

Introduction

In this document, our goal is to clearly articulate our stance on what we believe about the local church and its practices. Our deepest desire is to be as biblically accurate in our teachings and practices as possible; therefore the conclusions written in this document are based on the careful study of the scriptures by the leadership of TWCC. Alterations, modifications, and/or additions to this document will only occur based on conclusions after careful exegesis of the scriptures by the elders of TWCC.

We understand that there are differences in views within the body of Christ on every one of the subjects that will be discussed in this document, and we do not expect everyone in our congregation to hold to them. These conclusions are not a matter of dividing over, but rather to clearly express our stance on church life and practices. A person may be a covenant partner, leader and/or staff member of the church even though they may not hold to all of the conclusions written in this document, so long as they can affirm our entire ***Statement of Unity***.

However, in order to maintain unity in the body, covenant partners and/or leadership of the church will not be permitted to *teach* anything contrary to the conclusions as expressed in this document. Any attempt to teach things contrary to this document would be deemed as an attempt to cause division in the church.

If there are any questions to be answered, or if any points need further clarification, or if there is any issue with the conclusions in this document, we strongly request that a meeting would be scheduled with the pastoral leadership of the church in order to discuss. All questions, comments, and even disputes will be welcomed gladly and dealt with gently. To schedule an appointment, call our office at 559.456.1200 or email info@thewordfresno.org.

IN THIS DOCUMENT, WE WILL DISCUSS:

1. What We Believe About the Local Church, and Church Government
2. What We Believe About Roles & Qualifications for Eldership
3. What We Believe About Roles & Qualifications for Deacons
4. What We Believe About Men & Women's Roles in the Local Church
5. What We Believe About Spiritual Gifts
6. What We Believe About Baptism
7. What We Believe About Communion
8. What We Believe About Church Discipline
9. What We Believe About Tithes and Offerings

What We Believe About the Local Church

What is the church? Why does it exist? What is its purpose? These questions are best answered by first examining what God's plan and purpose is for creating the universe. Why did God create everything?

- All things were created by him and for him (**Colossians1:16**)
- The heavens declare the glory of God (**Psalms19:1**)

- God's invisible qualities, eternal power and divine nature are seen through creation (**Romans 1:20**)
- God desires to display His glory among the nations (**Ezekiel 39:21; Romans 9:17**)

GOD CREATED EVERYTHING TO DISPLAY HIS GLORY.

What is God's glory? God's "Glory" is when His character and attributes go on display.

His Character and Attributes Include

- Holiness
- Righteousness
- Justice
- Love
- Grace
- Mercy
- Wrath

All of these attributes are displayed most clearly at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Cross of Christ is one of the clearest expressions of the fullness of God's character in one event.

GOD'S GLORY IS MOST CLEARLY SEEN IN THE GOSPEL

How does God plan to get this message of the Cross of Christ out?

"So that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." (Eph. 3:10)

GOD HAS CHOSEN THE CHURCH TO BE THE REVEALERS OF HIS GLORY (THE GOSPEL)

The word "church" comes from the Greek Word "Ekklesia" which means "the assembly". The bible never gives an explicit verse telling us the definition of what the church is or what it does. However, the bible gives several word pictures about the church.

NT images of the church:

- **The body of Christ**
[Ro 12:4-5](#) See also [1Co 12:12,27](#); [Eph 3:6](#); [Eph 5:23](#); [Col 1:18,24](#); [Col 2:19](#); [Col 3:15](#)
- **God's building or temple**
[1Co 3:16-17](#) See also [1Co 3:10](#); [2Co 6:16](#); [Eph 2:21-22](#); [Heb 3:6](#); [Heb 10:21](#); [1Pe 2:5](#)
- **A plant or vine**
[Jn 15:1-8](#) See also [Ro 11:17-24](#); [1Co 3:6-8](#)
- **Jesus Christ's flock**
[Jn 10:14-16](#) See also [Mt 25:33](#); [Lk 12:32](#); [Ac 20:28-29](#); [1Pe 5:2-4](#)
- **The bride of Christ**
[Rev 21:2](#) See also [Eph 5:25-27,31-32](#); [Rev 19:7](#); [Rev 22:17](#)
- **God's household or family**

[Eph 2:19](#) See also [Jn 8:35-36](#); [Gal 6:10](#); [Eph 3:15](#); [1Ti 3:15](#); [Heb 2:11](#); [1Pe 2:17](#); [1Pe 4:17](#)

Other than the imagery of word pictures, the bible also tells us in various places things that were expected of the church. For example...

The Church is the Organization God Established to:

- **Matthew 28:18-20: Make disciples**
- **Matthew 24:14: Preach the gospel (make His glory known) to all nations before His return**
- **Ephesians 3:10, 21: Reveal the glory of God to the angelic realm**
- **Colossians 1:24: Be Christ's body**
- **1 Timothy 3:15: Be the pillar and foundation of truth**

The bible also clearly lays out an organizational structure with leaders and laity in the church. The church is an organization consisting of Saints, Deacons and Elders:

Saints comprise of every believer of the gospel. Saints are to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12) by making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them (Matthew 28:18-20), and exercising spiritual gifts to serve others (Romans 12:6; 1 Cor. 14:1, 12; 1 Peter 4:10).

Every Christian is a Saint.

Deacons are expected to handle the everyday needs of the local church they represent so that the elders can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.
(Acts 6:1-5)

Elders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12) as well as lead them (1 Timothy 5:17) and take care of God's church (1 Timothy 3:5).

An easy way to remember is that saints are called to do ministry in the world. Elders and Deacons are called to do ministry in the church.

What We Believe About the Local Church

The Purpose of the Church Starts With the Purpose of Creation

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His Character and Attributes Include:

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All of these attributes are displayed most clearly at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Cross of Christ is one of the clearest expressions of the fullness of God's character in one event. *God's glory is most clearly seen in the gospel*

God Has Chosen the Church to Be the Revealers of His Glory (The Gospel)

How does God plan to get this message of the Cross of Christ out?

"So that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." (Eph. 3:10)

Church Defined

It's important to know that the church does not refer to a building or a place. The church is the universal group of people consisting of every believer in Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#)). Once you

submit yourself to the Lordship of Christ and put your faith in Him you are grafted into the church ([Acts 2:41, 47](#)). It's also important to know that though there is one universal church which includes all of the believers around the world, there are also other "sub-churches" underneath that universal umbrella. Paul would write his letters to "the church of God in Corinth", making a distinction between that church and a church in another city. We even find multiple churches within a single city when Paul writes to the "to the churches (plural) in Galatia". And even on a smaller scale, he writes to Philemon and "the church that [met] in [his] home".

The word translated "church" in our English bibles is the Greek word "ekklēsia" which is a feminine noun meaning "the called out ones". Thayer's Bible Dictionary defines the church as "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly"¹. We are called out from the world, into a gathering of people saved and sanctified by the blood of Jesus. This group of called out ones is referred to in the New Testament as the church, the body, the elect, the believers, the brethren, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, golden candlesticks, God's building... and the list goes on. We are given pictures of what the church looks like through things that God has created.

NT images of the church:

- **The body of Christ:** Ro 12:4-5 See also 1Co 12:12,27; Eph 3:6; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18,24; Col 2:19; Col 3:15
- **God's building or temple:** 1Co 3:16-17 See also 1Co 3:10; 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:21-22; Heb 3:6; Heb 10:21; 1Pe 2:5
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- **Jesus Christ's flock:** Jn 10:14-16 See also Mt 25:33; Lk 12:32; Ac 20:28-29; 1Pe 5:2-4
- **The bride of Christ:** Rev 21:2 See also Eph 5:25-27,31-32; Rev 19:7; Rev 22:17
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Church Structure

The bible also clearly lays out an organizational structure with leaders and laity in the church. The church is an organization containing Saints, Deacons and Elders:

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Every Christian is a Saint.

Deacons are expected to handle the everyday needs of the local church they represent so that the elders can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

(Acts 6:1-5)

Elders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12) as well as lead them (1 Timothy 5:17) and take care of God's church (1 Timothy 3:5).

Simply put: saints are called to do ministry (service) in the world, while elders and deacons are called to do ministry in the church.

Submission to Church Leadership

We believe that submission to church elders is a biblical command, according to Hebrews 13:17

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

The purpose of this command is so that:

- The congregation would be taken care of (“for they watch out for your souls”)
- The elders know who they are accountable for (“...as those who must give an account”)
- The elders' leadership is joyful, and not burdensome (“...let them do so with joy and not with grief”)
- The congregation would profit (“...for that would be unprofitable for you [if you do not obey and submit]”)

This simply means that we are not to rebel or cause disunity in the church. This does not mean that elders can dictate every aspect of a Christian's life. Church elders have no authority except that which the bible explicitly commands. We believe that a Christian's submission and obedience is first and foremost to God Himself as written in His word and directed by the Holy Spirit. Submission to church leadership is only in honor of their primary submission and obedience to Christ Himself; therefore no Christian is bound to obey or submit to church leadership in things that God has directed otherwise.

If a Christian believes that his leadership is in sin, then they must follow the biblical guidelines to resolve the situation set forth in [Matthew 18:15–17](#), [1 Timothy 5:19](#), and other places.

What We Believe About Roles & Qualifications for Eldership

What is an Elder?

The word “elder” in the bible is translated from the Greek word “presbuteros”, meaning senior, presbyter, or one of rank or office. It was commonly used by Jews to describe leaders of the Jewish High Counsel (the Sanhedrin). The word was used by Christians to describe those who presided over the assemblies (or churches).

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”

Titus 1:5

What is an Overseer?

The word “overseer” is translated from the Greek word “episkopos”, meaning a superintendent, that is, a Christian officer in general charge of a (or the) church: bishop, overseer. Thayer’s bible dictionary defines this word as “a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent”.

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach...”

Titus 1:7

What is a Bishop?

The word “bishop” is translated from the Greek word “episcopo” which is translated into “Bishop” or “overseer” in many translations, meaning inspection, investigation, and visitation. Thayer’s bible dictionary defines this word as:

- 1) investigation, inspection, visitation
 - 1a) that act by which God looks into and searches out the ways, deeds character, of men, in order to adjudge them their lot accordingly, whether joyous or sad
 - 1b) oversight
 - 1b1) overseership, office, charge, the office of an elder
 - 1b2) the overseer or presiding officers of a Christian church

“The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer (or bishop), he desires a noble task.”

1 Timothy 3:1

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

The NT uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably (See Titus 1:5-7).

Church Elders in the New Testament did the following:

- Instructed and Directed the affairs of the church (Acts 15:22-24; Acts 16:4)
- Resolved issues of conflict in the church (Acts 15:1-6)
- Distributed the offerings of the church (Acts 11:29-30)
- Commissioned ministers (Acts 15:22; 1 Timothy 4:14)
- Preached and taught (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Prayed for the sick in the church (James 5:14)

What Are the Qualifications for an Elder?

Titus 1:5-16:

- Above Reproach
- Husband of one wife
- Children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination
- Not arrogant
- Not quick tempered
- Not a drunkard
- Not violent
- Not greedy for gain
- Hospitable
- Lover of good
- Self-controlled
- Upright
- Holy
- Disciplined
- Holds firmly to the trustworthy word as taught
- Able to give instruction in sound doctrine
- Rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine

1 Timothy 3:1-13 adds:

- Sober-minded
 - Gentle
 - Not a lover of money
 - Able to manager his own household well
 - Able to care for God's church
 - Not be a recent convert
 - Must be well thought of by outsiders
 - Wife must be dignified and faithful
-

What We Believe About Roles & Qualifications for Deacons

It is important to clearly define what a deacon is and what a deacon is not, as well as explain what is expected of deacons serving at The Word Community Church (TWCC).

“What is a Deacon?”

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word “diakonos” which means: attendant, servant, errand runner. The word “diakonos” is used 30 times in the New Testament, and its derivative “diakoneō” is used 40 times. However, it is only translated “deacon” five times in the KJV (six in the NIV). The other 64 times the words are used they are translated as “servant” or “minister”. Though the word is often translated as “minister”, it is not in the context of ministering the word of God, but rather ministering to needs, such as waiting tables. Though every Christian is a “diakonos” to some extent, the bible is clear that there is a unique role of deacon reserved for a select few.

A deacon is not:

- An elder
- A pastor
- A teacher
- An evangelist
- A prophet
- A preacher
- An authority figure in the church

Recap on Church Structure:

To help understand the role of a deacon, it is helpful to understand the role of the church. The church’s role is to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus commanded]” (Matthew 28:19-20). God has chosen the gospel message as the means to make disciples (Romans 1:16). Therefore the churches general responsibility is to get the gospel message out to the general populous and to the nations.

God has established a structure in the church comprised of *elders*, *deacons* and *saints*. **Saints** comprise of every believer of the gospel. Saints are to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12) by making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them. Every Christian is a Saint. **Elders** are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12) as well as lead them (1 Timothy 5:17) and take care of God’s church (1 Timothy 3:5). **Deacons** are expected to handle the everyday needs of the local church they represent so that the elders can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

We see this first in Acts 6:

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to *wait on (diakoneō)* tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’” Acts 6:1-5

The seven men that were chosen were known in church history as the first official deacons (diakonos) of the church. What was their responsibility? To wait on tables so the elders could pray and minister the word. In other words, their responsibility was to handle the everyday needs of the church so that the word could get out more affectively without the elders' attention being deterred by lesser work.

Because every church is different in regards to the needs represented by their congregants, the specific tasks of deacons may change from church to church.

Qualifications of a deacon:

Though a deacon is not an officer of the church in the sense of decision making and/or spiritual authority, deacons are leaders in the church in that they model the type of biblical character that the congregants of the local church they represent should follow. In Acts 6, the Apostles didn't choose just any congregant to take on these seemingly mundane tasks. Rather, they chose men in the church who were well known for their wisdom and strong spiritual life (Acts 6:3).

The bible gives several qualifications for a saint before he could be considered for the role of deacon. A man must be examined in every area in his life: how he indulges in pleasure, how he deals in his business, how he knows and holds to sound doctrine, how he leads his wife and how he raises his children.

"Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well." - 1 Timothy 3:8-12

A questionnaire to be filled out for consideration by the elders could look like this:

1. Do you indulge in alcohol? If so how much and how often?
2. How do you make money?
3. Are you 100% honest with your taxes?
4. Explain the gospel in your own words.
5. Do you believe every point of our statement of faith?
6. Give a short description of how you came to faith.
7. Would you say that your wife is a woman worthy of respect, who doesn't gossip or talk negatively?
8. Is your wife considered temperate and trustworthy in everything?
9. Explain briefly how you try to raise your children.

Areas in TWCC in need of deacons:

Setting up and tearing down of service facilities

Distribution of meals for nursing mothers

Setting up and preparation of communion

Setting up and tearing down of events

Service volunteers and flow (ushers, greeters, worship team, security, audio visual, etc.)

Hospital Visits

(... MORE AREAS TO ADD HERE)

What We Believe About Men & Women's Roles in the Local Church

We Believe in Male Headship in the Home, and the Church

There are two basic views on leadership in the local church:

Egalitarianism: the belief that both men and women can be elders and have equal roles in the church and home.

Complementarianism: the belief that men and women are equal in worth, but are called to complementary roles in certain church offices and in the home

(Definitions borrowed from Church Planter – Copyright © 2010 by Darrin Patrick)

At TWCC, we hold to the complementarian view of the scriptures. This conclusion is based on what we believe to be the plain reading of scripture, as well as thousands of years of church history.

Scriptures to consider:

- 1 Timothy 2:11-15
- 1 Timothy 3:2
- Titus 1:6
- Ephesians 5:22-23
- 1 Corinthians 11:1-16
- 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

Men and women, according to scripture, are both equal in worth and dignity, able to serve in full-time ministry, and both are given gifts of the spirit to operate in for the edification of the church. We believe that God, in His wisdom and according to His purpose, has created men and women equal in value, yet different in roles. Though the roles are different, they complement each other in order to display God's plan, purpose and glory most accurately. Men are not prized or gifted over and above women in any way; they simply are charged with more responsibility and accountability before God.

"The principle of male headship does not in any way diminish the significance and necessity of active female involvement in the home or church."

(Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* - Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995)

Women are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of ministry in the church with the exception of a select few areas that the bible reserves solely for men:

- *Primary teaching roles* – 1 Timothy 2:11-13
- *Elders/Overseers/Bishop (Pastor)* – 1 Timothy 3:2
- *Deacons* – 1 Timothy 3:12

Dealing with Objections to Complementarianism

We understand that this is a highly disputed and often misunderstood subject in our culture. The only reason it's an issue in our culture is exactly that – *our culture*. If we lived in another culture in the world, this subject wouldn't pose as a problem, which validates that many of the objections that come are highly rooted in our cultural distinctions. The rise of feminism (much of which was a necessary reaction in response to the abuses of domineering men) has bucked up against almost all male/female distinctions, and sees almost any view that says that men or women shouldn't do a certain thing as sexist, when that's not the case.

God has a beautiful plan which includes diversity in roles that are distinct, yet complement each other in a glorious way.

Setting the Record Straight

When dealing with objections to complementarianism, it's beneficial to clarify a few things:

Submission is not bad or belittling – Jesus is God incarnate (John 1:1), and yet humbled himself before the Father (Matthew 26:39; 1 Corinthians 15:28)

Male headship does not mean male domination – it would be an abuse of scripture to teach that a woman must obey everything her husband says. That is not male headship.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”
Ephesians 5:22*

*“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”
Colossians 3:18*

According to the bible, women are to submit to their husbands for sure; but a woman's submission to her husbands is only in direct relation to her greater (and primary) submission to God.

A woman's role as “helper” is not disparaging – In Genesis 2:18, God reveals that part of His purpose in creating woman for man was to create a helper suitable for him. The word “helper” is not a demeaning or belittling word, at all. In fact, God reveals himself as our “helper” (Hebrew: Ezer) (Exodus 18:4 and Psalm 33:20, for example).

God calls the man to lead, with the help of his wife. If a man ignores his God-given help in leading his family towards the glory of God, he is not only foolish, but is also held responsible.

Some Misunderstood Scriptures

“The women should keep silent in the churches For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husband at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

- Paul was dealing with a completely carnal, out-of-order church and used very strong language so as to rebuke their errors. It is unclear as to exactly what error Paul was confronting here, but in view of 11:5 and other New Testament passages, it is certain that Paul is not absolutely forbidding women to speak in every church situation. It has been suggested that Paul may have been addressing a particular problem in Corinth, such as women creating disorder during the worship service. At the very least, it is clear that Paul was rebuking the church for their abandonment of the biblical position of male headship.

“But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.”

1 Corinthians 11:5-12

- Should women not cut their hair? Again, Paul is dealing with a church that disregarded biblical male headship. Rather than making a universal command to be followed regarding head coverings, Paul was using a cultural norm to illustrate male headship, and female submission.

What We Believe About Spiritual Gifts

Two Views on the Distribution and Operations of Gifts of the Spirit

Regarding the distribution and operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit today, there are two basic views:

Cessation: Cessationism, in short, teaches that the distribution and normative operation of the gifts of the Spirit as specified in the New Testament ceased with the closing of the canon (the finalization of the bible), and the death of the last apostle.

Continuation: Continuationism, in short, teaches that the distribution and normative operation of the gifts of the Spirit as specified in the New Testament are to continue and should be sought after until Christ returns.

At TWCC, we hold to a continuationist view of the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

“And Peter said to them, “repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Acts 2:38-39

“Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil...”

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

*“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, **but then face to face.** Now I know in part; **then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.**”*

1 Corinthians 13:8-12

Cessationists believe that when 1 Corinthians 13:10 says “but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away” is referring to the bible (that which is perfect) and spiritual gifts (the partial)... however, in light of verse 12, this interpretation is unlikely.

Preliminary Thoughts on Spiritual Gifts:

- We do not believe the bible lists all spiritual gifts (there are several mentioned, but merely as examples, not as an extensive list that we are limited to.

- Thought the bible gives clear directions regarding how certain gifts are to be operated in in the church (for example, tongues and prophesy – see 1 Corinthians 14), it doesn't give much detail as to exactly what the other mentioned gifts look liked in operation in the church.
- We do not believe that your gift has to be recognized in order to be in operation (leadership doesn't have to publicly affirm your gift, and you don't even have to necessarily know what it's called or label it)

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

“...For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

Romans 1:11-12

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 3 THINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

1) Gifts are imparted (given, bestowed, shared)

The Greek word for “imparted” is “metadidōmi” which means *to give over*. In other words, gifts are given to be given. They are given to you to give to others. Spiritual gifts are not given to you for self-gratification, or to put on a show – they are given to you for the sake of others.

2) Spiritual gifts are for the purpose of encouraging others’ faith

This is also echoed in 1 Corinthians 14:26 – “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done *for the strengthening of the church*. Whatever your spiritual gift is, it is designed to stir up and encourage the faith of others.

3) Spiritual gifts are a two-way street (you need mine, and I need yours)

This truth is also seen in 1 Corinthians 12:26 – “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

.....

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 3 THINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

1) There are different gifts, but the same spirit

God is not more concerned with one gift over another – He is equally concerned about all of them as He is the one who gave them – v.4

2) Gifts are service (ministry) – v.5-6

We believe every believer is called to ministry in the world (to evangelize the lost), and in the church (to edify, encourage, or strengthen the faith of others).

3) Gifts are given for the common good – v.7

If you are not exercising your spiritual gift if it does no good for the body

.....

“¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-20

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 2 THINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

1) The church is the living representation of Christ on the Earth (v.12)

Jesus exhibited all of these gifts perfectly during His earthy ministry. When He ascended into heaven, He sent the Spirit to dwell in His followers (John 16:7).

2) We exhibit these gifts perfectly, to the extent of our unit (v.18)

See also Ephesians 4:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 12:21

Developing a Healthy Understanding of Spiritual Gifts

“²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

1 Corinthians 12:21-26

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 3 THINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

1) There is an unhealthy temptation to see some gifts as of lesser importance (v.21)

2) There is an unhealthy temptation to see some gifts as more important (v.22 – 25)

3) Underemphasizing and overemphasizing certain gifts causes the whole church to suffer

.....

“²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. ³⁹ So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.”

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 3 THINGS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

1) *There is a temptation for the church to fall into extremes*

- Extremes on the charismatic side which lead to abuses, and extremes on the conservative side which lead to neglecting or despising spiritual gifts

2) *God desires the gifts to be operated in order*

- For gifts to be operated “decently and in order” doesn’t mean that everyone who sees spiritual gifts in operation will understand, agree with, or even feel comfortable. Undoubtedly many cessationist and conservative Christians would be aghast if they entered an “orderly” church service as specified in 1 Corinthians 14.

“Decently and in order” refers to the fact that each one should exercise his or her gift at the appropriate time (if someone prophesies, do so one at a time... if someone speaks in tongues, there must be an interpreter, etc.), and in accordance with submission to spiritual authority.

3) *Gifts are not an uncontrollable force (v.31 – 32)*

- We do not believe that someone can exercise their spiritual gifts without their active involvement and cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We do not believe that the Holy Spirit forces Christians to exercise their gifts apart from their will by taking control over their body.

What We Believe About the Ascension Gifts (5-Fold Ministry)

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
Ephesians 4:7-13

FROM THIS VERSE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND 4 THINGS ABOUT THE ASCENSION GIFTS:

1) There are gifts from the Spirit, and gifts from the Son – each having different purposes

We do not believe that the gifts listed in this passage are referring to gifts given to the church by the Spirit (as 1 Corinthians 12:11 teaches), but rather these are gifts are given to the church by Jesus ("when HE [Jesus] ascended... HE gave gifts to men..." v.8)

This is why we make a distinction between the Gifts of the Spirit, and the Gifts of Jesus (or the Ascension Gifts, or the 5-fold ministry).

2) These aren't necessarily elders of the church, but every elder must be one of these gifts

You don't have to be an elder to operate as an evangelist, but every elder must be an ascension gift as elders are called to lead the church (see also 1 Tim. 5:17 and Titus 1:7).

3) The ascension gifts are given to the church to prepare God's people for ministry

According to 1 Corinthians 12:5-6, spiritual gifts are our ministry. It appears that these gifts to the church are given to help stir up and train the spiritual gifting in others.

4) There are technically only 4 gifts mentioned

Though it is commonly referred to as the 5-fold ministry (and it appears as if there are 5 gifts mentioned), in actuality there are only four. The definite article that is often translated as "some to be" (as in "...some to be apostles, some to be prophets..." etc.) is the Greek word "ho hē to" and is only written 4 times, highlighting four gifts:

- I. **Apostles**
- II. **Prophets**
- III. **Evangelists**
- IV. **Shepherds (or Pastors) and Teachers**

All this is to say that a Pastor is not separated from the role of Teaching.

The bible doesn't give any explicit definitions of how each of the ascension gifts operate in the church, but by scriptural deduction we understand these gifts as following:

Apostles – (Greek: "apostolos" meaning ambassadors, sent one, one that is commissioned with orders).

- Apostles are those who are sent out by God to plant churches and establish elders

Prophets – (Greek: "prophe^ē te^ō s" meaning interpreter of oracles, or foreteller, or "one who, moved by the Spirit of God and hence his organ or spokesman, solemnly declares to men what he has received by inspiration, especially concerning future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation" according to Thayer's Dictionary).

- Prophets are those who bring a fresh word from the Lord to the body.

Evangelists – (Greek: “euaggelistēs” meaning preacher of the gospel, or bringer of good tidings, or herald of salvation).

- Though all believers are called to preach the gospel, evangelists are specially gifted in the area of preaching of the gospel, and equipping the body to do so as well.

Pastors – (Greek: “poimēn” meaning shepherd, a herdsman, especially a shepherd)

Teachers – (Greek: “didaskalos” meaning instructor, master, one who is fitted to teach

- Pastors are responsible for watching over congregations as a shepherd watches over his sheep. This is one of the reasons why teaching is a primary role of a pastor – to build up the sheep in the faith (Romans 10:17) and to encourage them and protect them from false teachings (Titus 1:9)

THE RESULT OF THE ASCENSION GIFTS IN OPERATION:

- **We will reach unity in the faith (we all agree)**
See also 1 Corinthians 1:10
- **We will attain to the knowledge of the Son**
See also John 17:3 and John 10:10
- **We will become mature**
See also 1 Corinthians 3:1-7 and Hebrews 5:11-14
- **We will attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ!**
We (the Church!) would look like a perfect representation of Jesus

List of Spiritual Gifts Mentioned in the Bible:

1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28

1. Message of wisdom
2. Message of knowledge
3. Faith
4. Healing
5. Miraculous powers
6. Prophecy
7. Distinguishing between spirits
8. Speaking in different kinds of tongue
9. Interpretation of tongues
10. Administration (v.28)

1 Corinthians 14:26

1. Hymns
2. Word of instruction
3. Revelation

Romans 12:6-8

1. Serving
2. Teaching
3. Encouraging
4. Contributing to the needs of others
5. Leadership
6. Mercy

Many of these things are commands that are expected of all believers, however certain people are especially gifted in these areas for the sake of increasing faith in others.

What We Believe About Baptism

Who, What, When, Why and How

The goal of this article is to answer the following questions that are often asked about baptism:

- 1) What is baptism?
- 2) Is baptism necessary for salvation?
- 3) What is its history?
- 4) Who should be baptized?
- 5) When should one be baptized?
- 6) Who can administer baptism?

Keep in mind that a full understanding of baptism isn't required to obey the command to be baptized. When people in the New Testament heard the gospel and were told to be baptized, they didn't ask questions or take classes on what baptism meant or how it worked. They simply obeyed. Therefore if you are left with more questions after reading this article, feel free to ask; but don't use your lack of understanding to justify your lack of obedience to the command. Often times, understanding comes only after obeying.

What is baptism?

The word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which means to immerse fully in fluid. For Christians, it is the ceremonial initiation into the church (Ephesians 4:5, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:18-19, Acts 2:37-38). Though some denominations baptize by sprinkling water, the word means to immerse completely; and baptism has both biblically and historically has been conducted by immersing completely in water.

Baptism signifies:

- A pledge of a good conscience towards God (1 Peter 3:21)
- Submission to Christ (Galatians 3:27)
- Identity in His death and resurrection, symbolizing death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12)

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Mark 16:16, which says, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned...*" seems to suggest that baptism is necessary for salvation; however, this verse (just like every other verse of the bible) must be read carefully, in context, and in light of all the other verses which talk about the same subject. In this case, we need to read Mark 16:16 in light of the other verses that talk about baptism and salvation. I would argue that baptism is necessary in that it is a commandment which is given to be obeyed, but it is not pre-requisite to salvation.

Verses to consider:

One of the criminals who hung there [next to Jesus on the cross] hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "Since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

*Then he said, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom."
Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
Luke 23:39-43*

The thief on the cross was never baptized, yet Jesus said *"today you will be with me in paradise"*. Some have argued that the thief on the cross didn't need to be baptized because he died before the resurrection – before baptism was required for salvation (according to some). However, I would point to the Gentile believers in the book of Acts (after the resurrection) who *"received the Holy Spirit"* (which was only granted to believers – those who have been saved according to John 7:38-39) before being baptized.

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...
Acts 10:44-48*

Also, Romans 1:16 says that the *gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*. It doesn't say *"for the salvation of everyone who is baptized"* but for everyone who *believes*.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians clearly explains that we are not saved by any work, but only by grace through faith.

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

In 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, Paul teaches clearly that his goal wasn't to baptize people, but to preach the gospel. He separated baptism from the gospel (which is the power of God for salvation) when he said, *"Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"*.

So does baptism save you? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no.

...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

1 Peter 3:21

Peter says that baptism does save you, but not the physical act of dipping in the water, it's the pledge you are making with God.

So what does Mark 16:16 mean when it says, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"*? It simply means that all who have A & B will receive C. It's almost like saying "whoever is happy and smiles will feel joy". It's not the act of smiling that gives you joy, but the fact that you are happy. Smiling is just the automatic response of someone who is happy. Baptism is the automatic response of one who believes, because obedience is the evidence of our belief.

We see clearly from the bible that baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but if someone refuses to be baptized, it is evidence that they have not truly repented because they are refusing to obey a biblical command.

Where did baptism come from? (What is its history?)

There is no Old Testament reference to baptism. The first time we see the word in the bible is in Matthew 3.

"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

Matthew 3:1-2; 5-6

Even though baptism isn't mentioned in the Old Testament, it's interesting to note that the people John the Baptist was baptizing seemed to be familiar with the practice. The Jews of that time would have been familiar with baptism for 3 reasons: types, ceremonial washings, and Mikvah.

- 1) Types:** Types are events that took place which act as symbols for things that were to come. For example, 1 Peter 3:20-21 explain how the event where Noah's ark passed through the water saving only a handful of people symbolizes the waters of baptism which now save us. Another example is in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 where Paul explains that when the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea, *"they were baptized into Moses..."* These were actual events that took place, but they act as pictures of what was to come.

- 2) **Ceremonial Washings:** it was Jewish custom (and Levitical law), for unclean things to be made clean – often by washing. In Exodus 30:18-21, for example, we see instructions given to Moses by God to make a bronze basin for water where the priests would have to wash themselves before entering into the Tent of Meeting. We see a similar law given to the Israelites in Numbers 19:7-8.

- 3) **Mikveh:** Mikveh is where the act of baptism, as seen in the New Testament (by complete immersion in water) came from. Mikveh allowed for non-Jews to be converted to Judaism by ceremonial cleansing through a tub filled with water. It was an outward demonstration showing that someone was trading their previous identity for a new one. For Jewish converts, it was a declaration that they are turning from their old way of life, and identifying themselves with the people of God.

For Jews to be baptized, it was a radical statement. They were confessing that they were impure and that they were not identified with God's people. Being baptized, they were seeking cleansing and repentance.

Who should be baptized?

Anyone who makes a conscious decision to respond to the gospel invitation should be baptized. If you hear the gospel and are cut to the heart, and ask "what must I do" then you should repent and be baptized. The gospel invitation is to come to Christ, leaving your previous way of life behind you. Baptism is the outward demonstration that you have made that decision. Some denominations baptize infants. We would ask them, "Has that infant made a decision to follow Christ?" Obviously not, therefore we would counsel against baptizing infants and toddlers.

How old should one be? It's different for everyone. Some people have responded positively to the clear gospel message at very young ages, and they fully understood their decision. We would say they should be baptized.

When should one be baptized?

Throughout the New Testament, the pattern was always to repent and be baptized. There was never a waiting period for counseling, or teaching on doctrine and baptism. It was an immediate response to a believer's profession of faith. In Acts 2 when Peter preached to a large crowd, 3000 people responded to the gospel message and were baptized that same day. When Philip preached the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, "*they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*" (Acts 8:36-38)

Who can administer baptism?

There is no scripture that says that an elder, pastor, deacon, or any other church leader is responsible to baptize people. However, the Great Commission was written to all believers as our marching orders until Christ comes back.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.””

Matthew 28:18-20

The same believers that are commanded to make disciples are the same believers that are commanded to baptize and teach them.

What We Believe About Church Discipline

Church discipline is a subject that's not often talked about in mainstream Christianity, but it is clearly written and expressed in the bible and practiced throughout church history. We seem to have lost sight of this vitally important doctrine.

Church discipline is meant to be applied as a redemptive practice in local church bodies in order to protect the purity of church from sin and heresy, as well as restore Christians that have fallen in sin.

It's redemptive because the goal of church discipline is repentance and restoration of the sinful brother or sister – not to publicly put them on display for their sins. What is Church Discipline? In short, church discipline is the practice of confronting a brother or sister in a local church who is found to be in sin, for the purpose of restoring him or her to repentance. If the brother or sister refuses to repent, then the process of church discipline continues until he or she either repents, or is removed from the church.

The bible gives at least 3 categories of circumstances in which church discipline must occur: where there is open sin, false teaching, or divisiveness.

1) Discipline for Open Sin

First, it's important to realize that the bible is wrought throughout both the Old and New Testament with godly wisdom for God's people to separate themselves from the wicked.

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.”

Psalm 1:1-2

Second, God does call us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who intentionally surrounded Himself with sinners, because “it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick”, and who came to call “sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32). The point is that as God's children our relationship with sinners is such that we surround ourselves with them for the sake of mission, but separate ourselves from them in regards to their sin. We are not to extend the hand of fellowship to them as our brothers and sisters until they

make a decision to turn and follow Jesus. Paul even noted that the apostles didn't extend "the right hand of fellowship" to him until "*they recognized the grace given to [him]*" (Galatians 2:9).

With that being said, the church is God's assembly made up of people who have chosen to turn from their sin and get on mission to call sinners to repentance. When members of a church start displaying signs of turning back to a lifestyle of sin, then they are to be disciplined. Regarding open sin in the church, Paul explained to Timothy that "those who sin are to be *rebuked publicly*, so that the others may take warning" (1 Timothy 5:20). We see a practical example of this in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present."

1 Corinthians 5:1-3

This flies in the face of those who take Matthew 7:1 out of context - "Do not judge, or you too will be judged". If you keep reading Matthew 7, Jesus explains what He meant. He asked, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" His point was that you shouldn't make hypocritical judgments on other people when you have unchecked sin that you haven't even dealt with in your own life. He continued by saying that you should "first take the plank out of your own eye, *and then* you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." In other words, "before you judge the sin in your brother's life, first deal with the sin in your life... then you will see clearly how to help restore your brother out of his sin".

We not only *should* judge sin in the church – we *must*. When it comes to open sin in the church, discipline is not a suggestion, but a mandate.

"But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'"

1 Corinthians 5:11-13

2) Discipline for False Teaching

Maintaining purity in the church is not limited only to expelling outward expressions of sin, but it also includes expelling the impurity of false teachings. Paul told Timothy to watch his life *and* doctrine closely (1 Timothy 4:16). What a church teaches is as equally important as how a church lives. The Apostle Paul had no problem calling out certain people by name who abandoned the purity of the gospel:

“Holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

1 Timothy 1:19-20

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron...”

...If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.”

1 Timothy 4:1-6

“Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”

2 John 1:9-11

In Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he expresses his concern for the church in Corinth because they were putting up with false teachings. Just as the serpent twisted God's word in the Garden of Eden, false teachers come into the church and twist the truth about Jesus, the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.”

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

We are to expose false teaching for what it is, and not allow it to linger in the church. Paul charged Timothy to “stay there in Ephesus so that [he would] command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer” (1 Timothy 1:3). One of the reasons Paul (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) established elders in the church was so that they would maintain the purity of the message as it had been taught.

“He (an elder or overseer) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’ This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.”

Titus 1:9-14

The New Testament is clear that we are called to discern between truth and error – exposing and separating ourselves from error, while holding firm to the truth. If those who teach error find their way into the church, then they are to be exposed and expelled from the assembly.

3) Discipline for Divisiveness

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

1 Corinthians 1:10

God's heart for His church is that we would be united in the essentials of the faith, and not divide over peripheral issues. A division over denominational distinctions is not God's desire for us. In the midst of differences, conflicts and hardships, God expects us to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). God refers to His people as His flock (John 10:12). In Jeremiah 23:2, we get a glimpse of how God feels when someone comes in to scatter His flock:

"Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord.

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "

John 17:22-23

When the church is united in the same way Jesus is united to the Father, it displays a beautiful picture to the world of the true unity and reconciliation God offers. Not only does division bring potential harm to God's sheep, it also hinders the world from seeing Jesus rightly through us. In the church, we are told that leaders should "warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them" (Titus 3:9-10). Paul said "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17). In other words, do everything to stay unified with your brothers and sisters. If anyone seems to be bringing division in the church, confront them. If they refuse multiple times to stop their divisive behavior, then they need to be cut off.

Church Discipline is Redemptive

In all of these cases (open sin, false teaching and divisiveness) it is protecting the purity and unity of the church as a whole, rather than the feelings of a brother or sister as an individual. If an individual is willing to compromise the purity or unity of the church at large, then they need to be lovingly dealt with until they repent or are removed. Again, the purpose of church discipline is not only to protect the purity and unity of the church, it is also meant to be a redemptive practice for the person being disciplined. Going back to the example of the immoral brother in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul states the purpose for kicking the unrepentant brother out of the church when he said "hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, *so that* his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5). He didn't say "hand him over to Satan because he is a good for nothing sinner"... he said "hand him over to Satan **SO THAT** his spirit may be saved!"

One would understandably ask, “How in the world does handing someone to Satan help to save his spirit?” You would think that kicking a sinner out of the fellowship would be the worst thing you could do because now on top of them living in sin, they’re not going to hear the Word of God being preached anymore. They’re potentially not going to be around positive influences as much anymore. They’re not going to be around the presence of God in corporate worship. That’s a good question, and I believe the bible provides an answer. However, before looking at the answer as to how kicking someone out of the church could be helpful for their restoration, it’s important to realize that even if God didn’t provide an answer it doesn’t therefore mean that we aren’t obligated to obey the clear directives to exercise church discipline. If God simply said “kick them out because I said so” then that should be enough to obey.

With that being said, there is not a blatant verse that says “this is the reason Church discipline is redemptive”. However there are some evident truths in the bible which when put together they provide a good answer to this question.

Truth 1: when people continue to move in the direction towards sin, God hands them over to their sin (Romans 1:18-24)

Truth 2: sin causes death and destruction (Romans 6:16, James 1:15)

Truth 3: God will remove assurance of salvation for those who bear no fruit (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Truth 4: Godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Conclusion: When a person decides to live in sin, then God will hand them over to their sin and its effects (death and destruction in their life). When sin accomplishes its destructive work in their lives, it leads them to sorrow. The goal is for them to be so broken over their sin and its power in their lives that it would lead them to godly sorrow, which in turn leads to repentance.

When a church member is excommunicated because of their unrepentant hearts, they are not only separated from the fellowship of God’s people, they are separated from the presence of God Himself. The weight of this separation is designed to remove the false sense of peace that the brother or sister has in their sin, and drive them to repentance. If they face no consequences for their actions, then there is no felt need to repent.

The Obstacle of Autonomy

This is one of the problems of having so many autonomous local churches in a single city. If a member facing discipline refuses to repent and is eventually kicked out of the church, and then another church gladly welcomes and accepts them with no knowledge of what happened at their previous church, then there is no felt need on behalf of the sinning brother or sister to repent, as they are “accepted for who they are” at the new church. Someone undergoing the process of church discipline in Church A can simply pack up his stuff and go to Church B down the street with no consequences, and therefore no feeling of heaviness of the burden of their sin is weighing on them.

This is an obstacle we have to work through. We believe one way to work towards overcoming this obstacle is by church leaders networking with other church leaders from different congregations. Despite the various differences in denominations, traditions, and practices, most church leaders have enough in common with one another on the essentials of the gospel to be able to have a dialogue about congregants (or former congregants) that refused to repent when undergoing discipline. This undercuts the idea of autonomy of individual believers, as it does the autonomy of individual local churches. Not only do brothers and sisters hold each other accountable, but larger church bodies can hold each other accountable as well. This obviously doesn’t eliminate the problem, and clearly many church leaders will more than likely not hold everybody to the same standard. However, if church leaders networked together organically (without having an official “City Pastor’s Network Association” or something like that) and befriended one another despite their peripheral differences, then these types of conversations would be more frequent and easier to have.

The Necessity of Belongingness and Accountability

Church discipline assumes accountability and an understanding of belongingness. In other words, it should only be practiced on those members who have been baptized and/or are recognized as covenant partners belonging to TWCC. We wouldn’t practice church discipline on someone who has attended the church a few times but has not expressed any level of commitment to the body.

Covenant Partnership is basically a formal “define the relationship” process where it is clear to the leaders of TWCC who is committed, compared to those who are just checking things out. Church membership (nor Covenant Partnership) is not biblically commanded, but it is biblically assumed.

The Method of Church Discipline

So far, we’ve discussed the necessity of church discipline, the reasons for church discipline, the obstacles of church discipline, and the prerequisites for church discipline... but we haven’t mentioned the process (or method) of church discipline. The bible doesn’t give a clear step-by-step procedure for how a member should be disciplined. We are told that sinners, false teachers, and/or divisive people

should be rebuked and/or corrected, and in some cases expelled; but we're not really given the instruction manual on what to say, how to say it, and when to finally decide "enough is enough". The closest thing we are given as to a method for church discipline is found in Matthew 18:15-20. Keep in mind, these instructions are not given only to church leaders – these are for everyone. Many times leaders don't even have to get involved if it is handled correctly.

- 1) "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you..."

Church discipline is often handled incorrectly when a brother or sister sins and then someone who recognizes the sin in their life immediately goes to other people (usually someone in leadership) to have them deal with it. If we would follow this clear instruction directly from the mouth of Jesus, then many unnecessary conflicts would be avoided. Again, church discipline isn't instituted to publically ridicule our brothers and sisters – it is meant for their repentance and restoration. If you see someone in sin, don't ask someone what you should do about it. Have courage enough to go to them directly and confront them, or don't say anything at all. "If they listen to you, you have won them over." That's the goal! To win them over.

- 2) "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"

When you confront someone in their sins, it's not always received well. Then, and only then, is when you should confront them with one or two other *witnesses*. It's important to highlight that word "*witnesses*". That means that you shouldn't have to announce their sin to people who have no clue about what's going on. Rather, you should look for people who are close to them and who probably already know about the sin in their life.

- 3) "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church..."

This doesn't mean to put it in the announcements or the Sunday bulletin – this simply means to bring it up to those who are responsible for the church. This step – essentially – is where you would get leadership involved. If a brother's sin is serious enough to be confronted, and their hearts are hardened enough to reject the loving confrontation of others, then the problem needs to be escalated to those who have a position of leadership in the local assembly to confront him. At this point, it is in the leaders' hands as to how the situation will be handled with the unrepentant brother. This includes the leaders confronting him themselves...

- 4) "... and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

This does not mean to put a restraining order on them to make sure they don't come within 50 feet of the premises if they refuse to repent. No – this simply means that the right hand of fellowship is removed. They are no longer to be treated as those who are in the fold. When Jesus says to treat them like a pagan or a tax collector, He is saying to treat them as unbelievers. How would you expect to treat unbelievers who came into the church? You would love on them, and pray for them, and engage with them... but for the sake of winning them. You wouldn't ask them to pray over you. You wouldn't ask them to join with you in communion. You wouldn't ask them to serve, or volunteer, or minister alongside you. You would make it clear that they are loved, but if they want to be a part of the church, that there is a commitment to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. If they refuse to live up to that commitment, then they should be made very aware of their disconnection from the body.

So what do you do after you kick someone out of the fellowship?

- 5) “truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in My Name, there am I with them.”

This passage is often misquoted as saying “where two or three are gathered in My Name, that's the church” (their point being is that you don't need to be a member of a church, because you can have church if here are two or three Christians in the same room talking about Jesus). When Jesus tells us that “whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven...” and “where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I with them” He is saying these things in the context of church discipline. The idea is that when discipline gets to the point to where a brother or sister has to be expelled from the body, we need to come together as the church – even if it's just two or three of us – praying for them to turn from their sin; binding them in Jesus' Name on earth, that they would be bound in Jesus' name in heaven. Our hope and goal is that they would repent and be restored, so we are to pray for them, knowing that Jesus is right there with us praying the same prayer we are.

In conclusion, church discipline is not a suggestion, but a clear biblical mandate for the church to practice in order to maintain the purity of the doctrine and lifestyle of the local church. It is a practice that involves every member, not just the leaders, and is meant to be done in love for the purpose of redeeming those who are being disciplined. If the church wants to experience the power of the Holy Spirit working in its midst, then a culture of holiness must be cultivated – such a culture is only developed where there is discipline, guarding against that which is unholy.

What We Believe About Communion

What Is Communion?

God has given the church two ordinances designed to bring a constant reminder of what was accomplished at the cross: baptism and communion. Baptism is to be done at the beginning of the Christian's walk with Christ in order to symbolize our union with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (see section on baptism for more info). Communion, however, is practiced as a continual ordinance in order to "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Communion is the act in which Christians partake in breaking bread and drinking wine (or grape juice, as many churches use) to symbolize Christ's broken body and shed blood.

We receive the directives for communion in the following passages:

Matthew 26:26-28

Luke 22:19-20

1 Corinthians 11:20-34

Who Should Take Communion?

When Jesus said "Take, eat..." (Matthew 26:26) He was talking to His disciples. Communion should only be taken by Christ's followers, and should never be taken by non-Christians as those who partake in communion in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:27). At TWCC, we invite and welcome non-Christians to attend our gatherings, but request they not partake of communion. In regards to children, we leave the decision of allowing them to partake of communion to the discretion of their parents.

Who Should Distribute Communion and How Often?

The bible gives no directions as to who should distribute the communion elements, nor how often communion should be taken. The early church evidently broke bread daily (Acts 2:42), and it is unlikely that the Apostles were the ones always initiating the ordinance. Christians do not have to wait for an

official church-sanctioned event in order to participate in communion. Therefore freedom can be exercised by each Christian as to when and how often they take communion.

How Does TWCC Partake of Communion?

At TWCC, we take communion once a month as a corporate body – typically on the first Sunday of every month. The deacons of TWCC are typically responsible for setting up and distributing the communion elements during this time. Though we take communion as a corporate body once a month, many of our home groups participate in communion throughout the week.

Warnings About Communion

Communion is an amazing ordinance in which we reflect on the cross, repent of our sins, remember what Jesus did for us, and unify as a body. However, God is holy, and His ordinance is not to be taken lightly. The bible gives strict warnings against those who participate in communion abusively, passively, disrespectfully and unrepentantly. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 we find the Apostle Paul rebuking the church in Corinth as some were getting drunk off of the communion wine, others were eating the elements without waiting for their brothers and sisters, and still others were taking communion with known sin in their life. It even says that some people were sick, and others died because of their misuse of Holy Communion (v. 30).

When we take communion, we are to:

Do so in a worthy manner (v.27)

Examine ourselves (v.28)

Discern the body – or be conscious of the church (v.29)

What We Believe about the Gift of Tongues

Of all the Spiritual Gifts, few bring as much controversy as the gift of tongues. The purpose of writing an entire section in our Church Structure Document regarding the gift of tongues is to clarify some of the confusion and questions often associated with the gift in regards to its place and practice in public worship. We believe that the Word of God gives clear and sufficient teaching on this subject.

What is the Gift of Tongues?

The word often translated as “tongues” in the New Testament is the Greek word “glōssa”, which means “languages”. Tongues (or languages) are sometimes referred to as gifts in the New Testament (for example, 1 Cor. 12:28 and 1 Cor. 12:30).

We believe that the gift of tongues has at least 3 distinct functions as stated in the New Testament:

1. A sign to unbelievers (Acts 2:1-8, 1 Cor. 14:22)

In Acts 2, the first time the “gift of “tongues” (or languages) is used was for the purpose of presenting the “mysteries of God” to Jews from every nation. The tongues spoken were known languages as “each one heard their own language being spoken” (Acts 2:6). Throughout church history, God has used the gift of tongues to enable believers to share the gospel with people of other cultures in their native tongue.

2. A gift to edify the church (1 Cor. 12:7)

Aside from tongues being used on the mission field in an evangelistic way, we also have clear direction in the New Testament for how the gift of tongues can be used for the edification of the church, if accompanied by an interpretation (see 1 Cor. 14:26-28).

3. A gift to edify yourself in the privacy of your own personal prayer (1 Cor. 14:4)

Romans 8:26-27 says that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

The Scriptures also teach that tongues (along with prophesy) are at times signs of the Holy Spirit coming on individuals (Acts 2:4; Acts 19:6).

Is the Gift of Tongues For Today?

We believe that all of the gifts of the Spirit (including the gift of tongues) are to continue as normative practices in the church until Jesus returns (Acts 2:39), and see no explicit scripture that states the contrary.

What about Speaking in Tongues in Public?

1 Corinthians 14:16-17 tells us that if we pray in tongues over a person (or in front of other people) there would be no way for them to say “amen” as they have no clue what is being said, and therefore they will not be edified. Also, **1 Corinthians 14:23** says that “if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”

Therefore we are given directions as to how the gift of tongues ought to be used in a fitting and orderly way for public edification.

“If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.” (**1 Corinthians 14:27-28**)

The bible also clarifies for us that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (**1 Corinthians 14:32-33**) – in case certain individuals would claim that speaking in tongues is uncontrollable.

In summary, our stance at TWCC is that the gift of tongues is for today, and to be encouraged and not forbidden (1 Cor. 14:39). We also believe that there are at least 3 different functions of the gift of tongues, and when used in public worship it should be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor. 14:40).