be a **member for at least 1 year** before being considered for a teaching position. Children and youth teachers must be affirmed by the Family Pastor or Senior Pastor. Those who are requesting to teach an adult class (either Sunday School or Bible Study) must first be affirmed by the Discipleship Pastor or Senior Pastor. This provides the pastoral leadership the capability to oversee the church's teaching ministries.

Special Requirements for working with Children

Children are entrusted to the church to be loved and taught. Therefore, it is necessary for us to hold that trust with the highest regard. We do all that we can to protect our children from the opportunity for abuse. We have implemented several safety and security measures for their protection. Therefore, before anyone is allowed to work with small children (nursery) or go on children's ministry or youth trips they will have to be a **member for at least 6 months** and undergo a **background check**.



STATEMENT OF FAITH

(WHAT WE BELIEVE)

We believe that the Bible is ultimately our source for all faith and practice. Yet, we also believe that it is important for us to set forth a summary of our biblical convictions as a witness to our most basic and most important beliefs, and as a pledge of our faithfulness to those beliefs.

Our Statement of Faith is important to us and helps to define who we are as a church. We would encourage you to read this document carefully and take note of areas that you do not understand or possibly disagree with, and discuss these with a pastor.

Our church has adopted and affirmed the **Baptist Faith and Message** (2000 revision) as representing the principal beliefs of our church. This statement represents a general consensus of what most Southern Baptists believe as adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention. We would identify this statement (and our church) as historically orthodox and conservative and evangelical in its belief.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

1. **The Bible** is the inerrant and authoritative Word of God and therefore our ultimate standard for what we believe and how we live.
2. **God** exists coequally and coeternally in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
3. **Man** was created in the image of God, but because of Adam's fall into sin, the entire human race is fallen and in need of redemption.
4. God offers **salvation** by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
5. God is the one who initiates and completes the **work of salvation**.
6. **The church** is to be comprised of baptized believers.
7. The Lord has provided the church with two **ordinances**: baptism and the Lord's Supper.
8. **Evangelism and missions** are at the heart of God's mission for the church.

BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE 2000

I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

II. God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. 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 all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. 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 men.

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

III. Man

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

IV. Salvation

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

V. God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior,

the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

VIII. The Lord's Day

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

IX. The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

X. Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

XI. Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

XII. Education

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

XIII. Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

XIV. Cooperation

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

XV. The Christian and the Social Order

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

XVI. Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

XVII. Religious Liberty

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

XVIII. The Family

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.



WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ...?

(DOCTRINE AND DIVISION)

There is an almost endless number of ways you could finish that sentence. But, what is important to us is the ability to distinguish the relative significance of what is being asked.

We believe that church unity around what we believe must first set forth what is essential and most important, what is secondarily important, and what is least important. So, let's define three categories of doctrine or belief for our church.

First Order (Essentials)

First-order doctrines are those that are fundamental and essential to the Christian faith. These are matters that are non-negotiable for belief in the Christian faith and would define the church in opposition to any number of other religions and cults. These are the beliefs which are most important to us and bind us together as Christians.

This would include:

- The doctrine of the Trinity (one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
- God's character (His holiness, love, perfection, goodness)
- The full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ
- The doctrine of atonement (Jesus' death on the cross)
- Justification by faith alone (saved by faith, not by works)
- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
- The authority of the Bible as God's Word

Second Order (Important)

Second-order doctrines are those which are essential to church life and necessary for the ordering of the local church, but which, in themselves, do not define the Gospel. That is, one may disagree at this level and still acknowledge that the person in disagreement remains a believing Christian. Nevertheless, such doctrines are directly related to how the church is organized and its ministry is fulfilled. Therefore, the doctrines in this category define our church not just as a Christian church but a Baptist church. And so, likewise, these are beliefs that are important to us and non-negotiable to what our church believes and practices.

This would include:

- The mode and nature of baptism (believer's baptism by immersion)
- The meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper (spiritual presence of Jesus)
- The boundaries and practice of spiritual gifts
- Church organization and government
- Women in ministry (women are excluded from the offices of pastor, elder, or from teaching adult men in the church)

This is what marks the boundaries between many different denominations. Your settled conviction contrary to this church would best be handled by your pursuit of a more like-minded Christian church. We would encourage you to undertake this with great prayer and wisdom.

Third Order (Freedom)

Third-order doctrines are those which may be the ground for fruitful theological discussion and debate, but which do not threaten the fellowship of the local congregation or the denomination. These are matters that we can discuss, but disagree about and still remain united in worship and obedience in one local church.

This would include:

- The timing and sequence of events related to Christ's return
- Personal convictions regarding dress, matters of conscience and alcohol
- Preference about a particular Bible translation
- Preference regarding the style of worship music
- The interpretation and application of difficult passages of Scripture

THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE DISTINCTIONS

The Danger of Liberalism

The error of Liberalism is the belief that all religious beliefs are negotiable in the church – so, nothing is essential. Churches steeped in Liberal theology, then, have often abandoned the essential doctrines of the Christian faith (Deity of Jesus, the resurrection, authority of the Word of God, etc.). This happens when a church does not distinguish between core, fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith that are essential and necessary to what we believe, and those which are non-essential. In contradiction to Liberalism, we believe that many of our core beliefs are essential for membership and for Christian faith.

The Danger of Fundamentalism

The error of Fundamentalism is the opposite error. It is the belief that EVERYTHING is of supreme importance. And so churches of a Fundamentalist tradition often split over translations of the Bible, the timing of Jesus' return, or matters of Christian freedom or conscience. Things that should be regarded as matters of preference or unimportant are turned into a cause of division in the church. In contradiction to Fundamentalism, we believe that we can have disagreements about non-essential beliefs and still love one another and worship together in the unity of the Spirit.

A Needed Biblical Balance

Between these two dangers is a healthy church and what we strive for. Core doctrines of the Christian Faith (First Order) are tenaciously defended and held onto at all cost amid the many challenges of modern culture. Second Order beliefs are taught and held in the church as vital and important to our church. Yet, we are willing to cross denominational lines and work with other Evangelical Christian churches who would share the same core beliefs in matters of global and local ministry and missions. And we recognize that many things (Third Order) do not warrant destroying the unity and fellowship of the church. There is an encouragement for believers to have healthy conversations about these things, yet continue to affirm one another in the Body of Christ.

This preserves the church's primary focus and unity around a core set of beliefs about God and the gospel.



WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? (HOW ARE WE SAVED?)

Here's a helpful summary of God's work from creation to new creation as He redeems sinners and restores them to what He created them to be as reflections of His glory and grace.

God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge. He created man to glorify and enjoy Him forever (Genesis 2:7, 16-17; 18:25; Matthew 25:31-33). Man was created in God's image to serve, worship, and reflect Him and His character.

But, **Man** rebelled against God by sinning against His holy character and law (Genesis 3:1-7). We've all participated in this sinful rebellion, both in Adam as our representative head and in our own actions (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23; 5:12, 19; Ephesians 2:1-3). As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we are not forgiven (Ephesians 2:12; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Matthew 13:50). But God sent Jesus Christ to rescue lost and helpless sinners, while they were yet His enemies.

Christ, being fully God and fully man, was sent by God to die the death that we deserved for our sins—the righteous for the unrighteous—so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us (John 1:14; Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:4-6). Christ bore the wrath that man deserved, and was raised to new life in order that those who put their faith in Him would be saved.

Response: The only saving response to this Good News (“the gospel”) is repentance and belief (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:7-9; John 20:31). We must repent of our sins (turn from them and to God) and believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God. Through repentance from our sin and faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, we are welcomed into the family of God as those declared righteous in the sight of God. As we grow in grace and truth, God transforms us into the image of Christ and we begin to bear the fruit of righteousness, and await future glorification.

* This gospel summary was adapted from *The Deliberate Church* by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander.



STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

There is much cultural confusion regarding the issues of marriage, gender and sexuality. Therefore, we believe that it is important to express what we believe to be the Bible's clear teaching on these issues in contradiction to the definitions and standards of mainstream culture.

We believe that God created all things to display His immeasurable glory (Colossians 1:16). The pinnacle of God's creation was a man and woman (male and female) created in His image (Genesis 1-2). From the very beginning, God established the institution of marriage between a man and woman as an unchanging and permanent part of the display of God's glory in the world (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33).

Therefore, we believe that God is the only one who can define, explain, and set boundaries on marriage and sexuality. We, then, must follow God's purposes and design rather than any culture, organization or government.

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female, and this gift of gender is part of the goodness of God's creation. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Genesis 1:26-27). So, we believe that rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person and contrary to God's creation and design.

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as defined in Scripture (Genesis 2:18-25).

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Corinthians 6:18; 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4) and any sexual activity outside of the protections of a biblical marriage is sinful and offensive to God (Matthew 15:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Yet, we believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). As a church, we believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). We believe that compassion and kindness come most importantly not by condoning sin or by ignoring God's commands in Scripture, but by calling sinners to repent of their sin and to believe in Jesus. Therefore, it is our desire to help those who struggle with sexual sin, seeking to love people in Jesus' name, and pointing all people to Jesus' power to forgive and to heal.



WHO ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS ?¹

Our church identifies itself as a Southern Baptist church. If you come from a Southern Baptist background, that designation probably immediately makes sense to you. However, if you are new to Southern Baptists you might need to better understand what it means for a church to be identified as Southern Baptist.

In its most basic meaning, Southern Baptist churches are churches that voluntarily choose to participate in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

The SBC, first formed in 1845, is made up of almost 45,000 local churches. However, not one of those churches could adequately reflect or represent the whole of Southern Baptists. Southern Baptists are as varied and diverse as the cities, towns, communities, and countrysides where you might find them. Each autonomous Southern Baptist church is unique, and only if you viewed them all together could you grasp the diversity that is the Southern Baptist Convention.

Southern Baptist churches represent a broad range of sizes, cultures, ministry settings, ethnic groups, worship styles, and theological perspectives. However, there are a few doctrinal distinctives and a Great Commission mission that holds us together.

Southern Baptist Doctrinal Distinctives

First and foremost, Southern Baptists hold high the gospel of Jesus Christ as the unifying core upon and around which everything else is built and from which all ministry flows. We use the phrase “regenerate church membership” to emphasize that the starting point for everything related to a Southern Baptist church is a person’s faith in Jesus Christ and

¹ Much of this information is taken from the document, “Meet Southern Baptists” provided by the Southern Baptist Convention.

the efficacy of his atonement. So, church members are only those who are recognized as “born again believers” (or regenerate).

Second, Southern Baptist churches are “baptistic” in theology. This means that they hold to believer’s baptism by immersion. Therefore, we believe that baptism is understood as a believer’s act of obedience to symbolize the believer’s faith in and identification with a crucified, buried and risen Savior.

Finally, Southern Baptists have agreed to unite around the cause of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ through cooperative evangelism and missions, both locally and globally.

Southern Baptist Churches

While Southern Baptist Churches voluntarily choose to participate in the SBC, each local Southern Baptist church retains its sovereignty and is fully autonomous. Local churches select their own staff, ordain their own ministers, hold legal title to their own properties, choose literature, and establish their own membership requirements. The Convention has no authority over churches. Its single goal is to provide a means of cooperation and to be a resource for the church.

State Conventions and Local Associations

In addition to the national convention (SBC), there are also state and local Southern Baptist organizations which provide multiple services for, with, and among the cooperating churches in their respective states or regions. Some of these services include ministries to at-risk children through residential and foster care, ministries to disabled adults, pregnancy care services, funding for Baptist colleges and academies within respective states, and age-graded resources to assist churches in their Bible study and discipleship ministries. However, the dominant focus of the state conventions is to assist their cooperating church in evangelism, church planting, volunteer partnership missions, leadership training and development, disaster relief mobilization, and spiritual growth and prayer support.

However, a church can choose to participate in the SBC without being involved in either the state or local associations (again, this is voluntary).

The Cooperative Program (CP)

At the heart of Southern Baptists cooperation for mission and ministry is the Cooperative Program – the unified program for funding convention work. When Southern Baptist churches support the Cooperative Program in their own states, their state conventions use those funds to accomplish the ministry and mission goals established by the churches in that state. Each state convention then sends the percentage that has been agreed upon by the messengers in each state on to the national level. This helps fund the efforts of more than 5,000 missionaries in North America and over 5,000 international missionaries. It also goes directly to help fund the training of more than 16,000 seminary students to become ministers, missionaries, and other church workers for the cause of the Gospel. In addition, it supports efforts to protect moral values in our society through the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Finally, it helps fund the facilitating ministries of the Executive Committee. To take the Gospel around the world requires an organization and a structure to help facilitate that goal.

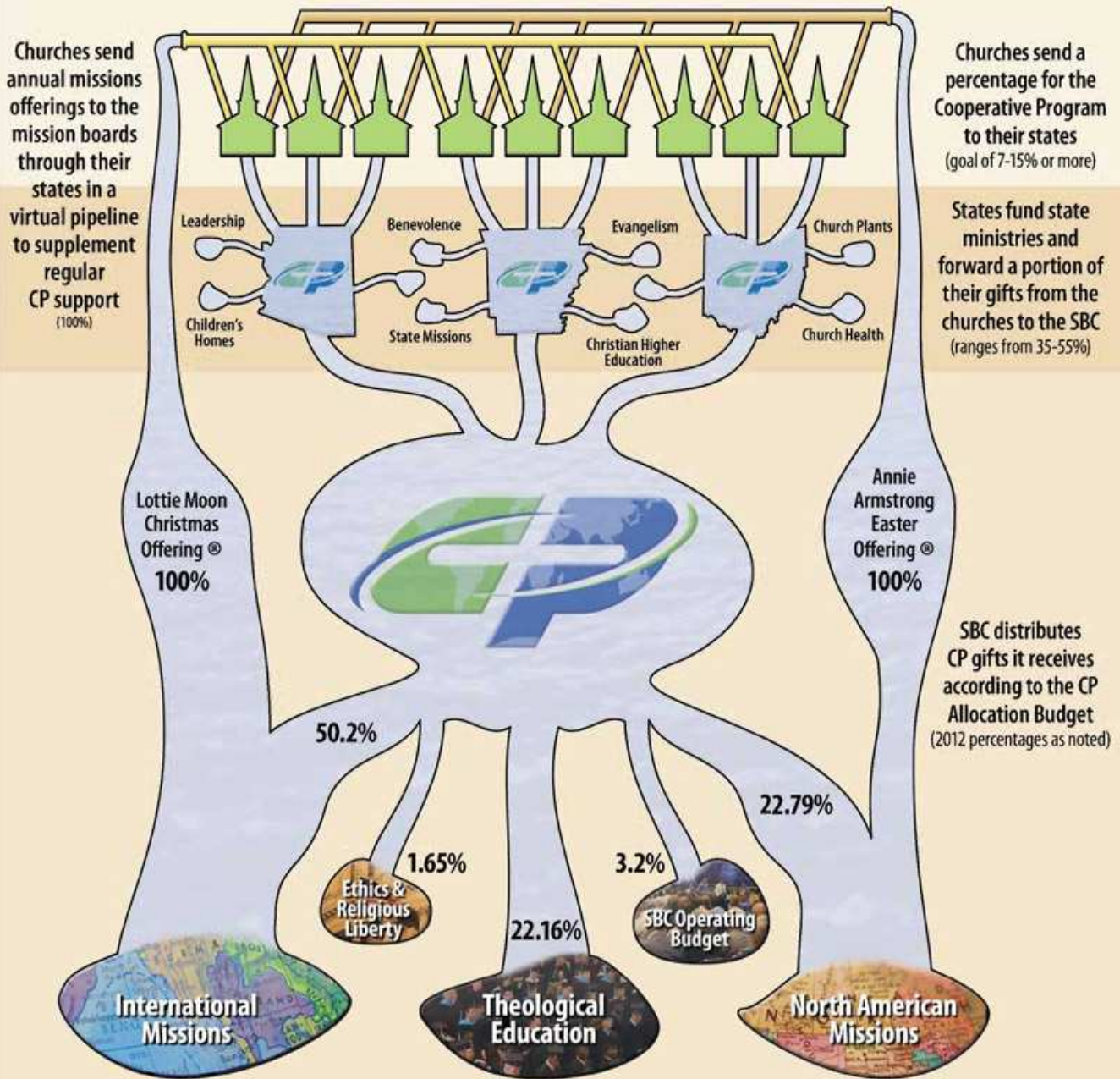
In this way, the Cooperative Program provides Southern Baptist churches with the opportunity to pool their resources to establish and advance Great Commission work, and therefore to have a greater impact than they could have had individually.

The Benefit of the Cooperative Program for International Missions

Living and ministering overseas as a missionary is costly. And independent missionaries must raise their own support. This often means that 20% or more of their time is spent in the United States working to raise support for overseas ministry. However, through the Cooperative Program, SBC missionaries are fully funded through the International Mission Board. This enables them to spend their time on the mission field focusing on ministry and their time back home resting, training, and recouping, not raising money.

The SBC also protects the theological calling and direction of missionaries through centralized training and oversight. It provides a measure of accountability for those who have entrusted their support for the work of overseas evangelism and ministry.

The Cooperative Program: Like a Mighty River



THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

The Southern Baptist Convention (2010)

- 16.1 million members
- 45,727 churches
- 42 state conventions
- 1,175 local associations
- 331,008 baptisms
- \$500 million given to Cooperative Program

The International Mission Board (2012)

- 4,822 missionaries
- 266,451 overseas baptisms
- 199,162 overseas churches
- 2.6 million members of overseas churches
- 24,073 new churches started
- 7.0 billion people, world population
- 3,030 unreached people groups
- \$126 million given directly through Lottie Moon

North American Mission Board (2010)

- 2,616 missionaries
- 1,086 new churches started
- \$55 million given directly through Annie Armstrong offering

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

Early Beginnings

The Baptist Convention was first started in 1814 in order to meet the needs of Baptist churches to better support and facilitate missions, both here in North America and around the world. In that year, independent Baptist churches from South Carolina to Massachusetts came together to form the first national Baptist organization in America. They called it the Baptist General Missionary Convention, which quickly became known as the Triennial Convention because it met every 3 years. Its purpose was to coordinate the funding of international missionaries, like Adoniram Judson, the famous missionary to Burma. In its beginning, it was primarily a missions sending agency – much like the International Mission Board today.

The Convention Split

In 1845, this association, and the Convention they founded, split over 2 issues:

1. Should a central sending board, or local sending boards, send missionaries? Churches located in the southern United States wanted a central board because they thought it was more effective in mobilizing missionaries. However, northern churches did not want to establish a board.
2. Secondly, and more importantly, could slaveholders be sent as missionaries? The southern churches felt the Convention did not have the authority to decide. It should be a matter left to the local church. Sadly, many Baptists (as well as Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians) in the south, did not believe slavery was morally wrong. In fact, in a sad testimony of our national history, many of these churches defended the principle of slavery on biblical grounds. However, most northern churches, Baptist and non-Baptist alike, felt slavery was an abomination and antithetical to the gospel. During this time, almost all of the major Protestant denominations would split on northern and southern lines, including Baptists, with the southern churches forming what we know today as the Southern Baptist Convention.

The SBC has since publicly repented and apologized for its past position, declaring that church members must “unwaveringly denounce racism, in all its forms, as deplorable sin” and “repent of racism of which we have been guilty whether consciously or unconsciously.”

In the split, the Southern Baptist Convention established two central sending boards for missionaries, which continue today as the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB).

The Conservative Resurgence

In the early 20th century, the Southern Baptist Convention (like most other denominations) was moving theologically towards Liberalism. Liberalism, influenced by modernism and scientific theory, tended to deny the authority and truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God and often moved to eliminate the supernatural and miraculous from the Christian faith (denial of the virgin birth, deity of Jesus Christ, and the reality of hell).

However, most churches and Southern Baptists were unaware of the theological “drift” of the convention and most importantly its seminaries, where liberal theology had begun to influence a whole generation of missionaries and pastors. But, in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, the influence of liberalism came to light through a series of controversies. The majority of the convention, which was still theologically conservative, reacted to this as a threat to the convention, for they had seen the sad result of liberalism, which tended to move churches away from belief in the Word of God and the Gospel (in denominations such as Presbyterians and Methodists). So, through the 1980’s conservatives fought for control over the convention’s board and its seminaries and organizations.

It was through this struggle that the Southern Baptist Convention has sought to define itself as a theologically conservative denomination of churches that stands finally and fully on the truthfulness and authority of the Word of God. Southern Baptists have often called this the “Conservative Resurgence” and it has been instrumental in shaping who Southern Baptists are today.