

Constitution
of
First Baptist Church of
The Colony, TX

I - PREAMBLE

We adopt, declare and establish this Constitution for the purpose of preserving and securing the principles of our faith, and to that end that this body of believers may be governed in an orderly manner consistent with the teachings of the Holy Scripture.

II - NAME AND PRINCIPAL OFFICE

The name of the corporation is First Baptist Church of The Colony (FBCTC). FBCTC is authorized under warrant of the Holy Scriptures and is incorporated under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Texas. It shall have no capital stock and is not organized for material or pecuniary gain. The principal offices are located at 4800 South Colony Blvd., The Colony, Texas 75056.

III - HISTORY

The idea of establishing a new mission in The Colony was born in the heart of Gerald Williamson, Director of Missions for the Denton Baptist Association in 1973. Fox & Jacobs purchased a large tract of land in what is now The Colony and planned a new housing development. Gilbert Calloway, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lewisville, as well as Chairman of the Denton Associational Missions Committee worked closely with Gerald. In a joint financial venture the First Baptist Church of Lewisville agreed to sponsor the new mission work in The Colony along with the First Baptist Church of Corsicana which lent financial support.

The First Baptist Church met for the first time as a mission on August 17, 1975 after a week of Backyard Bible Clubs. The first Sunday service was held at Fire Station #1 in The Colony. Dr. Gerald Williamson led the service. It was attended by Chuck and Bobbi Childs and their children, John and Omeda Carlsen and their children, as well as Charles and Helen Bacon, members of FBC Lewisville who assisted the new mission in its early days.

Dr. William Charles Tinsley was called as the first pastor in November of 1975 and in September of 1976 ground was broken for the first building. Construction was completed by January, 1977. The first service was held in the uncompleted sanctuary on Christmas Eve, 1976. The First Baptist Church of The Colony became an autonomous church at an official ceremony September 3, 1978.

IV - MISSION, PURPOSE, AND VISION

Our Mission - Building believers who reach others for Christ. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Our Purpose - To glorify God the Father through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit by:

- Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in our community, nation, and world through evangelism (Matthew 28:19-20a)
- Growing in Christ through discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20a; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18a)
- Serving others through ministry (1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 5:13b; Ephesians 6:7)
- Expressing our love of God through worship (Rom 12:1; Hebrews 12:28)
- Encouraging one another through fellowship (1 John 1:7a; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:25)

Our Vision

We are a church where members make a difference by:

- Loving others
- Caring for needs
- Praying without ceasing
- [Attending faithfully](#)
- Studying the Bible
- Reaching out with compassion
- Giving sacrificially
- Glorifying God through our unity

V - STATEMENT OF FAITH

At FBC The Colony, we believe in the importance of doctrine based on God's divine revelation of Himself through Scripture. Here we have summarized our core beliefs and believe that the following statement of faith accurately represents the teaching of God's Word, and therefore, is affirmed by all members of FBC The Colony. For an in-depth explanation of these beliefs along with the associated Scripture references, please see **Appendix A: Extended Declaration of Beliefs**.

- About the Bible (Bibliology)** - We believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, and the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- About God (Theology)** - We believe there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, without division of nature, essence or being.
- About Providence** - We believe that from eternity God decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet not in any way to be the author or approver of sin nor to destroy the will and responsibility of mankind.
- About Jesus of Nazareth (Christology)** - We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious, substitutionary, and atoning death

for all who come to Him in repentance and faith, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

- e) **About the Holy Spirit and Angels (Pneumatology)** - We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential; and that the present ministry of the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, enabling a godly life; and that He dispenses spiritual gifts to the body of Christ as He wills. We also believe in the existence of holy angels, who continue to do God's bidding and serve those who inherit salvation.
- f) **About Satan and Demons** - We believe in the existence of Satan as an actual spiritual being and the enemy of all that is good, and of demons who follow Satan's rebellion against God. All of whom are under the supreme authority of God Almighty.
- g) **About Man (Anthropology)** - We believe that Man was created in God's image, both male and female. Because of the temptation of Satan, mankind sinned against God and inherited a corrupt nature wholly opposed to God and His law. They are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors.
- h) **About the Church (Ecclesiology)** - We believe the Lord Jesus is the head of the universal Church, which is composed of all true believers, past and present. We also affirm the local church as the expression of His body in the world so long as it remains faithful to His gospel. The officers of a local church are Biblically qualified men who serve as Elders/Pastors and Deacons.
- i) **About Last Things (Eschatology)** - We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

VI - MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

The members of FBC The Colony recognize that, collectively, we are a community of faith in Jesus Christ. Various meetings of our church will include members, attendees, and guests. The difference between "attendees" and "members" can be summed up in one word: Commitment. We express this commitment through a formal membership covenant. We believe that all members of FBC The Colony must affirm this covenant with God and each other as a prerequisite of membership.

First Baptist Church The Colony Membership Covenant

“Having received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and having been baptized, and being in agreement with First Baptist’s statement of faith, strategy, and structure, I [now believe that the Holy Spirit is leading me to unite](#) with the First Baptist Church family.

I affirm the church’s mission to build me up in Jesus Christ, and to reach others for Him. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to other members to do the following by God’s grace:”

1. I will protect the unity of God’s church by:

- Pursuing Biblical doctrine (Eph. 4:14-16; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4).
- [Sincerely loving other members](#) (1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 15:5, 19).
- Refusing to gossip (Eph. 4:29).
- Following the leaders as they follow Christ and Scripture (Heb. 13:17).

2. I will share the responsibility of God’s church by:

- Praying for its growth (Eph. 1:18-23; 3:14-19).
- Inviting the unchurched to attend (Matt. 28:18-20).
- Warmly welcoming those who visit (1 Peter 4:7-9).

3. I will serve the ministry of God’s church by:

- Discovering my gifts and talents (1 Cor. 12; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:10).
- Being equipped by my leaders to serve (Eph. 4:11-13).
- Developing a servant’s heart (Phil. 2:3-4, 7).

4. I will support the testimony of God’s church by:

- Attending faithfully (Heb. 10:25; Lk. 4:16).
- Living a godly life (Phil. 1:27; Eph. 4:1-3).
- Giving regularly (1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor 9:6-8).

“In addition, I will consent to be governed by the Relational Commitments ([See Appendix B of FBCTC Constitution](#)) that have been officially adopted by the church and that address peacemaking and reconciliation, accountability and church discipline, marriage and divorce, counseling and confidentiality, and the protection of our children.

Finally, I also commit, should I leave the church, to unite with a like-minded church where I can carry out the spirit of this covenant.”

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

VII - POLITY AND AFFILIATIONS

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and as such is the head of First Baptist Church The Colony. (Colossians 1:15-18) We are authorized under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to appoint, affirm, and establish church leaders (Acts 6:3, 13:2-3). The offices of the church are composed of the elders/pastors and the deacons, as outlined in Scripture (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-15; Titus 1:7-9).

First Baptist Church The Colony is an elder-led church. We trust that the elders of our church will seek the mind of Christ in determining the will of the Father to guide us. The elders are given the ultimate responsibility for the oversight of the church body and to shepherd its members (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Because God also gives guidance by the leading of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the heart of every believer (2 Timothy 1:14), and through His Word, we further believe that the final authority in local church matters resides with the congregation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:17; Acts 6:3-6; Acts 15:22). The elders shall be accountable to God (Hebrews 14:17) and to the church (1 Timothy 5:19-21).

FBC The Colony is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Every SBC church is completely autonomous and independent. We are not subject to the control of any religious hierarchy or denominational body. Each church is self-governed and determines its own affairs. Affiliation with the SBC allows our church to participate in the largest missionary organization in the world. Through the SBC "Cooperative Program" we help support almost 10,000 missionaries in over 150 countries around the world.

We gladly affirm our Southern Baptist heritage and identity as we partner with the Southern Baptist Convention through the Cooperative Program and the Denton Baptist Association so long as its leaders and the respective bodies continue to remain faithful to God's Word and our local church's [statement of faith](#).

VIII - ORDINANCES

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. We also encourage believers to be baptized prior to receiving the Lord's Supper.

Matthew 3:13-17; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 3:22-23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the Church memorialize the Lord's sacrificial death on the cross. It also serves as a reminder of the gift of salvation that we receive as a result of Jesus' sacrifice. The elements of the Lord's Supper are bread, representative of the broken

body of Christ, and juice (or “fruit of the vine”), representative of the shed blood of Christ, poured out for us. The Lord’s Supper is open to all believers in Christ, and will be offered once a month at church.

Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 21; 11:23-29.

IX - ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION

This Constitution was affirmed by three-fourths of the assembled covenant members during a called Church Family Forum held on [Date]. This Constitution shall supersede all prior resolutions, precedents, and actions of the Church.

Adoption of an amendment to this Constitution requires an affirmation of three-fourths (3/4) of the covenant members present at a Church Family Forum. An amendment to the Constitution can be made by any covenant member by submitting the recommended amendment in writing to the elders. After prayer and deliberation, the elders must obtain a consensus regarding the recommended amendment. If after this process the elders affirm the proposed amendment, it will be made available in the Sunday morning worship guide to all covenant members at least two weeks prior to the next Church Family Forum where the amendment will be presented as a recommendation to the church body. If it is determined by the elders that the proposed amendment would not be beneficial to the church, then the elders [will express their decision to the covenant member either in writing or in an elder council meeting.](#)

A recommended amendment will then be voted on by the covenant members at the next Church Family Forum. If the next Church Family Forum is a special called meeting, the meeting must be announced to the covenant members in the Sunday morning worship guide at least 30 days in advance.

Appendix A: Extended Declaration of Beliefs

[Appendix B: Relational Commitments](#)

EXTENDED DECLARATION OF BELIEFFS

First Baptist Church of
The Colony, TX

Index

GOD3

THE BIBLE.....9

CREATION11

SIN13

SALVATION14

THE MINISTRIES OF JESUS18

THE MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT19

THE CHURCH20

CHRISTIAN LIFE23

CHURCH APPLICATION26

CHURCH PRACTICE28

CONCLUSION30

GOD

1. *THE EXISTENCE OF GOD*

A. Humanity's Inner Sense of God

1. As people created in the image of God, we have a deep, inner sense that God exists. We recognize that we are His creatures. He is our Creator. Apart from Him we are spiritually dead and have a strong sense that something important in life is missing (Eph. 2:4-5).

2. In the Christian life this inner awareness of God becomes stronger and more distinct. We begin to know God as our loving Father in heaven (Rom. 8:15) the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16) and we come to know Jesus Christ living within our hearts (Eph. 3:17; Phil. 3:8, 10; Col. 1:27; John 14:23). The intensity of this awareness for a Christian is such that though we have not seen our Lord Jesus Christ, we indeed love Him (1 Peter 1:8).

B. The evidence that God exists is found throughout the Bible (John 1:1).

C. Everything in nature proves clearly that God exists (Rom. 1:20).

D. Only God can overcome our sin and enable us to be persuaded of His existence (2 Cor. 4:4). Human wisdom alone is inadequate to know God on an intimate and personal level (1 Cor. 2:5).

2. *THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*

By His infinite nature, it is impossible for us to fully describe or understand God. He is the great "I am." Any list of His attributes would then be incomplete and inaccurate. But for our understanding we try to provide this partial list of the attributes of God.

A. Some of God's attributes are wholly His. They include the following:

1. **God is independent.** He does not need us or any of His creation for anything. Nevertheless, we and the rest of creation are allowed to glorify Him and bring Him joy. He is self-existent (Acts 17:24-25). God does not need anything from us (Job 41:11); yet, He delights in His people (Isa. 62:3-5).

2. **God is unchanging** (Heb. 13:8). He does not change in His being, His plans, His purposes, and His promises. God does act and feel emotions and He acts

and feels differently in response to different circumstances (Ps. 102:25-27; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17); plans (Ps. 33:11); purposes (Isa. 46:9-11); promises (Num. 23:19). God may choose to respond to intercessory prayer to change circumstances (Acts 12:5-12).

3. **God is eternal.** He created time and transcends time. Time does not impact God. He has no beginning or end (Ps. 90:2; Job 36:26; Rev. 1:8; John 8:58. See also Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Col. 1:6; Heb. 1:2). All of time is seen by Him equally and in the same newness (Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8; Isa. 46:9-10). God sees events in time and acts in time (Gal. 4:4-5; Acts 17:30-31).

4. **God is everywhere** (Jer. 23:23-24; Ps. 139:7-10). God is present in His whole being in every part of space (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17). God cannot be contained by space (1 Kings 8:27). God can be worshipped anywhere as He is present everywhere (John 4:20; Ps. 139:7-12).

5. **God is all powerful.** He is able to do anything that is consistent with His nature (Matt. 19:26). He is the Almighty (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 19:6). He cannot be untrue to His nature. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He cannot be tempted to sin (James 1:13). He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

6. **God knows everything** (1 John 3:20). God knows all actual and possible things (Matt. 11:21). God knows everything about our lives even before we are born (Ps. 139:16; Matt. 6:8; 10:30). He knows our every thought (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Ps. 139:1-2, 4).

7. **God is sovereign.** He is the supreme ruler. His plan (Acts 15:18) is all inclusive (Eph. 1:11). He is in control of His plan (Ps. 135:6) which includes evil, but does not involve Him in that evil (Prov. 16:4), and which ultimately is for the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:14; Rev. 19:6).

8. **God is jealous.** He continually seeks to protect His relationship with His people (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9).

B. God shares the following attributes with us, though we will never achieve the perfection of these characteristics of God while on earth:

1. **God is spirit** (John 4:24). There is no place in this universe that can surround Him or contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). He is not to be confined to some image (Ex. 20:4-6). Each of us was created with a spirit (John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:14; Phil. 3:3). We are united with the Lord's spirit (1 Cor. 6:17) through the Holy Spirit who bears witness to our adoption in God's family (Rom. 8:16). When we die our spirit goes to heaven to be with the Lord forever (Luke 23:43, 46);

Eccl. 12:7; Heb. 12:23).

2. **God is invisible.** God is a spirit being. (John 1:18; 4:24; 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). He manifests His glory to His people (Gen. 18:1-33; 32:28-30; Ex. 13:21-22; 24:9-11; Judges 13:21-22; Isa. 6:1; John 2:11). Seeing Jesus is seeing the Father (John 14:9; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). There is the promise that the pure in heart shall see God (Matt. 5:8). We shall see the human nature of Jesus (Rev. 1:7). It is not clear in what sense we will “see” the Father and the Holy Spirit, or the divine nature of God the Son (Rev. 1:4; 4:2-3, 5; 5:6). This is a matter to be revealed when we are in heaven. We are told that it will be “face to face” (Rev. 22:3-4). We shall be changed—we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). This vision is the greatest joy of our existence (Ps. 16:11).

3. **God is wisdom.** His wisdom is the means to accomplish the best (Rom. 16:27; Job 9:4; 12:13). God’s plan of redemption clearly demonstrates His wisdom (1 Cor. 1:20-31). God gives us wisdom when we ask for it (James 1:5). As we study His Word and choose to obey Him we will live a life of wisdom, pleasing to God (Ps. 19:7; Deut. 4:6-8). Our fear, reverence, respect and awe of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). God’s wisdom in us produces humility—not pride (Prov. 11:2; James 3:13). We are never as wise as God (Rom. 11:33). Many are the times that we don’t understand why, but we must obey in faith as God leads—His wisdom is best (1 Peter 4:19).

4. **God is faithful and true.** He is the only true God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). God is faithful to His promises (Deut. 32:4; Num. 23:19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 141:6). He always speaks truth. He does not lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5; John 17:17). His truth in His Word is our guide as His people (Ps. 139:17). His truth is to be our way of living in this world as His people (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:25; 2 Cor. 4:2; Prov. 4:24; Ps. 19:14). We are to love truth and hate falsehood (Ex. 20:16; Ps. 15:2; Prov. 13:5; Zech. 8:17).

5. **God is good** (Luke 18:19; Ps. 100:5, 106:1, 107:1, 34:8). His is goodness and all that He does is worthy of approval (Ps. 119:68; Romans 12:2). God is the source of all goodness in the world (Ps. 145:9; Acts 14:17). He is the giver of every good thing (James 1:17). He does good things for His people (Matt. 7:11; Rom. 8:32; Heb. 12:10). We are to imitate God in His goodness (Gal. 6:10; Luke 6:27, 33-35; 2 Tim. 3:17).

6. **God is love.** He gives of Himself in order to bring about blessings or good for others (1 John 4:8). God loves us even though we sin (1 John 4:10; Rom. 5:8; John 3:16; Gal. 2:20). We are to love God and to demonstrate this love by obeying Him (1 John 5:3, 2:15). We are to love others as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39; 1 John 4:11; John 13:35, 15:13; Heb. 10:24). We do this because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

7. **God is mercy.** He demonstrates mercy by His goodness toward those in misery and distress (Heb. 4:16; James 5:11). Moreover, His mercy is demonstrated by His goodness toward those who deserve only eternal punishment (1 Pet. 1:3-5). We are to imitate God in His mercy (Matt. 5:7).

8. **God is grace.** Grace is freely given by God. This grace underlies God's gift of salvation because it is not earned or deserved by anyone (Rom. 3:23-24, 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9). God's grace is the essence of the Christian life (1 Cor. 15:10).

9. **God is patient.** It is evidenced by His desire that all have eternal life and in His slowness to anger (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:16; Rom. 9:22; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:9). We should imitate God's patience (James 1:19; Eph. 4:2).

10. **God is holy.** God is the Most Holy One. He is separated from sin. He is called the "Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22, 78:41, 89:18, 99:9; Isa. 1:4, 5:19, 24). His holiness is the pattern for His people. God's command is for us to allow the Holy Spirit to impart and develop His holiness in us (Lev. 11:44, 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16).

11. **God is peace.** He is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33; Romans 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thes. 5:23; Eph. 2:14; 2 Thes. 3:16). His being and His actions are separate from all confusion and disorder (John 5:17). The Lord desires to bear His fruit of peace within us (Gal. 5:22-23).

12. **God is righteous.** He always acts in accordance with what is right and He is the standard of what is right (Duet. 32:4; Gen. 18:25; Ps. 19:8; Isa. 45:19). We are to strive to do right and be righteous in the sight of God and man (Ps. 37:3; 1 John 3:10).

13. **God hates sin** (Rom. 1:18, 2:5 & 8, 5:9, 9:22; Col. 3:6; 1 Thes. 1:10, 2:16, 5:9; Heb. 3:11; Rev. 6:16-17, 19:15). We are to imitate God and hate sin and evil (Rom. 7:15; Heb. 1:9; Zech. 8:17; Matt. 5:43-48).

14. **God is glorious.** His glory is the created brightness that surrounds God's revelation of Himself. This is an expression of God's greatness of His excellence (Ps. 24:10, 104:1-2). We should reflect His glory. By focusing on Christ we can be transformed to reflect His glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

3. *OUR RESPONSE*

A. KNOWING GOD

1. We can never, in this life, fully understand God. We shall never stop growing

in our knowledge of God. We will never run out of things to learn about God. We shall never tire in delighting in the discovery of more and more of His excellence and the greatness of His work. Our great occupation in life is to constantly increase in our knowledge of God (Phil 3:8-11).

2. We need to be aware that God is revealing Himself to us. We completely depend on God's active communication to us in Scripture, and through the Holy Spirit, for our true knowledge of God.

3. We can know God personally.

a. We have true knowledge of God from Scripture, even though we do not have exhaustive knowledge. We know God in our love relationship with Him (Jer. 9:23-24). Our sense of joy and our sense of importance come from the fact that we know God personally (John 17:3; Heb. 8:11; 1 John 5:20; Gal. 4:9; Phil. 3:10; 1 John 2:3, 13; 4:8).

b. God personally dwells among us and within us to bless us (John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

B. FEARING GOD

God is awesome and powerful. We, His people, should hold Him in highest reverence without equal or peer. In this attitude of reverence and highest honor we are said to "fear" God (Gen. 22:12, 42:18; Ex. 18:21; Job. 1:9; Ps. 66:16; Eccl. 5:7, 8:12-13; Luke 23:40; Acts 13:16, 26; 1 Peter 2:17; Rev. 14:7)

4. THE TRINITY

We have a finite ability to understand infinite concepts. Thus, when we seek to discuss the subject of the Trinity, we are entering a subject for which we can have only a limited comprehension. Nevertheless, it is helpful to understand that God has always existed as more than one person. God exists in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet, He is absolutely one. All the persons of God are completely God, all are distinct, and all are unified.

Three statements summarize the Bible's teaching on this subject: 1) God is three persons. 2) Each of these three persons is completely God. 3) There is only one God. Though not a term found in the Scripture, the Trinity is repeatedly revealed. The distinct persons of God primarily exist in relation to His creation. God relates to His creation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:26, Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6).

5. GOD THE FATHER

A. God's role as the Father relates to the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as creation, as the one who commands, directs and sends. The Father is over all, to include the

Son and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:6).

B. God is the Father of believers in Christ (Gal. 3:26; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:5).

C. He disciplines us as His children for our good, so we may share His holiness (Rev. 3:19).

6. **GOD THE SON**

A. Jesus is a completely unique person in that He is both fully God and fully human.

1. The humanity of Christ must first consider His miraculous conception and virgin birth (Matt. 1:18, 20, 24-25; Luke 1:35).

2. This miraculous conception and virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person (Matt. 1:22-23; Gal. 4:4-5).

3. In His humanity, Jesus had human limitations. He had a human body, mind and emotions.

a. Jesus had a human body (Luke 2:7, 40, 52).

b. He would get thirsty (John 19:28).

c. He would grow weary and tired (John 4:6).

d. He had an appetite and would be hungry (Matt. 4:2).

e. He had limited strength (Luke 23:26).

f. He had a human mind (Luke 2:52; Heb. 5:8).

g. He had human emotions (Matt. 8:10; John 11:35, 12:27, 13:21).

4. Jesus' experiences as a man, His suffering and death, enable Him as our High Priest to completely understand by His experience what we are experiencing (Heb. 4:15-16; 1 John 2:6).

5. Jesus was completely sinless, even while he was a man (John 15:10; Romans 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

6. Jesus' humanity was required so He would become the substitute sacrifice for us (Romans 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:45, 47; Heb. 2:16-17).

7. Though He was fully human, Jesus was fully God (John 8:58; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-8).

8. We believe that at a time known only to the Father, Christ will return to the earth (1 Thes. 4:15-17; Rev. 19:11-16; Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 1:11; John 14:1-3).

9. Christ is our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1).

7. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. The Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity and is equal to the Father and Son, while remaining distinct from these persons of the Trinity. He is fully God with all the same attributes (Matt. 28:19; John 14:26; 2 Cor. 2:4, 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Jude 1:20-21).

B. The Holy Spirit is a person with intelligence (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:13), feelings (Eph. 4:30) and a will (Acts 16:6-11; 1 Cor. 12:11).

C. The Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16:13), convicts us of our sin (John 16:8), performs miracles (Acts 2:1-6) and intercedes for us with the Father (Rom. 8:26).

D. The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and Son (John 16:14).

8. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A. The Kingdom of God is God's sovereignty over His creation. His kingdom literally extends into human lives when we submit to Him as Lord (Luke 17:20-21).

B. God is King of all who willfully acknowledge Him as their eternal Lord and Savior (Ps. 5:2; 1 Tim. 6:15).

C. As His people we pray and labor that His Kingdom may come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

D. With the return of Jesus Christ to earth, and the end of this age the Kingdom of God shall be complete (Rev. 21:1-4).

THE BIBLE

9. GOD'S WORD

The Bible is God's Word. These are God's own words, even though written down by human authors, and therefore supremely authoritative (Ps. 12:6, 119:105, 160; Prov. 30:5; John 1:1-3; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12).

10. THE CANON

The Canon of Scripture is the list of all the books in the Bible. It is very important to know which writings belong in the Bible and which do not. The importance is because the Scripture is a primary source of our nourishment for our spiritual lives. To be any less or any more than what God has intended would be wrong.

A. The Old Testament was not disputed in the writings of the New Testament. Most importantly there is full agreement with the Old Testament by Jesus and the Apostles. They often quoted from the Old Testament as recorded in the New

Testament (Matt. 4:1-11; Acts 2:14-21; 13:40-41; 1 Cor. 2:9).

B. The New Testament focuses on the coming and works of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The Apostles were given the amazing gift to remember all things that Jesus had said and were guided by the Holy Spirit to record those things He willed to be preserved (John 16:13-14). Paul also claims the revealing of the truth through the Holy Spirit in his writings (1 Cor. 2:12-13). The Apostles (including Paul) wrote all but five books of the New Testament: Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude. The early church fathers determined that in order for a book to be included in the canon, it was absolutely necessary for it to have divine authorship. They determined that based upon John 16:13-15, authorship by an apostle was divinely inspired. Thus, if the writings can be shown to be by an apostle, it has divine authorship. So all but five of the books were automatically accepted by the early church. Of these remaining books, all were written at a time when the apostles could have and would have affirmed the divine authorship through these other authors. Peter would have affirmed the authorship of Mark as containing the gospel that he himself preached. As for Hebrews and Jude, they were considered to be self attesting.

C. The Canon is closed. Once the writings of the New Testament apostles and their authorized companions were completed, we had in written form the final record of everything that God wants us to know about the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and its meaning for the lives of believers for all time. We must heed the warning of Revelation 22:18: "I warn every one who hears the words of prophecy for this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." The primary reference is to the book of Revelation, yet its placement at the end of the last book of the Bible should not be ignored.

11. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

A. The Bible is the ultimate authority for our faith and practice. God's leadership in all matters will agree with, and never contradict the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). All the words in Scripture are God's words. All Scripture is Godbreathed (2 Tim. 3:16).

B. The authority of Scripture means that all the words of Scripture are God's Words. Therefore to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. Thus, Jesus can rebuke the disciples for not believing the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25; 2 Peter 3:2).

12. THE INERRANCY/INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture is Truth. God does not lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Since God does not and cannot lie, the Bible is truth in all respects (Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5; Ps. 119:89; Matt. 24:35; Num. 23:19). His word is truth (John 17:17).

CREATION

13. GOD'S CREATION

- A. Everything exists by God's power (Jer. 10:12; Rev. 4:11).
- B. God created everything from nothing. Before God created the universe nothing else existed except God himself. All things ultimately belong to Him (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6, 9; John 1; 3; Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24-25; Col. 1:16).
- C. All things are sustained by the power of God (Job 12:10; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

14. ANGELS

- A. God created angels (Neh. 9:6).
- B. Angels carry out some of God's plans on the earth (Psalm 103:20-21). They bring messages (Acts 8:26), patrol earth as God's representatives (Zech. 1:10-11), carry out war against demonic forces (Dan. 10:13; Rev. 12:7-8), and carry out some of God's judgments (Acts 12:23).
- C. Angels are not to be worshipped (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

15. SATAN

- A. Satan is a literal being known by several titles including: Satan, the devil, Beelzebul, the thief, the murderer, the liar, and the adversary (Matt. 4:1; 12:24; Luke 11:18; John 8:44; 10:10; 1 Peter 5:8).
- B. He is the originator of sin and father of lies (1 John 3:8, 8:44). He attempts to destroy every work of God (John 10:10).
- C. In his war against God, he uses a variety of approaches (John 10:10; Rev. 12:9; 1 Peter 5:6).
- D. However, Satan and his demons are subject to Christ and to us in His name (Luke 10:17; Eph. 1:19-23; 6:11).

E. Because his time is limited, Satan’s intentions are carried out with great wrath (Rev. 12:12).

16. DEMONS

Demons are evil angels who sinned against God and who now continually work evil in the world (2 Peter 2:4).

A. Demons are organized by Satan and do his bidding (Eph. 6:12).

B. Demons have the capacity to “demonize” individuals and influence their lives (Mark 5:1-20; Acts 16:16-18).

C. Demonization is the relative control of Satan, over, or in, an individual’s life. There is a wide spectrum of this control, ranging from annoyance to complete domination. The Bible teaches that humans can be influenced by demons to commit evil and sinful acts (2 Tim. 2:26).

Demons attack our minds to gain a foothold in our lives (2 Cor. 10:3-7). It is possible for a Christian to be demonized, that is to say, influenced by demons. In Eph. 4:27, Paul writes “and do not give the devil an opportunity.” The word “opportunity” is the Greek word *topos*, meaning place, abode or dwelling. The indication is that a place of occupation can be given to Satan in a believer’s life.

D. Demons know Jesus, recognize their fate and respond obediently to Jesus’ commands (Luke 4:33-36).

17. MANKIND

A. God created human beings to live in a special love relationship with Him, both here and now, and in heaven forever (John 10:10; Rom. 6:4-11; Rev. 21:3-7; 22:3-5).

B. Our highest purpose in life is to love God (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:28-30).

C. Mankind is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Human beings are made up of these parts: the body is that aspect of our life that relates to the world around us. The soul is made up of mind, emotions and will. It is through the soul that we relate to ourselves. Finally, the deepest part of man is the spirit. The human spirit is that aspect of life that relates directly to God and receives the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Thes. 5:23).

18. MALE AND FEMALE ROLES

Mankind, as male and female, is created in God's image reflecting harmony, equality and yet differences in role and authority.

God illustrated equality by creating *both* male and female in His image (Gen. 1:27, 5:1-2). As men are dependent on women, and women are dependent on men, both are equally important and worthy of honor (1 Cor. 11:11,12). While there are differing roles for men and women, we are nonetheless, one in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

19. EQUALITY OF MANKIND

Equality among races, social and economic strata and gender is emphasized in Scripture. Therefore, any form of discrimination or bigotry is sinful (Gal. 3:27-28; James 2:2-9).

20. HEAVEN

Heaven is a literal place where God dwells. It is here that all true believers will spend eternity in the presence of God and in fellowship with one another. Heaven is a place of eternal reward, worship and great joy (Matt. 5:12; Luke 23:24 & 43; John 14:2-3; Rev. 21:3-7; 22:3-5).

21. HELL

The Bible also teaches that hell is a literal place. It is the final and eternal place of punishment for Satan, his demons, and all those who die without Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is a place of eternal separation from God in torment (Matt. 5:22; Mark 9:47; Luke 12:5; 16:23-26; Rev. 19:20; 20:10 & 11-15).

SIN**22. SIN**

Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in word, thought, or deed. Sin is the choice to rebel against God. This rebellion can be either through our actions or our neglect. The result of this rebellion is disharmony with God for the Christian and condemnation for the non-Christian. Sin is something that all humans do.

A. All of mankind has sinned or will sin (Rom. 3:23).

B. While our salvation as Christians is eternally secure (John 10:28), sin, nevertheless, causes disharmony with God for the Christian (Rom. 6:23, 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:23). Our sin disrupts our fellowship with God. Not only is our personal relationship with God affected, but our sin damages our relationships *with others* and *our* ministries (John 15:4).

C. Sin includes individual acts—stealing, lying, committing murder—illustrated by

the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). Sin also includes acts of omission, being disobedient when God tells us to do something, either through His Word or through the work of the Holy Spirit.

D. Sin includes wrong attitudes—coveting, desires to do wrong, anger, lust, jealousy and selfishness (Ex. 20:17; Matt. 5:22, 5:28; Gal. 5:19-21).

E. Sin is part of our very human condition (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:3).

F. The penalty of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Death means separation from God. Thus, for the non-Christian, death will cause his/her eternal separation from God (Rom. 1:18). But the believer in Christ will be spared this punishment (John 3:16; 11: 25-26).

23. THE FALL OF MANKIND

A. The origin of Mankind's Sin—the origin of sin was the act of Adam and Eve consciously choosing to disobey God when tempted by the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-24; Rom. 5:1, 16; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14).

B. Inherited Sin—due to Adam's disobedience sin and death entered the human race (Rom. 3:23; 5:12, 12-21; 6:23).

C. Man's Voluntary Choice—God is not to blame for our sins and Satan is not the exclusive source of our sin, we must recognize that sin is our own voluntary act (James 1:14-15).

SALVATION

24. MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

A. The simple facts of the gospel are as follows:

1. All of us have sinned (Rom. 3:23).
2. The penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8).
4. Because of God's mercy, grace and love for the sinner, Jesus issues an invitation to each of us for salvation that requires a response. That response requires us to believe that Jesus is God's son and receive Him (John 1:12). This is done through faith and not by our own works (Eph. 2:8-9).

B. The message of the Gospel is that God so loved us that He gave His Son to pay the penalty for our sin. The Gospel includes a call to repent and an invitation for us to make a conscious decision to abandon our sins and to come to Christ fully trusting (faith), asking Him to forgive us of our sins (Luke 24:27; Acts 2:37, 3:19, 5:31, 17:30; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10). The glorious message of the Gospel is the promise of forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God (John 3:16; Acts 3:19). God’s promise and assurance is “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Christ will accept all who come to Him in sincere repentance and faith seeking salvation (John 6:37).

25. ATONEMENT

The Doctrine of atonement relates to Jesus dying to pay the penalty for our sins. This includes:

- A. God’s justice required that a penalty be paid for our sin (John 14:6; Eph. 2:8).
- B. God’s love caused Jesus to pay that penalty (Rom. 3:25-26).
- C. Jesus lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to God the Father (Rom. 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:21), and died a substitutionary death for our salvation (Gal. 3:13; 1 John 2:2).
- D. God’s love brought Jesus as the atonement from our sins (John 3:16).

26. ADOPTION

- A. Adoption is an act of God, not of our own power (John 1:12).
- B. When we accept Christ as Lord and Savior, we are made members of God’s family (Rom. 8:14-17).
- C. As adopted sons, we have a loving and wise heavenly Father who watches over us, provides for us, and protects us (Matt. 6:9; 1 John 3:1; Ps. 103:13-14; Matt. 6:23; 2 Thes. 3:3).
- D. Adoption establishes an eternal relationship with Jesus as our elder brother. Other Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom. 1:13, 8:12; 1 Cor. 1:10, 6:8; James 1:2; Matt. 12:50; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 1:2; James 2:15). As we are brothers and sisters, the concept of church must take on a new perspective as we are engaged in “family work.” No competition, no jealousy, no hindering of others in obeying our Father; we are to be encouragers and thankful for the good that comes to our “family” for all are to be contributing to the good of the family and imitating God our Father (Eph. 5:1; 1 Peter 1:14-16).

27. REGENERATION

Regeneration is an act of God alone in which He literally gives us a new spiritual life. This is called being “born again” (1 Peter 1:3; John 3:3-8; Ezek. 36:26-27).

A. This is an act totally of God alone; we play no part in this (John 1:12-13).

B. Though we may not understand regeneration, we do know that we were spiritually dead, not caring about spiritual things (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 3:11), and a change occurred, which we did not control, as God made us alive to Him. We were born again to relate to God in prayer and worship and enabled to hear and understand his Word with receptive hearts (John 3:3-7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13).

28. JUSTIFICATION

A. Justification is God declaring us righteous in His sight (Rom. 3:20, 26, 28, 5:1, 8:30, 10:4, 10; Gal. 2:16, 3:24).

B. Forgiveness of our sins and being righteous in His sight are both essential for God’s justification (Rom. 4:6-8; Rom. 3:21-22).

C. We are declared just by God because He considers Jesus Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us (Rom. 4:3).

D. Justification is a gift of God’s grace not on account of something that we do or earn (Rom. 3:23-24; Eph. 2:8-9).

E. God justifies us through our faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:25, 26, 5:1, 17-19).

29. SANCTIFICATION

We believe that the Christian is declared righteous by God through faith in Christ. This is referred to as “positional” sanctification. Because we are in Christ, and He is righteous, we are righteous. Yet there is also such a thing as “practical” sanctification. In practice, our daily life is to reflect our position. Some try to produce this holy life via legalism. While the attempt may be sincere, it is also doomed to failure. In reality “practical” sanctification is achieved the same way “positional” sanctification is realized, by grace, through faith.

A. Practical sanctification increases throughout our lives as Christians. It is a progressive work of God in man that increases our freedom from sin and grows us into a likeness of Christ in our daily lives (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil 3:13-14).

B. Sanctification is primarily the role of God (1 Thes. 5:23) God's role includes disciplining His children (Heb. 12:5-11). God causes us to want His will and to work for His pleasure (Phil 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21).

C. Our role is both one in which we depend on God to sanctify us and one in which we strive to obey God (Passive: Rom. 6:13, 12:1, 8:13) (Active: Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:14; 1 Thes. 4:3; 1 John 3:3; 2 Cor. 6:14, 18, 7:1; 2 Peter 1:5).

D. Sanctification affects our entire being. It affects our intellect and our knowledge (Col. 3:10; Phil. 1:9; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5). Growth in sanctification will affect our emotions (Gal. 5:22; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:15; Rom. 6:17; Eph. 4:31). Our decision making, our will, is changed by God working in us (Phil 2:13). Our spirit will be affected (1 Cor. 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1). And our physical bodies will be affected (1 Thes. 5:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Cor. 13, 19-20).

30. ELECTION

God Himself performs all the work of salvation. The only human component of salvation is the act of receiving Christ as Savior and Lord.

31. THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

At the moment of salvation every believer receives the Holy Spirit as an eternal indwelling presence (Acts 2:1-4; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 12:13).

32. THE BAPTISM OF (WITH/IN) THE HOLY SPIRIT

Baptism of the Holy Spirit also occurs at the time of salvation. This is the placing of a new Christian into Christ. We become members of the one body of believers in Jesus Christ and as part of Jesus Christ. The evidence of this is the manifestation of the life of Christ in and through us (Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13).

33. UNION WITH CHRIST

Union with Christ describes aspects of our relationship with Christ as believers through which we receive the benefits of salvation. This inseparable union is the basis of God's work in the believer's life and includes the following:

A. We are in Christ (John 15:5; Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:28).

B. Christ is in us (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27).

C. We are like Christ. We imitate Christ in our union with Him (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:6; Phil. 1:20).

D. We have a personal fellowship with Christ in our union with Him (Matt. 18:20, 28:10). It is great joy to know that Christ actually wants us to be with Him (John

17:24).

34. PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS (SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER)

All those who are truly born again are secure in Christ, being kept by God's power as His child. He will keep us as His children for the rest of our lives and for all eternity (John 10:27-29).

A. Salvation in Jesus Christ brings eternal life (John 3:36, 5:24, 6:47, 10:28; 1 John 5:13).

B. The Holy Spirit within us is the guarantee of our inheritance of eternal life with Christ in heaven (Eph. 1:14).

C. Since salvation is not dependent upon the actions of the believer, true believers cannot lose their salvation (1 John 2:19).

THE MINISTRIES OF JESUS

We believe that four primary ministries of Jesus Christ are listed in Luke 4. Since Christ left His Church in the world to be His body, and perform His ministry, we must pay special attention to these four initiatives.

35. PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR

The first of these ministries is preaching the gospel to the poor. We must choose to reach out to those in financial need. Many of the most heinous conditions, addictions and iniquities are found among those afflicted by poverty. When the gospel is effective among the poor, it can be effective at any other stage of society. (Luke 4:18; Mt. 6:1-4; 19-20; 1 John 3:17-18; John 5:17; 19-20; 30; 6:38; 8:28-29; 14:12; 16; 26; 20:21; Mk 10:46-52; Luke 4:43; 18:22; John 9:1-12; James 2:5; Prov. 18:15-16; Mt 19:21; Mk 14:7; Luke 21:1-4; Rom 8:14; 12:13; 1 Cor 12:7; 2 Cor 8:12; 9:7-9)

36. PHYSICAL HEALING

We believe that the ministry of physical healing is an important part of the work of God. While it is not God's will to heal everyone of every disease this side of heaven, it is His will to heal some, if not many. Prayer for the sick is a significant assignment for the church, and it is a vital part of our Elders' Ministry. (Luke 4:18; Mt 8:16; 9:33; 12:22; Mk 5:2-5; 9:17-29; John 5:14; James 5:15-16; Luke 4:40-41; 6:18; 13:11-13, 16; 16:19-25; John 9:3; 11:4; Acts 10:38; Gal 4:13; Luke 22:40-46; Acts 9:34-35; 39-42; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mt 9:2; 22; 29; Mk 5:34; 6:56; 10:52; 5:20; 7:9-10; 8:48; 17:19; Mt 8:17; Luke 18:42; Acts 3:16; 4:9-10; 14:9; 1 Cor 12:9; Phil 2:27; James 5:13-16; Luke 10:34; 1 Tim 5:23; Mt 11:3-5; Mk 2:10; 5:19; Luke 7:22; 9:2; John 5:36; 9:4-5; Luke 16:19-25; John 11:25-26; 40-45; Acts 10:38)

37. EMOTIONAL HEALING

We believe that the ministry of emotional healing is also an important aspect of the focus of the church. Emotional disturbance and pain afflicts many people in our society. The healing of many emotional difficulties are found in Christ. Through prayer, learning and applying spiritual truths, and taking our thoughts captive into obedience to Christ we experience this wonderful deliverance. (Luke 4:18; Mt 6:25-34; Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 10:5; Gal 5:22-23; Phil 4:6-12; Col 3:15; 1 Tim 6:6; Rom 3:23- 25; 4:25; Rom 5; Rom 6; 8:30; 8:35-39; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17; 10:5; Gal 2:15-17; John 14:19; Gal 2:20; 3:24; Phil 1:21; Titus 3:7; Isa 41:10; Mt 21:22; Mk 9:29; 11:24; Luke 11:9-10; 18:1; 22:46; Acts 1:14; 10:31; 12:5; Rom 12:12; Eph 6:15; 6:18; 1 Thes 5:17; Heb 4:1-10; Luke 22:32; Acts 2:42-44; 1 Cor 1:9-10; Gal 2:9; 5:22-23; Phil 2:1-2; 1:4-7; 1 Pet 4:8; 1 John 1:3-4; 1:7)

38. SETTING CAPTIVES FREE

We believe that many people are in spiritual captivity. Christ has come to set us free from this spiritual enslavement and to empower us to live in our freedom in Him. This is an important part of the work of God in our world today. (Luke 4:18; Gen 2:19-20; 3:17-19; John 3:14-21; 8:12; 8:34-35; 10:27-28; Rom 3:23; 5:12-14; 5:17-21; 6:3-4; 8:1-2; 8:37-39; Rev 12:10-11; Mt 10:1; 10:8; Mk 6:7; Mk 6:13; Luke 9:1-2; 9:6; 10:17-20; Acts 8:6-7; 1 John 4:4; Isa 14:12-15; Mk 1:13; Luke 4:1-13; John 8:44; 2 Cor 2:9-11; Eph 2:2-3; 4:26-27; 6:12-13; 2 Pet 2:4; 1 John 3:8; Jude 1:6; Rev 12:3-17; 13:6-7; Mk 9:37; John 3:3; 3:16-17; 12:32; Eph 2:4-6; James 4:7-8; 1:12; John 8:32; 14:6; 15:26; 16:13; Eph 6:14; 2 Thes 2:13; Luke 5:17; 6:19; 9:1; 10:19; Acts 1:8; 4:7-10; 10:38; 15:13; Rom 1:16; 2 Cor 12:9; Eph 3:16-19; Phil 3:21; Col 1:11; 2 Tim 1:7)

THE MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**39. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit's work can be stated in broad and general terms. He, as the indwelling person of God, purifies, empowers, blesses, reveals, keeps and unifies Christians with one another. One of the driving forces in the work of the Holy Spirit is to magnify Christ (Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:26-27; Phil. 2:12-13).

40. THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The filling of the Holy Spirit begins at salvation and continues as we yield more control to the Holy Spirit to be empowered by Him to accomplish great and mighty things. The progressive yielding to the Holy Spirit is life changing. The world is yet to see all that God can accomplish through a life completely yielded to Christ and being filled with the Spirit.

A. Yielding to the Holy Spirit is a voluntary act by a Christian seeking to grow by becoming more like Christ (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1, 12).

B. Being filled with the Holy Spirit empowers us to accomplish great and mighty things. Acts reveals a number of these special events of great and mighty things

in the early church (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 23, 31).

C. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one time thing. It can be a recurring special event or it may be realized as a progressive growth that engenders increasing sanctification for the believer (Acts 4:8, 7:55 [recurring individual event], 6:3, 11:24 [progressive growth]).

41. GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit endows every Christian with at least one spiritual gift at the moment of salvation. A spiritual gift is a special God-given ability to serve the Lord with relative ease and effectiveness. There are at least three lists of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. They are found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. There is no Biblical evidence that certain gifts have ceased to operate, however some gifts are more rigorously controlled than others. This does not annul the fact that the use of spiritual gifts is essential to the ministry of the church (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-10; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Peter 4:11).

42. ABUSE OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every spiritual gift can be abused through overemphasis, self-aggrandizement or the efforts of the flesh to promote self. Love must be the primary factor in the use of any gift. The use of a spiritual gift in public is for the edification of all who are present (1 Cor. 13, 1 Cor. 14).

43. NON-CESSATIONISM

God continues to gift believers and perform miraculous acts as He did in the first century. We must not try to put God in a box. It is our responsibility to use our God-given faith and trust Him to act in power. However, we are not to become preoccupied with spiritual gifts. Our preoccupation is the Giver of the gifts, not the gift. We recognize that every spiritual gift can be perverted, overemphasized and counterfeited. The gifts of God and their manifestations are to follow Biblical guidelines. Whatever the challenges might be, the fact that God is still working today makes it all worthwhile. An individual's personal views on cessationism shouldn't be a point of contention or break fellowship between believers.

THE CHURCH

44. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

"The Church" has two meanings. First, there is the "universal Church" made up of all true believers in Christ, of all time. Second, there is the "local church" made up of all local believers who congregate together for common edification and ministry. The purposes of the church are to worship God, nurture and mature believers, and offer evangelism and mercy to the world (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:42-47; Acts 16:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

45. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Christian unity is extremely important and should be sacrificed only in the case of essential Biblical doctrine (2 John 10-11). Our unity is born out of our common relationship with Christ. He is in us; we are in Him, which makes us one (John 17:21; 1 Cor. 1:2). There is room in the fellowship of the church for disagreement. However, there is not room in the church for divisiveness. Divisiveness must be addressed in a very forthright way (Titus 3:10-11). It is the duty of every Christian to preserve the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

46. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Church membership is a God-led choice to unite with a body of believers and serve as a living appendage of that body. In general, membership will be granted to anyone who offers a Biblical testimony of salvation, has been scripturally baptized and agrees to accept the responsibilities of membership. These responsibilities include:

- A. To pursue a holy lifestyle, surrendered to the Lord's leadership.
- B. To pursue Christ-like relationships with FBCTC members.
- C. To pursue a life of ministry and service within FBCTC. This includes the investment of time, talents, spiritual gifts and financial resources.

47. GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

Our church government is "theocratic" in nature. This means that the Lord Himself governs the church. In His sovereignty God has established two church offices— elders and deacons. Elders are called by God to serve as humble servant leaders and under-shepherds of Christ (1 Tim. 3:1-5, 17; 1 Peter 5:4; Titus 1:5). Deacons serve as the called ministers of mercy to the church family (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Church members are called on by God to submit to the leadership of these leaders, unless such submission (Heb. 13:17) would be clearly unBiblical, immoral, or illegal. The leadership of the elders is to be established by consensus. This means that, if there is one elder who disagrees with a proposal before the Elder Council, the proposal will be set aside until all of the elders experience a similar leading by the Lord.

48. ELDERS

FBCTC seeks to be a New Testament Church committed to the teachings of the Bible. No other authority or tradition is to guide the means, faith or structure of the Lord Jesus Christ's Church. The administrative and pastoral structure for a New Testament Church is to utilize a plurality of leadership. FBCTC follows this scriptural instruction. To achieve this New Testament model, FBCTC requires qualified men to serve as an Elder Council.

- A. These men must meet specific moral and spiritual qualifications before they serve (1 Tim. 3:1-7).
- B. They must be publicly installed into office (1 Tim. 5:22; Acts 14:23).

C. They must be motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do their work (Acts 20:28).

D. After review, examination and appointment, men affirmed by FBCTC to serve as elders shall constitute the Elder Council. To effectively perform their duties, the Elder Council needs the prayers, support and assent of members of FBCTC (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Heb. 13:17).

E. FBCTC is called upon to honor their Elder Council and to protect them against false accusations (1 Tim. 5:19).

F. Finally, if an elder falls into sin, and continues to sin, he must be publicly rebuked (1 Tim. 5:20).

49. DEACONS

Deacons are the servant-ministers of the church. Their purpose is to relieve the elders of some of the multitude of practical duties involved in caring for the flock. Deacons are to give their primary attention toward caring for the flock's physical welfare. Deacons have the honor of modeling, for the local church and the lost world, God's compassion, kindness, mercy and love. As the church compassionately cares for people's needs, the world sees a visible display of Christ's love, which will draw the lost to our Savior. Deacons are to be an example of commitment, unity, and harmony in their service. Additional information is contained in the FBCTC Deacon Handbook.

50. BAPTISM

Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is a public demonstration of a believer's identification with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Being symbolic in nature, there is no saving value in water baptism itself. Baptism follows a believable profession of faith (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 32-33; 1 Cor. 1:16). Baptism is performed by immersion in water (Mark 1:15; John 3:23; Acts 8:36, 38-39; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). It demonstrates a believer's obedience to Christ's command (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38).

51. LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ (Matt. 26:26-29). It is an important act of worship. Only those who are believers in Christ—Christians—should participate in the Lord's Supper. In this act, believers use the symbol of the fruits of the vine, and unleavened bread to commemorate the blood and body of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:20-34; 1 Cor. 10:16-17). The Bible does not provide specific guidelines regarding the frequency of observation of the Lord's Supper.

52. EQUIPPING BELIEVERS

The church's priority to equip believers for ministry is accomplished through the exegetical preaching and teaching of the Bible (Eph. 4:11-16). An exegetical approach to preaching and

teaching, in which we draw our beliefs directly from the actual words of Scripture, is used in an unparalleled way to win the lost and disciple the saved (Matt. 28:19; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We place our emphasis on Scripture being the tool that God uses to develop our faith and equip us for ministry (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21).

53. WITNESSING

Every Christian is given the privilege of sharing their relationship with Christ (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-2). Christian unity is one of the primary means by which we reveal the reality of Christ (John 17:23). Additionally, we are to bear witness, by lifestyle and through words. The Holy Spirit empowers our witness and uses it in the salvation of others (Acts 1:8; 10:44).

54. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

God requires church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17). The purpose of church discipline is for believers to hold one another accountable to live Godly lives. The goal of church discipline is twofold—restoration of fellowship between the sinning Christian and God, and between the sinning Christian and his/her fellow believers (James 5:20). Other goals for church discipline include: keeping sin from spreading to others; protecting the purity of the church so that Christ will not be dishonored (Rom. 2:24; 1 Cor. 6:6; Heb. 12:15; Rev. 2:20). We should never lose sight that where there are issues of conduct on which Christians may legitimately disagree, a wide degree of initial tolerance is required (Rom. 14:1-23). We are not seeking to punish the offender out of a desire for vengeance, but we are seeking to restore and heal (2 Cor. 2:5-11). Additional policy regarding church discipline is contained in Relational Commitments of FBCTC Bylaws.

55. DENOMINATIONALISM AND DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

First and foremost we are Christians. Affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention affords us the opportunity, as a local fellowship of believers, to be a part of the cooperative work in evangelism and missions with a larger body of believers. This affiliation should not generate a denominational bias that interferes with the larger work of the Kingdom of God. The design of the Southern Baptist Convention permits the local church to maintain its independence and autonomy in government and ministry.

CHRISTIAN LIFE

56. PRAYER

Prayer is communication to, with, and from God. Prayer is the primary means for the expression of faith. There is great power in prayer, because prayer is heard and answered by God. God has so arranged history that there are some things that can happen only if a Christian prays. One of the most important works of the church is the labor of prayer. In the future, there will be an outpouring of God's power due solely to the fervent praying of God's people (Matt. 6:8-9; 18:19-20; 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:9-10; 11:13; Acts 4:24; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 1:6; 4:2; 5:16).

57. FASTING

Fasting is an important discipline of the Christian life (Neh. 1:4; Esth. 4:3; Joel 2:12; Isa. 58:5-7; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). Though it was not commanded by Christ, He does assume that believers will fast (Matt. 6:16; 9:15). Every Christian should fast as directed by the Lord. Fasting provides several benefits to enhance the Christian life.

1. Fasting increases our sense of humility and dependence on the Lord. Fasting allows us to give more attention to prayer (Dan. 9:3).
2. It is a continual reminder that we are sacrificing ourselves to Christ as we experience discomfort from fasting.
3. Fasting is good exercise in self-discipline—training to resist sin.
4. Fasting heightens spiritual and mental alertness providing a sense of God’s presence as we focus on Him and less on material concerns.
5. Fasting expresses earnestness and urgency in our prayers.
6. Fasting aids prayer and empowers faith.

58. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A SUPPLIED LIFE

The Christian life must be supplied by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We cannot manufacture, compose, or produce the Christian life for ourselves through education, determination, self-discipline, or self-reliance (John 10:10; 15; Eph. 3:17-19; Phil 4:19).

59. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

There are stages to spiritual growth. When we first receive Christ as our Lord and Savior, the believer is a “newborn babe” (1 Peter 2:2). In this stage of spiritual development, the Christian is fully saved, yet very vulnerable, unstable, and often gloriously enthusiastic. The “baby Christian” must grow in Christ, by taking in Biblical truth and practicing faith and trust in God (Eph. 4:12-13; Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Peter 1:5-6). The goal of spiritual growth is maturity in which the believer is stable and responsible. Spiritual growth is more process than event oriented (Heb. 6:1-3; 1 John 2:12-14).

60. CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP/LOVE

Christian relationships are the most unique and important of all human relationships (John 13:34-35; Gal. 5:13). The common element of every Christian relationship has to do with common spiritual heritage. We have the same Father (God), the same Elder Brother (Jesus) and the same indwelling Spirit (Holy Spirit) (Eph. 4:4-6; Col. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). This means that we are in an eternal brother and sister relationship with each other. The driving force in Christian relationships is love (agape love). This love compels us to serve one another, give

preference to one another, honor one another and protect one another (1 John 5:1-2; Rom. 13:9-10).

61. LEGALISM

Legalism began in the Garden of Eden when Eve added to the command of the Lord (Gen. 3). Legalism includes humanity's attempts to gain acceptance from God through individual effort and determination (Eph. 2:8-9). It is a great temptation, because it involves self-reliance and self-sufficiency (Gal. 3:1-3). However, legalism is totally ineffective (Matt. 23:23; Col. 2:8). We must resist the temptation to make ourselves acceptable to God, or to create unBiblical rules for others to follow (Col. 2:8; Gal. 5:1-5). However, we should never confuse legalism with the clear Biblical call for believers to lead lives of obedience to Christ (John 15:10; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

62. SUFFERING

Christians are not exempt from suffering (Matt. 5:10-12; 2 Cor. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:12-19). Sometimes we suffer due to our sin. However, suffering can also be due to the sins of others, the fact that we live in a fallen world, to glorify Christ, or for unknown reasons (Phil 1:20; Heb. 2:14-15; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 2:20; 3:17). We can learn obedience from suffering. (Hebrews 5:8)

63. GOD'S DISCIPLINE

God disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:5-11). The purpose of God's discipline is to perfect our faith (Rev. 3:19), hone our character (1 Cor. 11:32) and make adjustments to our lifestyle to be in accordance with God's will (Heb. 12:10).

64. SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Mankind is involved in a great spiritual war between the forces of God and the forces of evil (Eph. 2:2-3; Isa. 14:12-15; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:3-17). The Bible teaches that our spiritual enemy, Satan, has great power (Rom. 8:38-39; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-13; Rev. 13:6-7), tremendous earthly authority, a potent spiritual organization of evil and a plan to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10; 8:44). While Christians must not be demon oriented, or preoccupied, we must understand our true identity and position in Christ and employ the authority of Christ to combat the determined attacks of Satan (Eph. 4:26-27).

65. DEMONIZATION

Demonization is the *relative* control of Satan, over, or in, an individual's life. It is therefore possible for a Christian to be influenced by demons. There can be a wide spectrum of control. However, a Christian can never be *possessed* by Satan or demons.

66. GOD SPEAKS TODAY

In one sense, as it relates to revelation regarding Himself and salvation, God is done speaking (Heb. 1:1-3). All of what He wants to say to us is given in His Son. The primary and the most authoritative means of God's guidance is through the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We must be guided by Scripture if we sense God may be speaking to us through circumstances, nature, dreams, or

other people. We must be mindful always to check Scripture to assure the accuracy of our understanding (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Peter 3:16).

CHURCH APPLICATION

67. OUR SOLE AUTHORITY

Since the Bible is God’s inspired word that is true and without error, it is our sole source for determining the purpose and structure of the church (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 16:9; 29:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 2 Pet. 1:21).

68. GOD’S CHURCH, GOD’S WAY

The church belongs to Christ (Matt. 16:18; 28:18-20; 1 Peter 2:4), not to the elders, deacons, members, or any organization. Since the church belongs to Christ, it is to be managed, led, and practiced His way (Rom. 12:4-8). This approach to the church is thoroughly described in the New Testament (Acts 2:41-47). Our responsibility is to seek unity and avoid dissention in our pursuit of God’s church, God’s way. (Eph. 4:4-6; Rom.16:17-18).

69. VISION OF THE CHURCH

The vision of FBCTC is to become a thoroughly biblical church that passionately seeks God’s manifested presence and leadership (2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12; Prov. 3:5-6; John 4:23-24; 8:31-32; Matt. 22:36-38; Rom. 8:14).

70. PURPOSE-DRIVEN CHURCH

A church should be driven by its purpose, not by personalities, traditions, money, or outside influences (1 Cor. 10:31).

71. PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The purpose of FBCTC is to build believers who reach others for Christ. The ultimate objective is to glorify Christ in every aspect of life and in all relationships (Matt. 22:37-38; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; John 20:21; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; James 4:8; 1 John 5:20; Matt. 22:39-40; John 15:8).

72. PRINCIPLES OF MINISTRY

The ministry of FBCTC is to be overseen and directed by the principles of God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12; John 15:7-11; Acts 17:11).

73. METHODS ARE NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH PURPOSE

Our God-given purpose will never change. It is our understanding that methods must change as the needs of people change (Matt. 9:27-30; Mark 8:22-23; John 9:1-7; 1 Cor. 9:22-23).

74. SPIRITUAL NEEDS VARY

The spiritual needs of believers and nonbelievers (seekers) differ vastly. Believers who have a personal relationship with God need to worship God and be taught biblical truths. People who are seeking a relationship with God need a trustworthy and safe haven to investigate the claims of Christ. We are committed to strive for excellence in developing ministries that are sensitive to these varied needs. (1 Cor. 9:22-23; 14:22-25; Col. 4:2-6; Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil 3:13-14; Heb. 5:12-14).

75. RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTED EVANGELISM

Trusting God is a process that is most effectively facilitated through relationships between believers and non-believers. Salvation is a result of repentance and receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior. In a practical way, the Lord often uses believers to lead their non-believing friends to Christ. As a result, FBCTC is committed to relational-process driven evangelism, rather than emphasizing program-driven evangelism.

A. Relationships are part of the Holy Spirit's awakening of the non-believer's spirit that leads to salvation (regeneration). As Philip brought Nathanael to see Jesus, we should bring non-believers to Jesus (John 1:40-48; 12:20-22).

B. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness of our Lord to nonbelievers (Acts 1:8).

C. Our conduct as believers should be beyond question so as to be a useful testimony of our Lord in our lives to non-believers who know us (Col. 4:4-6).

76. EVERY BELIEVER A MINISTER

Every believer is a minister, gifted by God for the benefit of the body of Christ. Every believer receives at least one spiritual gift at the time of salvation. Through these gifts, believers find fulfillment and effectiveness in serving Christ. Therefore, we are dedicated to assisting believers in discovering, developing and demonstrating their gifts. We are also committed to a church organization that is structured to utilize these gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Peter 4:10).

77. WORSHIP

We believe that worship is one of the great privileges of the Christian life. There are many different ways to worship God. Christians have absolute freedom, within a biblical context, to worship the Lord and ascribe to Him the immense value of His worthiness (Rom. 12:1-2; Rev. 22:8-9; John 4:23-24; Col. 3:16; Isa. 6:3; Heb. 10:25; Rom. 14:13-23).

78. MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Music in worship may have many different expressions. It is the purpose and lyrics of the music, not the notes, rhythm or meter that distinguishes Christian music. Worship is a celebratory experience enjoying the presence of God who delights in the praises of His people. (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12; Ps. 95:1-2; Ps. 98:1-8; Ps. 150).

79. EVALUATING PROPRIETY IN WORSHIP

God is to be worshipped in the ways He prescribes. The guidelines for worship are not found in tradition, personal opinion, or even personal partiality. The Bible, particularly the New Testament, provides these instructions for worship. We will limit our expressions in public worship to these activities that are edifying to the corporate church body (John 4:23-24; Rom. 12:1-2; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 12:28-29).

80. OUR “BUSINESS”

Changed lives are our “business.” The truths of the Bible ministered in grace within the fellowship of believers, produces changed lives. We must always ask ourselves, “How is business?” (Rom. 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:16).

81. HOW WE CHANGE

Helping people improve their relationship with God is a more urgent need than confronting their actions. Our focus is to affect change from the inside out, not from the outside in. Society is best changed by changed people (Luke 19:1-9; John 8:1-11; John 12:1-11).

CHURCH PRACTICE

82. COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

Ministry is a reflection of our love for God and therefore should be done with excellence (2 Tim. 2:15, 21).

83. ULTIMATE VALUES

Christian character, attitude, love (1 Cor. 13:13) and integrity (Prov. 10:9; 11:3) are of ultimate value in all that we do.

84. WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

To worship in spirit translates to worshipping with enthusiasm. We offer vibrant worship—reflecting our gratitude for what God has done, and anticipation of His future movements of power within the church. It is not optional to worship in the spirit as we are commanded to worship in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Unless our spirit is worshipping we are not truly worshipping (Eph. 5:18-20).

85. ACCEPTING GOD'S GRACE AND OFFERING IT TO OTHERS

God's grace, unmerited favor, has been given to us as the gift of salvation (Rom. 3:23-24; Eph. 2:8-9). As we attempt to imitate Christ in our daily life we are to demonstrate grace to others (1 Peter 4:8-10).

86. GODLY SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Our leaders are to be godly servants at heart. They are to be humble in nature, looking out for the good of the body, protecting us in love and feeding us with the Word (Luke 22:26-27; Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 3:1-10; Titus 1:5-9).

87. HELPING FAMILIES BUILD STRONG FOUNDATIONS BASED UPON GOD'S WORD

The relationships of husband, wife and children to each other are critical matters of instruction in the New Testament (Eph. 5:18-6:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Col. 3:18-21; 2 Tim. 3:14-17).

88. EVANGELIZING AND DISCIPLING

It is the duty of every believer to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ as we surrender to, and cooperate with, God as He uses us to communicate the gospel of Christ. 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 (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:20).

89. A TEAM APPROACH TO MINISTRY

As each believer is gifted with at least one spiritual gift at salvation, utilizing these gifts in an effective way is one of the goals of the church. Every member is a minister as these gifts are discovered, developed and demonstrated. We effectively utilize these gifts as we participate in team ministries. The New Testament provides many examples of teams involved in ministry—from Paul and Barnabas to the Disciples of Jesus (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 4:11-13).

90. CHURCH SIZE AND NUMERICAL GROWTH

Church size should be determined by the Lord's work in leading people to the church, not predetermined by some human scheme of measurement. Numerical growth should not be used as the criterion for judging success of the church. The first church was a very large church. Larger churches can become truly metropolitan in nature. A larger church can offer a wider variety of specialized ministries than may not be offered by smaller churches. There is an important place in our community for all sizes of churches (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:46-47; Acts 6:1; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

91. SOCIAL ACTIVISM

God's primary methods of social activism are prayer, evangelism, discipleship and Christian unity. Our faith working through God's love is the answer to the woes of the world. (Matt. 28:19; Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:12-13; Gal. 5:6; James 2:8-9, 16-17; 2 Tim. 2:4).

92. JUDGING SUCCESS IN CHURCH WORK

Success in the ministry is not to be calculated by the number of people in attendance, the growth rate, or the size of the offering. Instead, success is to be measured in terms of biblical standards. A successful church has many emphases including preaching and teaching biblical truth, observing the ordinances, demonstrating church discipline, worshipping in spirit and in truth and emphasizing prayer, witnessing and fellowship. In addition, the successful church has a biblical form of church government, experiences genuine spiritual power in ministry, encourages personal holiness in the lives of its members, and pursues the ministries of Jesus thereby bringing glory to Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:42-47; Rev. 2; Rev. 3).

CONCLUSION

93. A CHURCH THAT GLORIFIES GOD

God is building His Church. It is the passion and commitment of all who embrace these words to pursue this kind of church.

Church Family Relational Commitments

First Baptist Church of
The Colony, TX

Relational Commitments

At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That's where these Commitments come in. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines. These Commitments accomplish several important purposes:

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby insure that all members are treated fairly.
- Finally, they reduce our church's exposure to legal liability by clearly establishing our relational practices and by affirming our mutual commitment to resolve conflict biblically.

A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Two boys, John and Luke, lost their mother at a young age. When they were in their teens, their father was reported to have died when his plane crashed into the ocean. The boys had no other relatives, so two neighboring families took them in.

The Friendly family did all they could to make John feel welcome in their home. They gave him his own bedroom, provided his meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. Not wanting him to feel any pressure, they did not explain to him any of the family rules. Instead they hoped that he would notice how their other children behaved and decide on his own to act the same way.

Not knowing exactly what was expected of him, John frequently disappointed the family by violating unspoken rules. Feeling judged and unconnected to the family, he became increasingly independent. He came and went at any hour, played loud music, and spent long hours in his room with a variety of girls. When Mr. Friendly finally tried to talk with him about his behavior, John said, "I'm not your son, so you have no right to tell me how to live my life. I like having a bedroom and meals whenever I decide to be here, but I'll still do whatever seems right to me."

Tensions continued to build, and finally Mr. Friendly asked John to leave. Fortunately for John, there was another Friendly family in town, and they were happy to take him in. But there the cycle started all over again.

John's brother had an entirely different experience. Luke was taken in by the Loving family. They wanted him to feel welcome, so they gave him a room, provided meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. But they also wanted to avoid misunderstandings and conflict. So shortly after Luke arrived, Mr. Loving explained the family rules to Luke, so he would know how to get along with the rest of the family. He said, "Even though you are not my son, I will be glad to look out for you the best I can. But as long as you are in my home, I also will expect you to behave as my other children do."

Like any normal teenager, Luke sometimes broke the rules. When he did, Mr. Loving sat down with him, pointed out what he'd done wrong, and held him accountable to the same standards he had established for his other children. Luke sometimes resented this discipline, but he eventually realized it was always done in love, and it kept him out of a lot of trouble.

After a few months, Mr. Loving approached Luke and said, "Since you are living here like part of the family, we would like to make it official. If you feel this is where you'd like to stay, we'd like to adopt you and make you our son."

Luke gladly accepted and formally committed himself to the family. In doing so, he changed from being an orphan who merely resided in the home to being a son who willingly accepted and enjoyed all of the same responsibilities and privileges of his new brothers and sisters.

Suppose that John and Luke’s father is rescued from an island two years later. When he is reunited with his sons and hears what has happened to them, which family will he thank the most? The Friendly family, who were kind enough to give John a place to hang out, but could not bring themselves to give him any boundaries? Or the Loving family, who welcomed Luke in, held him accountable to the same rules as the rest of the family, and invited him to be a son?

The answer is obvious. And there is a real Father who one day will evaluate the way we care for the people who come into our church family. Therefore, we are glad to welcome people and give them a place to worship, grow and serve. But being “friendly” is not good enough. We want to be loving, as God defines loving (Heb. 12:5-6; 10:24). Therefore, we will encourage and expect everyone who attends our church to live out the biblical principles that are summarized in these Relational Commitments.

And when people have lived like part of our family for a while, we will encourage them to “make it official.” Living like an orphan, with its illusion of independence and self-determination, may seem appealing to some. But it cannot compare to the security, privileges, and sense of belonging that come from joining a biblical church and living as truly committed brothers and sisters in the family of God

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).

Our church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us His wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to trust God and seek His help in living out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will seek reconciliation without delay (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).

- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others' interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration.

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will be a means of spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy (and peace) of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, he established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ and have found repentance and forgiveness in coming to Christ and sought reconciliation where possible. Others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others, even after professing faith in Christ, may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and received the forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus and sought reconciliation where possible. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide serious premarital counseling to help couples enter into marriage advisedly, and be well-prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in our small-group ministry where they can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to helping individuals and couples receive biblical counsel and support when they face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

Diversity of Viewpoints on Divorce and Remarriage at FBC The Colony

The leaders of FBC The Colony are not entirely of one mind on the legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. For example, some of us see the scripture forbidding remarriage after divorce as long as both spouses are living, no matter what the circumstances of the divorce were.

We believe Jesus calls us in this way to the radical display of the unbreakable covenant commitment between him and his church.

Others of us, believe that the scripture permits divorce under the limited circumstances of unrepentant adultery or decisive abandonment or protracted life-endangerment. In these cases we believe the marriage truly ends and the reconciliation-desiring, aggrieved spouse is free to remarry in the Lord.

Statement of Guidelines for Mutual Accountability

In view of these differences among us, we agree to live by the following guidelines concerning the nurturing of marriages and the exercise of redemptive church discipline wherever needed.

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse decisively and physically deserts the relationship, commits repeated, unrepentant adultery, or is guilty of protracted, unrepentant life-endangerment (1 Cor. 7:15; Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). We do not believe that divorce must be the last word. Even after long periods of separation and alienation, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness (Hosea 2:14-23).

We want to emphasize that the phrase "divorce may be permitted" holds out the possibility that inquiry may reveal that the deserted partner engaged in a wrong behavior that drove the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. And we want to stress that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to separation or divorce even where adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew 18:21-22, "Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'" (see Luke 17:3-4.)

4. The remarriage of a divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behavior did not biblically justify being divorced, may be free to remarry a believer (Matthew 19:9), if he or she has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes.

Recognizing the honest and devout differences of conviction in the church, those of us with more limiting standards for remarriage consent at this point not to make them normative for the whole body. Others of us, who regard this fourth statement as fully Biblical, respect those among us with a more limiting interpretation and do not require or expect them to act in any way against their consciences in attending, supporting or performing enactments of marriage they regard as contrary to Scripture.

All of us urge every member who contemplates remarriage to struggle in prayer and study with all the relevant Scriptures, with the sole aim of glorifying God through full obedience to his word. Consider fairly the arguments against remarriage and those for it.

Moreover we want to affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service both before marriage and after divorce or death. It is commended in 1 Corinthians 7:7,11,32-35, and elevated by the examples of Jesus and Paul and hundreds of great single saints.

5. After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation the aggrieved partner referred to in guideline #3 may, together with the leadership of the church, come to regard the marriage as irreparably broken. In such cases remarriage may be a legitimate step, if taken with serious reckoning that this cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation that God may yet be willing to produce. (See Guideline #7)

6. The aggrieving partners referred to in #3 (who were guilty of abandonment, adultery or life-endangerment) should repent and be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Corinthians 7:11; 1 John 1:9). If it is too late because their spouses have remarried, then they should remain single because they left their first marriage without Biblical warrant (Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:11).

7. If a second marriage ends in death or divorce, the widow or widower in this case is not permitted to return to the first spouse in marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

8. The amount of time that has passed and the change in standing from unbeliever to believer does not alter the application of the guidelines for divorce and remarriage (See Matthew 19:4-6 which highlights the fact that enduring marriages are part of God's plan for all his human creation, not just his redeemed people.)

Even though divorce is permissible under the circumstances described above, we want to stress that it is not required. It is not the best testimony to the covenant-keeping love of Christ and his church. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with seeming dissolution. Therefore, when a member of FBC The Colony is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our pastors/elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, and

as they endeavor to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is warranted according to the guidelines mentioned above, and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends his love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done what the scripture requires to rebuild broken relationships.

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Prov. 27:12a).

Children are a blessing from God, and he calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a place of safety and blessing for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen at FBC The Colony, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children and youth from foreseeable harm.

If a child or youth is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also regularly review our policies, practices and procedures, to consider changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

Our goal in providing Biblical Counseling is that we may “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col.1:28). We believe that the Bible is God-inspired guidance, instruction and power for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling relies on Biblical teachings and principles applied with “all wisdom” through the Holy Spirit to each situation we counsel. We are committed to asking the question, “What does Scripture say regarding this matter?” and to counseling in the light of the response to this question.

We believe that Christ has equipped His body, the church, to provide wisdom, knowledge and instruction to one another (Rom.15:14) in order for each member to live a godly and holy life, pleasing God in all ways. Christ has also equipped His church with spiritually mature leaders who are able to shepherd, lead, teach, and counsel others (Heb.5:11-14) in the church. Though the educational and experiential background of each leader who counsels at FBC The Colony is unique, the essential training and practice for all leaders who counsel at FBC The Colony centers around their ability to apply Scripture to the situation they are counseling. For this reason, those who counsel for FBC The Colony do not present themselves as psychotherapists nor mental health professionals but as Biblical counselors.

In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the role of leaders in the church that provide “spiritual counsel” these clarifications should be kept in mind.

1. Leaders who provide spiritual counsel may also be trained in other areas of life that are outside of the realm of providing spiritual counsel. Thus, if a doctor provides “spiritual counsel” through the church, you need to understand that this is separate from his providing “medical counsel” at his clinic.
2. God calls the leaders in His church to set an example in “speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). If any leader should not live up to this standard in any counseling situation, the counselee needs to report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.
3. Confidentiality is an important factor in establishing a relationship to receive spiritual counsel. The leader providing spiritual counsel will keep confidentiality except in the following situations:
 - when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);

- when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20);
- when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

Providing spiritual counsel requires a relationship between the leader and the counselee. Occasionally there may arise a misunderstanding between the counselor and the counselee. We require our members to handle these misunderstandings in a Biblical way. This includes being willing to submit to legally binding arbitration rather than filing a lawsuit and also not attempting to require a “spiritual counselor” to appear in court or to provide his notes.

Our desire is to provide “wise, spiritual, godly counsel” to each person in our church. By sharing these guidelines, we hope the “Biblical counseling” offered at FBC The Colony will help many become “mature in Christ”.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all Covenant Members of FBC The Colony.

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God’s Love

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that he sent His Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate purpose for His church is to present her as a gift to His Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the “bride” of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God’s mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as “discipline.” The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. “The Lord disciplines those he loves” (Heb. 12:6). “Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law” (Ps. 94:12). “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (Rev. 3:19).

God’s discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as “formative discipline,” involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions God’s discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called “corrective” or “restorative” discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13). 2-14

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

Similarly, in the church, we need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in His Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The pastors/elders and leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Gal. 5:23). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. “If he will not listen, take one or two others along” (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher, church leader, or elder. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called “formal discipline.”

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If a member persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to “tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church pastors/elders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our pastors/elders may approach the member privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The member will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the member recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our pastors/elders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our pastors/elders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including, but not limited to, private and public admonition, withholding of the Lord’s Supper, removal from office, withdrawal of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removal from membership (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If the straying member does not repent in response to private appeals from our pastors/elders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person’s behavior. This step may include close friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, or the entire congregation if our pastors/elders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the member still refuses to change, then our pastors/elders may bring the situation before the congregation, with the recommendation that the member be removed from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the member as an unbeliever.* This means that we will no longer treat the member as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the member, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him or her, remind him or her of God’s holiness and mercy, and call him or her to repent and put his or her faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

For example, it is not uncommon for a person to attend a church, develop relationships of trust, persuade people to give him money to invest, and then fail to return the money as promised. Senior citizens are particularly vulnerable to these schemes, and many people have lost much of what they had saved for retirement. When such sinful men are discovered, they usually leave a church, but continue to prey on members who have not heard about their schemes. If our leaders found such a man in our church, they would call him to repent and confess his wrongs. If he refused, they would bring him under formal discipline, and also warn the congregation not to trust him with their money.

If our leaders inform our entire congregation about a disciplinary situation, they have discretion whether to divulge the member's name. This decision usually will depend on a variety of factors, such as: how widely known the situation already is; whether there might be people in the congregation who could persuade the member to repent; or whether the congregation needs to be on guard against potential harm he or she might cause (see previous footnote). Even if our leaders decide it is not necessary to identify a member specifically, they may still inform the congregation of the general situation and the disciplinary steps they have followed. This general information can help to enlist wide prayer support, let the congregation know that our leaders are obeying the Lord's command to seek after those who stray, and warn people who may be flirting with secret sin that they, too, may face discipline if they do not turn back to God.

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability while discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop the process of discipline until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our pastors/elders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the member to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the member find freedom from his or her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If a member repents, and our pastors/elders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

People who have been disciplined by another church will not be allowed to become members at FBC The Colony until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our pastors/elders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10-11).

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

We believe that God wants every Christian to become a member of a local church. To learn why, please read Joshua Harris's book, *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Body of Christ*, and the third chapter of Donald Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*.

Becoming a member of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life. Therefore, we want you to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God's command to build His church (1 Cor. 14:26), and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

We invite you to attend our membership class. During that class you can learn more about our church's doctrines and vision for ministry, and about the privileges and responsibilities of formal membership. Attending the class will not obligate you to become a member.

If attending the membership class convinces you that joining our church will help you grow in your ability to love and serve God, we would be delighted to have you become a member of our body. By joining our church, you will demonstrate in a concrete way your desire to unite with us to advance Christ's mission in the world. Membership also will allow you to enjoy ministry opportunities and privileges that are not available to people who only attend our church, including the following:

- You may participate and vote in congregational meetings, where we seek to discern and plan how to follow God’s vision for our church.
- If you need counseling or support from our pastors/elders when their time is limited, your request for assistance will take precedence over requests from people who have not joined the church.
- There are some teaching and leadership ministries that are only open to members.

If you would like to learn more about the importance of church membership, please read the books mentioned above. You may also meet with our pastors/elders, who would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about membership.