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Rock Harbor Church Statement of Faith

I. The Scriptures

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. The verbal inspiration of the original autographs was plenary and verbal. Therefore, the Bible is inerrant and infallible in its original manuscript. It is the sole authority for faith and practice in all matters to which it speaks.”

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16, 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18, 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2, 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21

II. God

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

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all-powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff; 20:1ff; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalms 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3, 15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. We believe in the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ who always was and will be God and did not cease to be God at the incarnation. The Man Christ Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit; that He was born of the virgin Mary; that He possesses both a divine and human nature both distinct and unmixed; that He was without sin; Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision and atonement for the redemption of men from sin. He died a penal substitution for the sin of all men; that He was buried; that He arose on the third day in the same but glorified body in which He lived and died; He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He functions as the High Priest for all believers ever making intercession for them and now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord. He will return personally and physically in power and glory. The Second Coming has two phases: the Rapture in which Christ returns for the Church in the clouds and the Second Coming to earth to judge the world, save Israel and to consummate His redemptive mission.

Genesis 18:1ff; Psalms 2:7ff; 110:1ff; Isaiah 7:14; 53; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16, 27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6, 19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18, 29; 10:30, 38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16, 28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20, 28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5, 20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3, 34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8, 24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15, 24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. He is the infallible author and interpreter of

the infallible Word. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. In this age, at the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ and permanently indwells every believer. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He empowers, instructs, and guides the believer in living, service, and worship through His gifts. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. His chief purpose is to witness and glorify Christ; that His fullness and power and control are appropriated in the believer's life by faith.

Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10, 12; Luke 1:35; 4:1, 18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17, 39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28, 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11, 14-16, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians. 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8, 14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10; 22:17

III. The Dispensations

The dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on earth through man by varying responsibilities; that they are chronologically successive; that they are not ways of salvation nor different methods of the administration of the Covenant of Grace but are a test of man's submission to God based on progressive revelation; that they are a necessary view of Scripture based on literal interpretation, a consistent distinction of Israel and the Church, and that the ultimate purpose of God is His own glorification; that they are not different ways of salvation but in every dispensation the basis of salvation was always the blood of Christ, the means of salvation was always by grace through faith, the object of faith was always God, but the content of faith changed in different dispensations dependent upon progressive revelation.

Genesis. 12:3; Deuteronomy. 28:25, 64, 65; 30:1-4; 2 Samuel. 7:8-16; Psalms. 89; Is. 2:1-5; Jeremiah. 31:31-34;; Ezekiel 40-48; Daniel. 9-12; Matthew. 11:13; 16:18; 18:15-18; 24-25; 26:26-28; Mark 2:21-22; Mark.

7:18-19; 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; Acts. 2: 2:16-21; 2:34-5; 15:13-17; Acts. 13:46-47; 17:30; Romans. 9-11. 1 Corinthians. 11:23-25; 1 Corinthians. 15:51-52; 2 Corinthians. 3:5-6; Galatians. 3:1-6:2; Ephesians. 1:7-14; 2:11-18; 3:1-11, Colossians. 1:24-28; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5; Hebrews. 7:1-28; 8:6-13 10:14-18; 12:22-24; 1 Peter 2:9-12; Revelations. 4-22

IV. Angels: Unfallen and Fallen

A. Creation of Angels

God created an innumerable number of sinless beings known as angels, seraphs, and cherubs. The Scriptures do not indicate a precise time for this creation. The Scriptures do teach that the angels saw the foundations of the earth created which would be between day 2 and 3.

Job 38:6, 7; Ezekiel.28:15; Matthew.8:10; 24:31; 26:53 Psalms.148:2, 5; Colossians.1:16; Jude 6

B. Satan

One of these created beings, "Day-Star, Son of the Morning," the highest in rank, sinned through pride, thus becoming Satan the adversary; that he is an actual person with all the characteristics of personality; that he is the originator of sin; that he operates today as the prince and god of this world; that he is the arch-enemy of God and the people of God and deceiver of humanity; that he led the first parents into transgression causing their fall; that he was judged at the cross, a judgment yet to be executed in the Lake of Fire.

Job.1:12; Ezekiel 24:18; 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; Matt.13:39; 12:24; Luke 10:18; 11:18; John 8:44; 12:31; 2 Corinthians. 4:4; 6:15; 2 Corinthians.11:3, 14; 1 Ephesians.2:2; 6:11-12; Thessalonians. 3:52 Timothy.2:26; James 4:7; 1 Peter.5:8; 1 John 5:19; Revelations.12:3, 9-10, 17.

C. Unfallen Angels

A great company of angels kept their holy estate and are ministering spirits of God for the carrying out of His purpose, especially to those who inherit salvation.

Genesis.21:17-20; 1 Kings 19:5-7; Psalms.34:7, 35:4-5; Daniel.6:20, 23; Matthew.18:10; Luke 16:22; Acts 12:7; Hebrews.1:14; Jude 9

D. Demons

One third of the angels followed Satan in his fall, some of whom became demons who are active as Satan's agents in the carrying out of unholy purposes, while others who fell are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Genesis.6:4; Daniel.10:10-20; Zechariah.3:1; Matthew.4:9-10; 8:28, 10:1; 12:24; 25:41; Mark 1:14,34; 5:32; Acts 19:16; 2 Corinthians. 11:13-15; Ephesians. 6:12; 5:6, 7; 1 Timothy.4:1-3; Jude 6, 7; Revelations.9:1-11; 16:13-16

V. Man

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

Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5, 7, 18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18, 23; 5:6, 12, 19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18, 29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19, 21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11

VI. Salvation

A. Only Through Christ

Due to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again; and that no degree of reformation however great, no attainments in morality however high, no culture however attractive, no baptism or other ordinance however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven; Our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was

made to be sin and was made a curse for us, dying in our stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the Apostles can add in the very least degree to the value of the blood, or to the merit of the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity with perfect and sinless humanity (Lev. 17:11; Isa. 64:6; Matt. 26:28; John 3:7–18; Rom. 5:6–9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 3:4–9; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:18–19, 23).

B. The Object

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

C. The Means

Salvation is wholly a work of God's free grace and not the work of man in whole or in part, nor due to man's goodness or religious ceremony; that it is a gift to man received by personal faith at which time the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner, thereby justifying him in God's sight; that those who are saved have been elected to salvation according to the foreknowledge of God in eternity past and have been called by the Holy Spirit. (See below for scriptures)

D. Regeneration

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It occurs after someone has responded by faith to God's call to salvation; the creation testifies, the conscious bear witness, the Scriptures testify, and the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment. Once someone responds by faith, the Holy Spirit regenerates the person which entails a change of heart, and a new nature is given to the person, which wants to obey. The person is freed from the enslavement to the old nature and can now make a decision concerning which nature to exercise. The person is adopted in to God's family and the Holy Spirit now indwells the believer.

E. Justification

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.

Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God. (See below for scriptures)

F. Sanctification

Sanctification, beginning in regeneration, which is a setting-apart unto God, is threefold: It is already complete for every saved person because his position toward God is the same as Christ's position. Since the believer is in Christ, he is set apart unto God in the measure in which Christ is set apart unto God. The believer retains his sin nature, which cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, while the standing of the Christian in Christ is perfect, his present state is no more perfect than his experience in daily life. There is, therefore, a progressive sanctification wherein the Christian is to "grow in grace," and to "be changed" by the unhindered power of the Spirit. We believe also that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state as he is now sanctified in his standing in Christ when he shall see his Lord and shall be "like Him" (John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:24; 5:25–27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 10:10, 14; 12:10).

G. Glorification

Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. The redeemed will receive their new glorified bodies and will not possess a sin nature and nor will they ever be able to rebel again. (See below for scriptures)

H. The Extent of Salvation

When an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life, and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion as linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one may have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings and to know a fuller measure of divine power through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is therefore in no way required by God to seek a so-called "second blessing," or a "second work of grace" (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 3:21–23; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10; 1 John 4:17; 5:11–12).

I. Eternal Security

Because of the eternal purpose of God toward the objects of His love, because of His freedom to exercise grace toward the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory blood of Christ, because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life, because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven, because of the immutability of the unchangeable covenants of God, because of the regenerating, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved, we and all true believers everywhere, once saved shall be kept saved forever. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall be secure to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ. They receive a loss of temporal blessings and eternal rewards. They may also bring temporal discipline on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. God is a holy and righteous Father and that, since He cannot overlook the sin of His children, He will, when they persistently sin, chasten them and correct them in infinite love; but having undertaken to save them and keep them forever, apart from all human merit, He, who cannot fail, will in the end present every one of them faultless before the presence of His glory and conformed to the image of His Son (John 5:24; 10:28; 13:1; 14:16–17; 17:11; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1–2; 5:13; Jude 24).

J. God's Purpose of Grace

God graciously calls and convicts all of mankind equally to salvation. God must initiate the call to individuals and he or she will either accept or reject God's call. Mankind's sin nature does not totally render a person incapable of responding to God's call to salvation. Those who accept the call by faith will be regenerated/ born again/ born from above. Election is according to the foreknowledge of God, and **predestination** is the gracious blessings of God that were marked out ahead of time for those that He knew would respond to the Gospel in faith. **God has predestinated beforehand the kind of destiny He will graciously give anyone who believes in Him. Therefore, God has determined that He will regenerate, justify, sanctify, and glorify sinners to make them into the image of His Son.** Furthermore, God planned and blesses the believer with adoption, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a new nature, spiritual gifts, inheritance, and many other promises as part of becoming part of the elect. Also, election in many cases deals with the corporate election of either Israel or the Church. When a person becomes

part of one of these two bodies they are called “elect” since they now belong to either the nation of Israel or the Church. Israel and the Church are the two elected vehicles God would use to reach the world. Again, these elect vehicles are also considered blessings which were marked out ahead of time for those who would respond in faith as God’s program in salvation history developed. These are all part of the blessings of becoming saved, which God purposed before the foundation of the world. Predestination and election have to do with blessings that accompany salvation that God decided to give to individuals who become believers before the foundation of the world. It is consistent with the free agency of man since it is based on God’s foreknowledge of the individual’s faith in Him, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness towards believers and allows for human freedom. It excludes prideful boasting and promotes humility since man cannot work for/earn/merit or deserves salvation.

Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:18-19; 16:21-26; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68- 79; 2:28-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:11-14, 29; 3:3-21, 36; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:9, 27-29; 14:6; 15:1-16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Romans 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18, 28-39; 10:9-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 13; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 1:18, 30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 15:24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 2:8-22; 3:1-11; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10, 19; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12:8, 14; James 1:12; 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-23; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:6-2:11; 2:19; 3:2. Revelation 3:20; 21:1-22:5

K. Assurance of Salvation

Assurance of salvation is based on a believer’s belief in Christ and is not based on what the believer does or fails to do in his sanctification. The good works of the believer are a test of discipleship and not of salvation. We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude,

and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; 1 John in its entirety).

VII. Israel

God called a people to Himself who are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that Israel is the Wife of Jehovah, unfaithful in the past, divorced in the present, and to be reunited in the future; that God has made one conditional covenant (The Mosaic, which has now rendered inoperative since the Messiah has fulfilled the law) and has made four unconditional covenants (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New) with this elect nation that have remained unfulfilled. God intends to fulfill all His promises to Israel in a literal way just as His warnings and judgments were fulfilled in a literal way; that in Israel's history of unbelief there has always been a believing remnant according to the election of grace; that there will be a national regeneration of Israel at the end of the Tribulation at which time all of the provisions of the unconditional covenants will be fulfilled, including the seed, land, and blessing aspects which will be realized in the Millennial Kingdom. Currently, Israel becoming a nation again in 1948 is prophetically significant since this predicted by the prophets concerning the last days.

Genesis. 12:1-3,7; 13:6,14-15,17;15:1-6,17-21;17:1-21;22:17;26:2-5,24;28:13-15;49:1-28; Exodus 15:26;19:3-8; 32:11-14; Deuteronomy 4:7-8,37 ; 7:6-8; 30:1-10; 2 Samuel 7:11b-17; 23:1-5; 1 Chronicles 17:10b-15; Psalm 79; 80:1-19; 89:1-52, Isaiah 2:2-3; 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 12:1-3; 14:1-2; 27:12-13; 28:14-22; 35:1-10; 40:1-2; 43:1-12; 49:22-23; 55:3, 59:21, 60:18-21; 61:4-9; 64:1-12; 65:1-25; 66:20-22; Jeremiah 3:18; 16:14-16; 23:5-6; 30:4-18; 31:31-37; 32:37-41; 33:14-17; 19-26, Ezekiel 11:17-21; 16:1-63; 20:33-38; 22:17-22; 28:25-26; 30:7-10; 34: 11-16,25-31, 36:22-24; 36:26-28, 37: 37:1-14, 21-28; Ezekiel 38-39; 40-48; Daniel 9-12; Hosea 1:10-11; 3:4-5; 5:15; Joel 2:28-32; 3:1-3,17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1,4-7; 7:14-17; Zephaniah 2:1-2; 3:14-20; Zechariah. 8:4-8,23; 10:11-15; 12:10-13:1; 13:7-9; 14:8; Matthew 12:22-45; 21:43; 22:23-33; 23:1-36; Luke 1:30-35, 68-73, 19:43-44; 21:6,20-24; John 19:41-44; Acts 15:14-18; 26:6-8; Romans 3:1-2; 11:25-36; Hebrews 6:13-20; Revelation 7:1-17; 12:1-17; 20:1-15

VIII. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of

Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The Church is the body and Bride of Christ; that it is composed of all Jewish and Gentile believers from Pentecost to the Rapture; that entrance into this body is by Spirit-Baptism; that it is distinct from Israel; that while sharing spiritual blessings with Israel of the Jewish covenants, it neither fulfills them nor has taken possession of them from Israel. All believers are obligated to assemble together for the purpose of participation in the ordinances, to be taught the Scriptures by gifted men, to edify each other, and to worship God; that this assembling is to be organized as a local church under authoritative leadership; that the believer is called to holy living in the power of the indwelling Spirit; to fight the spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil; to use his spiritual gifts for the purpose of building up of the local body of Christ.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; 28:18-20; Romans 1:7; 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3

A. The Office of the Pastor

The New Testament uses three titles, pastor/bishop/elder, when referring to the same leader of the church. The scripture calls the pastors/bishop/elder “the steward of God.” This word relates to the pastor’s task as both a minister and preacher of the Word of God. The New Testament pastors were men who were called by the Holy Spirit and ordained to the pastoral office of a local New Testament church. In the New Testament there is an indication that the early church possessed a plurality of pastors depending on the situation, although there is no scriptural command for a church to have more than one elder in one church. Therefore, a church could have as many pastors/bishops/elders as is needed. There is no biblical basis to divide the office of pastor into preaching/teaching pastors/bishops/elders and “ruling” lay pastors/bishops/elders, operating as a governing board who legislate

major decisions for the church. The uniform New Testament teaching is that all pastors/bishops/elders were men who were called by the Holy Spirit and had a double function of ruling and preaching/teaching the Bible.

B. Congregational Government

The congregation is the final authority since the Church age carries with it a distinctive called the priesthood of all believers. Authority within the local church rests with the individual members of the congregation since they are priests of God, permanently indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit. Due to the reality of every believer being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, no pastor, deacon, or ministry leader, has the right to exercise any kind of authority independently of, or contrary to, the wishes of the people who have chosen them as their leaders. While the level of spiritual maturity may differ in the lives of every believer, no one has the right to deny them the right of exercising their spiritual privilege to make decisions affecting the welfare of the church. Therefore, the members of the local congregation are spiritually capable of making decisions that affect their spiritual lives.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; John 21:15-19; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 11:30; 13:1-4; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:17,20-35; 28:18-20; Romans 1:7; 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2,10; 3:16; 5:3-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 11:33-34; 12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 4:11-12; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-16; 4:12-16; 5:17-19; 2 Timothy 2:14-15; 3:10-17; 4:1-5; Titus 1:3,5-16; Hebrews 11:39-40; 13:7, 17, 20; James 5:14; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4; Jude 1:3; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3

C. How Israel and the Church Relate

The Church is completely different and distinct from Israel, and the two should not be confused hermeneutically. In fact, the Church is an entirely new creation that came into being on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection from the dead, and will continue until it is taken to Heaven at the Rapture return of the Lord. None of the curses or blessings pronounced upon Israel refer directly to the Church. The Church enters into the Abrahamic and New Covenants, for instance, only by divine application, not by original interpretation. This leaves all the covenants, promises, and warnings to Israel intact. Israel, the natural Jewish nation, is still Israel. To be sure, Israel has been side-lined during these past 1,900 years of the Diaspora. The Church has taken center stage in the Lord's affairs as the Gospel has spread throughout the world.

Nevertheless, God has carefully preserved the Jewish people, even in unbelief, through every kind of distress and persecution. Not only has God preserved the Jewish nation, but He has also kept His promise to save a remnant of Israel in every generation. The remnant of Israel in this age are the Jewish believers in Christ who have joined the Gentile believers, and form the Church, the Body of Christ. In this respect, then, a part of Israel (the believing remnant) intersects with the Church during the Church Age. But this does not make Israel the Church, or *vice versa*.

In the future, both God's warnings and promises to Israel will come to pass. After the Lord is finished with the Church Age, and has taken the Church to Heaven in the Rapture, God will restore Israel to center stage on the world's divine theater. First comes the devastating "Time of Jacob's Trouble" also known as the Great Tribulation. This is a dreadful period of seven years, which begins relatively lightly during the first half, but intensifies into full focus during the latter half. During this time the world is judged for rejecting Christ, but, more specifically, Israel is judged, purged and prepared through the fiery trials of the Great Tribulation for the Second Coming of the Messiah.

When Christ does return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, Israel will be ready, willing, and eager to receive Him, and proclaim, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" As the stumbling of Israel brought blessing to the world at Christ's First Coming, the reception of Israel to Christ at His Second Advent will be like "life from the dead." The remnant of Israel which survives the Tribulation (some one-third of the Jewish people who enter the Tribulation), will be saved, and the Lord will establish His kingdom on the same earth and the same capital city, Jerusalem, that rejected Him centuries before. Israel will be the head of the nations, and no longer the tail, and all nations will send representatives to Jerusalem to honor and worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Church will return with Christ, and will rule with Him for a thousand years. He Himself told His disciples that they would rule over the 12 tribes of Israel in the restoration. Thus, Israel has not been forgotten in God's plan. While the Jewish nation still has a dark period facing it, there is a glorious finale to Israel's long history.

Genesis. 12:1-3,7; 13:6,14-15,17;15:1-6,17-21;17:1-21;22:17;26:2-5,24;28:13-15;49:1-28; Exodus 15:26;19:3-8; 32:11-14; Deuteronomy 4:7-8,37 ; 7:6-8; 30:1-10; 2 Samuel 7:11b-17; 23:1-5; 1 Chronicles 17:10b-15; Psalm 79; 80:1-19; 89:1-52, Isaiah 2:2-3; 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 12:1-3; 14:1-2; 27:12-13; 28:14-22; 35:1-10; 40:1-2; 43:1-12; 49:22-23; 55:3,

59:21, 60:18-21; 61:4-9; 64:1-12; 65:1-25; 66:20-22; Jeremiah 3:18; 16:14-16; 23:5-6; 30:4-18; 31:31-37; 32:37-41; 33:14-17; 19-26, Ezekiel 11:17-21; 16:1-63; 20:33-38; 22:17-22; 28:25-26; 30:7-10; 34: 11-16,25-31, 36:22-24; 36:26-28, 37: 37:1-14, 21-28; Ezekiel 38-39; 40-48; Daniel 9-12; Hosea 1:10-11; 3:4-5; 5:15; Joel 2:28-32; 3:1-3,17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1,4-7; 7:14-17; Zephaniah 2:1-2; 3:14-20; Zechariah. 8:4-8,23; 10:11-15; 12:10-13:1; 13:7-9; 14:8; Matthew 12:22-45; 16:18; 18:15-20; 19:28; 21:43; 22:23-33; 23:1-36,39; 26:28; Luke 1:30-35, 68-73, 19:43-44; 21:6,20-24; John 19:41-44; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; 28:18-20; 26:6-8; Romans 1:7; 1:16; 3:1-2; 9-11:25-36; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:9-11; 22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians. 4:16-18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 6:13-20; 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 7:1-17; 12:1-17; 20:1-15; 21:2-3

D. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His Second Coming. Both ordinances are limited to believers only.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20 John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 21; 11:23-39; Colossians 2:12

E. Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ

has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ. It is the responsibility of both the church and the individual believer to evangelize and disciple all nations both actively (doing the work of evangelism) and passively (supporting those doing the work of evangelism):

1. Jewish Missions

The Bible divides missions into two categories. American churches have also divided missions into two categories, invariably these are home missions and foreign missions, but those are not the two categories used in the Scriptures. The two scriptural categories are Jewish missions and Gentile missions (Galatians. 2; Romans. 11; Acts 15). Again, the procedure for discipling the nations is "to the Jew first" and this is also true in both active and passive evangelism. (Romans 1:16)

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8, 16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8, 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 1:6; 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17

IX. Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the age to its appropriate end. The Rapture of the church will commence the Day of the Lord; the dead will be raised and the believers who are alive will be glorified and translated to Heaven to await the judgment seat of Christ where they will receive their reward; The Rapture will be followed by the seven year tribulation period. At the end of the Tribulation, according to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth to rescue the remnant of Israel and the Gentile nations and Christ will judge the nations in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The remnant of Israel and the Gentile will live in the Millennial Kingdom for 1,000 years. After the 1,000 years are over, the Great White throne Judgment will commence and sentence all unbelievers and the Devil and his angels to the Lake of fire forever. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will dwell in Heaven with the Lord forever. (see scriptures below)

A. The Rapture of the Church

Christ will return into the air for the purpose of gathering the Church to Himself both dead and alive; that this event is both imminent and Pre-Tribulational; that this is the blessed hope of the Church. (see scriptures below)

B. The Seven Year Tribulation

We believe that sometime after the Rapture, the Tribulation of Israel's Seventieth Week will occur for a period of seven years; that it is a time of judgment of all humanity; that it will bring to an end the times of the Gentiles and result in the national regeneration of Israel. (see scriptures below)

C. The Second Coming

We believe in the personal, visible, and bodily return of Christ to the earth with his saints after the Tribulation and before the Millennium in the clouds of heaven with glory and great power at the request of and to save Israel from her enemies; to judge all living Gentiles for the purpose of determining who will be excluded from the Kingdom and who will be included in the Kingdom. (see scriptures below)

D. The Messianic/Millennial Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Currently, we are in the Mystery or Invisible Kingdom phase of God's kingdom. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and His rule for 1,000 years over Israel and the Gentile nations. The Kingdom of God will continue after the Millennium for all eternity. During the Millennium, the Church will co-reign with Christ, the unconditional covenants with Israel will be fulfilled, Israel will be restored along with the resurrection of the Old Testament saints, Satan will be bound in the abyss, the curse will be lifted, and the knowledge of God will permeate the world, and peace will be maintained by the iron-rod rule of Christ.

Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28;

James 5:8, 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18, 3:11; 20:1-22:13. Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10,23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52: 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrew 11:10, 16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 20-22

X. The Final State

A. The Present Time

At physical death, the believer immediately goes into the presence of God in full conscious fellowship with the Lord, awaiting the resurrection of the body; that the unbeliever enters immediately into eternal conscious separation from God in Hell, awaiting the resurrection of the body. (see scriptures below)

B. The Eternal Order

In the eventual resurrection of all saints before the Kingdom to fellowship with Christ in the Kingdom on this earth and then in the New Jerusalem on the New Earth in eternity after the Kingdom; in the resurrection of all unbelievers after the Kingdom to appear before the Great White Throne Judgment and then to abide for eternity in the Lake of Fire. (see scriptures below)

Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36, 44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28, 35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians. 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8, 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelations. 1:18, 3:11; 20:1-22:13. Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10, 23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52: 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 20-22

XI. Education

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people. In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists. Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7, 11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15;3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5;3:17.

XII. Stewardship

A. Stewardship in the Church Age

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians are in the dispensation of grace so grace giving is the procedure in stewardship. Believers in the Church age are not obligated to keep the Mosaic 23% tithe or the pre-Mosaic practices of making a one-time donation of 10% from the spoils of war. However, believers are still mandated to give today, but are to be led by the Holy Spirit in the amount they give. There are no legalistic percentages that are mandated because the Holy Spirit directs the amount. Furthermore, the church is not the storehouse since it is not in Jerusalem, is not the Jewish temple, and the Mosaic Law has been rendered inoperative. Therefore, the Holy Spirit directs believers in the age of grace to where He sovereignly chooses to channel funds. This could be to the local church but could also include various other missions, ministries, and people. Believers are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically,

individually, proportionately, and liberally under the direction of the Holy Spirit for the advancement of the Gospel on earth.

B. Principles in Giving

There are five basic principles of biblical giving. First, giving is a measure of the believer's love for God. If the believer is laying up treasures here on earth, then the believer's heart will be on earthly things. But if the believer is laying up his treasures in Heaven, his heart will be on heavenly things. Secondly, giving is an expression of faith. Thirdly, the believer will never out-give God. Philippians 4:15-19 teaches that if the believer gives, God will supply his needs; the believer need not worry about his needs, as God will take care of these things. He should be more concerned about giving, because giving will result in God's supplying the believer's needs. Fourthly, giving should be done in secret. The fifth principle is that the believer should be willing to work in order to give more. One should give as one has purposed to give, according to one's ability. A similar point is made in Acts 11:29. One should give according to his ability and according to his own free will or as he has purposed. The believer should not do it out of a sense of necessity.

C. Gentile Indebtedness to Jewish Believers

Furthermore, according to the apostle Paul, Gentile believers are required to support Jewish believers (Romans 15:25-27) since Gentiles have become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings. According to Paul, the Gentile believers have become indebted to the Jews, especially Jewish believers. The way of fulfilling or paying off their indebtedness is by sharing their material things with Jewish believers. As Gentiles have become partakers in their spiritual things, they are now to fulfill their indebtedness by giving in a material way to Jewish believers.

Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21, 42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

XIII. Cooperation

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the

most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament. The Christian must use wisdom in who and what they align themselves with on common cause issues.

Exodus 17:12; 18:17ff; Judges 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Nehemiah 4; 8:1-5; Matthew 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1ff; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 1:6-10; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 1:15-18.

XIV. The Christian Walk

We are called with a holy calling, to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and so to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit that we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. But the flesh with its fallen, Adamic nature, which in this life is never eradicated, being with us to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, needs to be kept by the Spirit constantly in subjection to Christ, or it will surely manifest its presence in our lives to the dishonor of our Lord (Rom. 6:11-13; 8:2, 4, 12-13; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 1:4-7; 3:5-9).

XV. The Christian's Service

We believe that divine, enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit upon all who are saved. While there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the same Spirit, and each is called to his own divinely appointed service as the Spirit may will. In the apostolic church there were certain gifted men—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—who were appointed by God for the perfecting of the saints unto their work of the ministry. We believe also that today some men are especially called of God to be evangelists, pastors and teachers, and that it is to the fulfilling of His will and to His eternal glory that these shall be sustained and encouraged in their service for God (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11).

We believe that, wholly apart from salvation benefits which are bestowed equally upon all who believe, rewards are promised according to the faithfulness of each believer in his service for his Lord, and that these rewards will be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ after He comes to receive His own to Himself (1 Cor. 3:9–15; 9:18–27; 2 Cor. 5:10).

XVI. The Christian and Society

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose evolution, rewriting history, racism, social justice, the social gospel, socialism, cults, the occult, communism, fascism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, the redefinition of a biblical marriage, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to endeavor, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth. The Christian must also use wisdom in who and what they align themselves with on common cause issues. The Scriptures do not promote social justice, Marxism, Communism or Fascism since these socio/politico/economic theories are not compatible with the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not promote radical environmentalism but state plainly that man cannot effect the environment. The Christian must be aware of that the world is prophetically heading for a one world government, one world currency, and one world leader. Although the will of God cannot be thwarted, the Christian is to be salt and light to oppose these trends.

Genesis 8:22; Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; 27:17; Psalms 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16; Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

XVII. Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war if possible. However, the Bible gives clear indications for a just war. The strong help the weak and defenseless. To confront evil and extract it through war is justifiable from the scriptures. Pacifism is nowhere found in the scriptures. Turn the other cheek has to do with personal insults and not war. Therefore, nations are not allowed to sit by and watch evil do as it will. On a personal level, we would protect our families if evil confronted our family. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of The Lord's teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. However, the world is getting worse and evil will have to be confronted. True peace will only be found in the Millennial Kingdom and not during this age. In fact, the Lord comes back to fight against His enemies at the Second Coming.

Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 5:9,38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36,38; Romans 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:1-2.

XVIII. Religious Liberty

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

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7, 24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1, 13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.

XIX. Marriage, Family and Sexuality

All matters of faith and conduct must be evaluated on the basis of Holy Scripture, which is our infallible guide (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Since the Holy Bible does speak to the nature of human beings and their sexuality, it is imperative that we correctly understand and articulate what the Bible teaches on these matters. We are committed to the home and family as set forth in Holy Scripture. We believe God has ordained and created marriage to exist between one man and one woman, with absolute marital fidelity. The Bible sets forth specific home and family values, which include the distinct roles of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and children. It is our firm conviction that we uphold the dignity of each individual as we embrace the unchanging and longstanding principles of scriptural truth. Based on Holy Scripture and the constant moral teaching of the universal Church, we believe:

- **Marriage** — RHC defines marriage as the permanent, exclusive, comprehensive, and conjugal “one flesh” union of one man and one woman, intrinsically ordered to procreation and biological family, and in furtherance of the moral, spiritual, and public good of binding father, mother, and child. A pastor of RHC may only marry someone with the biblical qualifications as stated above. A failure to meet the above qualifications disqualifies the applicant. (Genesis 1:27-28, Genesis 2:18-24, Matthew 19:4-9, Mark 10:5-9, Ephesians 5:31-33)

- **Sexual Immorality** — RHC believes that sexual acts outside marriage are prohibited as sinful. Consequently, RHC members must resist and refrain from any and all sexual acts outside marriage — including but not limited to adultery, fornication, incest, zoophilia, pornography, prostitution, masturbation, voyeurism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, sodomy, polygamy, polyamory, sologamy, or same-sex sexual acts. (Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 18:7-23, Leviticus 20:10-21, Deuteronomy 5:18, Matthew 15:19, Matthew 5:27-28, Matthew 15:19, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-13, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 13:4, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 4:17-19, Colossians 3:5)

- **Sexual Identity** — RHC believes that God created mankind in His image: male (man) and female (woman), sexually different but with equal personal dignity. Consequently, RHC members must affirm their biological sex and refrain from any and all attempts to physically change, alter, or disagree with their predominant biological sex — including but not limited to elective sex-reassignment, transvestite, transgender, or non-binary “genderqueer” acts or conduct. (Genesis 1:26-28, Romans

1:26-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

- **Sexual Orientation** — RHC believes that God created and ordered human sexuality to the permanent, exclusive, comprehensive, and conjugal “one flesh” union of man and woman, intrinsically ordered to procreation and biological family, and in furtherance of the moral, spiritual, and public good of binding father, mother, and child. Consequently, RHC members must affirm the sexual complementarity of man and woman and resist any and all same-sex sexual attractions and refrain from any and all same-sex sexual acts or conduct, which are intrinsically disordered. (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, Mark 10:5-9, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-9, Revelation 21:2)

- **Sexual Redemption** — RHC believes that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and should seek redemption through confession, repentance, baptism, and faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, RHC members must try to help and treat with respect, compassion, and sensitivity all who experience same-sex attractions or confess sexually immoral acts, but are committed to resisting sexual temptation, refraining from sexual immorality, and conforming their behavior to RHC Statement of Faith. (Matthew 11:28-30, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-10, I Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 2:17-18, Hebrews 4:14-16)

- **Celibacy** — RHC believes that Holy Scripture grants two life-enhancing options for human sexual behavior: (1) the conjugal “one flesh” marital union of one man and one woman, and (2) celibacy. Either is a gift from God, given as He wills for His glory and the good of those who receive and rejoice in His gift to them. Celibacy and faithful singleness is to be celebrated and affirmed within the RHC. (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-24; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:5-8; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1-8; Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Romans 12:10; 1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6, 15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15, 17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8, 14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

XX. Creation

The Bible declares that the human mind (if open to possibility of creation) is able to explore the manifestations of the Triune God rationally, scientifically, and teleologically. The Creator of the universe is the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is only one eternal and transcendent God, the source of all being and meaning, and He exists in three Persons, each of whom participated in the work of creation.

The biblical record of primeval earth history in Genesis 1-11 is fully historical and clearly expressed, including the creation and Fall of man, the Curse on the Creation and its subjection to the bondage of decay, the promised Redeemer, the worldwide cataclysmic deluge in the days of Noah, the post-diluvian renewal of man's commission to subdue the earth (now augmented by the institution of human government), and the origin of nations and languages at the tower of Babel.

A. Creation

The physical universe of space, time, matter, and energy has not always existed, but was supernaturally created by a transcendent personal Triune Creator, (The Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) who alone has existed from eternity. Scripture, which serves as an eye witness account, teaches a recent origin for man and the whole creation, spanning approximately 4,000 years from creation to Christ and approximately another 2,000 years from Christ to the present. The gap theory or an old universe/earth theory has no basis in Scripture since death would be introduced into the world before the fall of man. All things in the universe were created and made by God in the six literal days of the Creation Week described in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and confirmed in Exodus 20:8-11. The days in Genesis do not correspond to geologic ages, but are six [6] consecutive twenty-four [24] hour days of creation.

The phenomenon of biological life did not develop by natural processes from inanimate systems but was specially and supernaturally created by the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of the major kinds of plants and animals was created functionally complete from the beginning and did not evolve from some other kind of organism. Changes in basic kinds since their first creation are limited to "horizontal" changes (variations) within the kinds, or "downward" changes (e.g., harmful mutations, extinctions).

The creation record is factual, historical, and presented clearly; thus all theories of origins or development that involve evolution in any form are false. All things that now exist are sustained and ordered by The Lord

Jesus's providential care. However, a part of the spiritual creation, Satan and his angels rebelled against God after the creation and are attempting to thwart His divine purposes in creation.

B. Adam and Eve

The first human beings did not evolve from an animal ancestry, but were specially created in fully human form from the start. Furthermore, the "spiritual" nature of man (self-image, moral consciousness, abstract reasoning, language, will, religious nature, etc.) is itself a supernaturally created entity distinct from mere biological life. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were specially created by the Lord Jesus Christ, and all other men and women are their descendants. In Adam, mankind was instructed to exercise "dominion" over all other created organisms, and over the earth itself (an implicit commission for true science, technology, commerce, fine art, and education), but the temptation by Satan and the entrance of sin brought God's curse on that dominion and on mankind, culminating in death and separation from God as the natural and proper consequence.

C. Noah's Flood

The record of earth history, as preserved in the earth's crust, especially in the rocks and fossil deposits, is primarily a record of catastrophic intensities of natural processes, operating largely within uniform natural laws, rather than one of gradualism and relatively uniform process rates. There are many scientific evidences for a relatively recent creation of the earth and the universe, in addition to strong scientific evidence that most of the earth's fossiliferous sedimentary rocks were formed in an even more recent global hydraulic cataclysm.

D. Miracles in the Natural World

Processes today operate primarily within fixed natural laws and relatively uniform process rates, but since these were themselves originally created and are daily maintained by the Lord Jesus Christ, there is always the possibility of miraculous intervention in these laws or processes by Him. Evidences for such intervention should be scrutinized critically, however, because there must be clear and adequate reason for any such action on the part of God.

E. Man's Fall Affected Creation

The universe and life have been impaired since the completion of creation, so that imperfections in structure, disease, aging, extinctions, and other such phenomena are the result of "negative" changes in

properties and processes occurring in an originally-perfect created order. Since the universe and its primary components were created perfect for their purposes in the beginning by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a competent and volitional Creator, and since He does remain active in this now-decaying creation, there does exist an ultimate purpose and meaning in the universe. Teleological considerations, therefore, are appropriate in scientific studies whenever they are consistent with the actual data of observation. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the creation presently awaits the consummation of the Lord Jesus Christ's purpose.

F. The Redemption of the Creation

The final restoration of creation's perfection is yet future. The eventual accomplishment of God's eternal purposes in creation, with the removal of His curse and the restoration of all things to divine perfection, will take place at the personal bodily return to earth of Jesus Christ to judge and purge sin and reign for one thousand years. After the one thousand years, God will create a new heaven and earth free from corruption and will last for all of eternity.

Genesis 1-11; Exodus 4:11; 20:11; Deuteronomy 4:32; 2 Kings 19:15; Nehemiah. 9:6; Job 9:8-10; 10:8-12; 12:10; 26:7-10; 26:13; 28:26; 31:15; 33:4; 33:6; 34:19; 35:10; 36:3; 37:16,18; 38:4-12,19,21,33,36; 40:15,19; Psalms 8:3,5,6; 19:1,4; 24:1,2; 33:6-9,11; 65:6; 74:16,17; 78:69; 86:9; 89:11-12,47; 90:2; 94:9; 95:4; 95:5-7; 96:5; 100:3; 102:18,25; 103:22; 104:2-6,8,24,26,30; 111:4; 115:15; 119:73,90-91,152; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 136:5-9,13,16; 146:6; 148:1-6; 149:2; Proverbs 3:19; 8:26-29; 14:31; 16:4; 17:5; 20:12; 22:2; 26:10; 30:4; Ecclesiastes 3:11; 7:29; 11:5; 12:1,6; Isaiah 17:7; 22:11; 27:11; 29:16; 37:16; 37:26; 40:26,28; 42:5; 43:1,7,10,15,21; 44:2,21,24; 45:7-9,11-12,18; 48:7,13; 49:1,5; 51:13,16; 54:5; 57:16; 64:8; 65:17-18; 66:2; Jeremiah 1:5; 5:22; 10:11,12,16; 14:22; 16:20; 27:5; 31:35; 32:17; 33:2; 51:15,19; Hosea 8:14; Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:6; Jonah 1:9; Zechariah 12:1; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 13:35; 19:4; Mark 13:19; John 1:1-3,10; 17:24; Acts 4:24; 7:50; 14:15; 17:24-26,28-29; Romans 1:20,23,25; 4:17; 8:19-22; 9:20; 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 11:9,12,18,24; 15:38, 45,47; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Ephesians 2:10; 3:9; 4:24; Colossians 1:15-17; 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:13; 4:3-4; 6:13; Hebrews 1:2,10; 2:10; 3:4; 11:3; 12:9; James 3:9; 1 Peter 4:19; 2 Peter 3:4; Revelation 3:14; 4:11; 10:6; 14:7; 20:1-15; 21:1.

Addendum

Why do we have an invitation?

The Scriptures record many incidents where listeners to God's word were given an opportunity to respond to God's conviction on their hearts.

(Exodus 32:26; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 7:28-8:1; 8:22; 10:32-33; 10:38-39; 11:28-30; 15:21-28; 16:24-27; Mark 1:17; 3:5; Mark 8:34-38; 10:14-16; 10:17-22; Luke 6:8-11; 6:17-19; 8:40-48; 9:57-62; 17:11-19; John 1:38-39; 1:4; 1:7-8; 4:16; 5:5-15; 6:1-14; 32-59; 7:37-39; 8:11; 9:1-11; 11:39-44; Acts 2:41; 3:19-4:4; 8:36-39; 10:34-35, Revelation 22:17)

What decisions can you make?

Salvation

Today is the day of salvation! This is the most important decision of your life.

The Bible presents a clear path to eternal life. First, we must recognize that we have sinned against God: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We have all broken His laws, which makes us deserving of punishment. Since all our sins are ultimately against an eternal God, only an eternal punishment is sufficient. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Our sin has separated us from God, and the consequence of sin is death; physical death and spiritual death, the latter being separating from God for all eternity in Hell. Salvation is deliverance from "wrath," that is, from God's judgment of sin (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9). Biblical salvation refers to our deliverance from the consequence/penalty of sin and therefore involves the removal of the guilt sin.

God calls everyone to salvation and only God can remove sin and deliver us from sin's penalty (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). God has rescued us through Jesus Christ (John 3:17). Jesus Christ, the sinless (1 Peter 2:22), eternal Son of God became a man (John 1:1, 14) and died to pay our penalty. "God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Specifically, it was Jesus' death on the cross, taking the punishment that we deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was buried and on the third day He rose from the dead that achieved our salvation, proving His victory over sin and death. ((1 Corinthians 15:1-4); Romans 5:10; Ephesians 1:7). In His great mercy

He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Scripture is clear that salvation is the gracious, undeserved gift of God (Ephesians 2:5, 8) and is only available through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

We are saved by *faith*. First, we must *hear* the gospel—the good news of Jesus' death on the cross to pay for our sins, burial, and resurrection (Ephesians 1:13). Then, we must *believe*—fully trust the Lord Jesus (Romans 1:16). This involves repentance, a changing of mind about sin and Christ - who He is, what He did, and why - for salvation (Acts 3:19 and calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:9-10, 13). If we place our faith in Him, trusting in the person and work of Christ, we will be forgiven and receive the promise of eternal life in heaven. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that anyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Faith alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross is the only true path to eternal life! "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If you want to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, here is a sample prayer. Remember, saying this prayer or any other prayer will not save you. It is only trusting in Christ that can save you from sin. This prayer is simply a way to express to God your faith in Him and thank Him for providing for your salvation. "God, I know that I have sinned against you and deserve punishment. But Jesus Christ took the punishment that I deserve so that through faith in Him I could be forgiven. I place my trust in You for salvation. Thank You for Your wonderful grace and forgiveness - the gift of eternal life! Amen!"

Baptism

Baptism doesn't save you or prove that a person is truly saved. The thief on the cross was saved and was never baptized. (Luke 23:40-43) Baptism is a command since Jesus commanded His disciples to Baptize as part of fulfilling the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:19-20) Therefore, baptism is not optional and must be done as soon as it is possible. Baptism is a believer's first step of obedience after receiving Christ as Lord and Savior. Christian baptism is an outward testimony/profession of their faith that memorializes/points back to the inward reality of salvation that has already occurred in a believer's life when they were saved. The

meaning of the symbol action of Baptism signifies three different realities that occurred in and for the believer at salvation.

First, Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ. A believer is identified with the person and saving work of Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:11-12).

Second, the symbolic action of being immersed in the water symbolizes being freed from the power of sin and dying to our sin nature. The action of coming out of the water pictures our new life in Christ and entering into eternal life by being regenerated/born again. (Romans 6:6-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17) The immersion into water symbolizes the washing away /cleansing of sin by the Holy Spirit in regeneration (Ezekiel 36:25; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5) Furthermore, the raising of the person out of the water also signifies the hope that one day the person will be physically resurrected from the dead as Christ was resurrected. (Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; 42-44; 50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

Third, it identifies the believer with the Church through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was a waterless Baptism that occurred at Salvation. At salvation the Holy Spirit placed the believer into the Body of Christ at salvation and identified and connected the person with everyone in the believing Church. (Acts 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:5) Baptism of the Spirit makes all believers of the Church unified in spirit. Therefore, Baptism points to our union with the Body of Christ. To identify with Christ is to identify with His people. (Ephesians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 12:4-5) Furthermore, Baptism has been given to the church as an ordinance. This gives the local body of believers a visible sign that a person is a professing believer since salvation/the new birth cannot be witnessed by anyone. (Matthew 28:19-20; John 3:8; Acts 2:38-42; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 19:5)

Therefore, the symbol of Baptism and the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip into water, demands total immersion into water. In Christian baptism, there are two requirements before a person is baptized: 1) the person being baptized must have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior, and 2) the person must understand what baptism signifies. If a person knows the Lord Jesus as Savior, understands that Christian baptism is a step of obedience in publicly proclaiming his faith in Christ, and desires to be baptized, then there is no reason to prevent the believer from being baptized.

Church Membership

The Definition of Church Membership

When an individual is saved, he becomes a member of the body of Christ universal; in Heaven and on earth. (1 Corinthians. 12:13). The believer now possesses the qualifications necessary to become member of a local expression of that Body. To become a member of a church one has to commit oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for the purposes of the Church. These purposes include receiving instruction from God's Word (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy. 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and proclaiming the Gospel to those who are lost (Matt. 28:18- 20).

Although Scripture does not contain an explicit command to formally join a local church, the biblical foundation for church membership, formal or informal, is discussed in principle in the New Testament. This biblical principle can be seen most clearly in the example of the early church, the existence of church government, the exercise of church discipline, and the exhortation to mutual edification. In the early church, the idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally or informally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

The letters of the New Testament were written to **local** churches that possessed certain spiritual and practical boundaries. In the case of the few written to individuals—such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus—these individuals were leaders in churches. The New Testament letters themselves demonstrate that the Lord assumed that believers would be committed to a local assembly. There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Tim. 5:9), which could illustrate the possibility that local churches were tracking their members through lists as they grew in size. (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; 2 Cor. 3:1-2).

The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. In the book of Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of some type of church membership. Phrases such as “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17), all suggest recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (also see 1 Cor. 5:4; 14:23; and Heb. 10:25). Therefore, whether or not the membership was formal or informal, there were clear boundaries of who belong and who did not that one cannot deny.

The Existence of Church Government

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that a pastor/pastors is/are to oversee each local body of believers. The specific duties given to these pastors presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care. Among other things, these men are responsible to shepherd God’s people (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), to labor diligently among them (1 Thess. 5:12), to have charge over them (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17), and to keep watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Scripture teaches that the pastors will give an account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:3).

Those responsibilities require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership, formal or informal, in the local church. Pastors can shepherd the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are; they can provide oversight only if they know those for whom they are responsible; and they can fulfill their duty to shepherd the flock only if they know who is part of the flock and who is not. The pastors of a church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are primarily responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the church, and this is only done through some type of formal or informal church membership.

Conversely, Scripture teaches that believers are to submit to their pastors. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your leaders, and submit to them.” The question for each believer is, “Who are your leaders?” The one who has refused to join a local church and entrust himself to the care and the authority of the pastor has no leaders. For that person, obedience to Hebrews 13:17 is impossible. To put it simply, this verse implies that

every believer knows to whom he must submit, which, in turn, assumes clearly defined church membership.

Therefore, even though requiring a formal church membership is not discussed in Scripture per se, it is also not forbidden to require it either. The Scripture discusses the spiritual organization of the church such as the two offices of pastor and deacon, the roles of men and women, its discipleship and evangelism goals and values, and the behavioral expectations for believers. However, there is a great amount of flexibility in how each individual church decides to function in its cultural and contextual setting. For example, in the United States a church can file Articles of Incorporation with its respective state in order to protect individual leaders within that church from being sued personally. The negative of having Articles of Incorporation is that the church, which is considered a non-profit, must have a board with officers. Articles of Incorporation are not discussed in the Scripture but neither are they forbidden. Therefore, they become a preference issue, which allows a church the freedom to have this protection or not. (Romans 14:1-23; Colossians 2:16-17) Rock Harbor Church (RHC) has taken advantage of this law to protect its leadership and members from being sued. However, a church has the freedom to file Articles of Incorporation or not to. Therefore, having a formal church membership is categorized under this same freedom. One church may decide not have a formal church membership while another one has the freedom to require it based on the context and cultural setting. Neither of the decisions are wrong. Therefore the issue is morally neutral if the intent is for good reasons and church does not try to force its decision on other churches.

At Rock Harbor Church we have decided to require membership for 5 reasons:

1. Commitment

In America commitment is a rare commodity, and in general church membership ranks very low on many believer's priorities. Sadly, American Christians practice horrible ecclesiology because they tend to move from church to church on whims of children, teens, or some perceived felt need. Many practice what is commonly called "cafeteria Christianity." In other words, they pick and choose the best programs from different local assemblies to meet the needs of themselves and their families. Therefore, they never commit to a specific church, but simply take the best from multiple churches. RHC desires that its members be

committed to every aspect of the church and its agenda. RHC's desire is for its members not to get into the practice of taking the best of churches in the community but to find ways to increase the ministry capabilities by their commitment to the cause of RHC. The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that God has called every member to a life devoted to the growth of the local body they belong to. In other words, Scripture exhorts all believers to edify the other members by practicing the "one-another's" of the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 10:24-25) and exercising their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Mutual edification can only take place in the context of the corporate body of Christ in a local church setting. Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal or informal way to make that commitment.

2. Accountability

It is a sad fact but many American Christians do not want accountability in their lives. They refuse to submit themselves to the care of the pastors and deacons, and they never commit themselves to a group of fellow believers. In essence, they try to practice Christianity in isolation which goes against how the church was designed as a body. When one becomes a member of a church, formally or informally, he submits himself to the care and the authority of the biblically qualified pastors that God has placed in that assembly as long as they function correctly. (1 Timothy 3:1-7) Furthermore, believers are all responsible to serve the local body of Christ, but this can only be done in the context of a local church. If that local church has chosen to practice a formal church membership, then that is the step the believer would have to take in order to effectively serve at that church. This would be an issue of submission. (Hebrews 13:17)

3. Church Discipline

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlines the way the church is to seek the restoration of a believer who has fallen into sin—a four-step process commonly known as church discipline. First, when a brother sins, he is to be confronted privately by a single individual (v. 15). If he refuses to repent, that individual is to take one or two other believers along to confront him again (v. 16). If the sinning brother refuses to listen to the two or three, they are then to tell it to the church (v. 17). If there is still no repentance, the final step is to put the person out of the assembly (v. 17; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13). The exercise of church discipline according to Matthew 18 and other passages (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 5:20; Titus 3:10-

11) presupposes that the pastors of a church know who their members are. For example, the pastor/pastors has neither the responsibility nor the authority to discipline a member of the church down the street. Sadly, the widespread lack of understanding of church membership by Christians has made it necessary for pastors to discipline not only formal members but also non-members who regularly fellowship at the church but never join. However, the Bible's teaching on church discipline assumes church membership formally or informally.

4. Liability

One of the biggest factors for congregations losing their churches is due to being sued. Even though the Scriptures admonish brothers not to sue one another, the culture that we live in is a very litigious one; believers included. Many believers ignore the warning in Scripture (1 Corinthians 6:1-8) and actually sue the very church they attend. This ability to sue a church does not really exist in third world countries or even throughout church history, but it is a reality today in America. This sad reality requires that a church protect itself. Therefore, membership becomes a way to protect a church from being sued. Membership protects against several things that has and does happen:

- a. **Defamation of Character/Public Slander law suits.**
If RHC did not have membership requirements and we publically church disciplined someone as prescribed in Matthew 18:15-19, then we could be sued for either defamation of character or public slander. The fact that we require church membership protects us as a non-profit entity in the State of California. For example, if we church disciplined a member for living in open sin and we had to take it to level three of Matthew 18:17, then that member could not sue us for public slander or defamation of character. The ability to sue a non-profit organization is lost when a person decides to give up that right when they join and sign a membership agreement. By signing a membership agreement, the person has submitted to the non-profit organization's rules and understands that rule violations are grounds for dismissal. Our rules for dismissal are found in Matthew 18:15-19, Romans 16:17-18, 1 Corinthians 5:5,9-11-13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,13-15, and Titus 3:10. This reality exists for all non-profits and not just churches. We have handled several instances of church discipline since the inception of RHC, but those issues were handled privately at the first and second levels of Matthew 18. However, it is very real

possibility that one day RHC will have to publically church discipline one of its members due to the person's unrepentance reaching the third level of Matthew 18. If this happens, RHC will have to take the issue to level four of Matthew 18 and publically disciplined an individual. RHC is protected from being sued at this point for defamation of character or public slander due to our formal membership covenant that the person signed. The courts will defend us and not them since they submitted to the non-profit's form of discipline for non-compliance.

5. A Vetting System.

If someone comes to faith in Christ for the first time in their lives, then we can properly vet them with our own discipleship program. However, the majority of people who join RHC come from other churches and that brings a whole new dynamic to our context. We are not in an isolated area such as in the first century or some remote place on the mission field. Churches in America are on every block it seems and so we believe that there needs to be a vetting system to ensure that RHC's members are professing salvation according to the Scriptures, Biblically baptized, living biblically consistent lives, and are not under church discipline. In the American culture of churches, there exists the fact that other churches do an extremely poor job leading people to the Lord, baptizing, and disciplining people. Some of these churches are liberal or apostate so the person comes with a host of heresies and are at times practicing an immoral lifestyle. Therefore, when the people who have been attending these kinds of churches decides to join RHC, we have discovered that they have major spiritual, theological, and moral issues that need to be confronted since we don't want heresies or immorality infecting our people. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that false doctrine acts as a cancer. (2 Timothy 2:16-18) Therefore, to protect our people and our reputation in the community, we have decided to have a vetting system. This vetting system of membership allows us to maintain our theological standards and to present a membership whose behavior is consistent with the Scriptures. Lastly, one of the last safety nets that RHC has is a public invitation after the sermon. If someone comes forward to join the church during the invitation, then the members can see who is joining RHC. If a member is aware of an issue regarding a person desiring membership, then they can alert the leadership of the church of any issue they deem to be problematic. Therefore, in our cultural context, RHC is exercising the freedom given in Scripture by requiring membership as the vehicle used for vetting people.

Conclusion

Whether one agrees with having a formal or informal membership is irrelevant. It is the decision of the local body of believers what type of membership dynamic they will use with its members. A church must decide what system is best for them in their cultural and contextual climate so that the many duties and responsibilities of believers can be lived out without any hindrance. Therefore, freedom in Christ is given for a church to make this kind of decision indicative to their situation. For RHC, a formal membership process fits our church's needs.

Rededicating your life to Christ

Perhaps you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior but you have been away from fellowship with the Lord. We can never lose our salvation but we can lose fellowship with the Lord due to many issues. For example, a child can lose fellowship with his or her parents due to bad behavior. However, that child is always their child. The union always remains but the fellowship can be broken. Likewise, the same can happen between us and God. Even though our union with Christ can never be broken, we can stop living for Him, get involved into sinful behavior, harbor unconfessed sin, or simply become indifferent towards the Lord. If you have been out of fellowship with the Lord, He desires that you come back to restore your relationship with Him.

Baby/Child Dedication

Baby/Child dedication is intended to be a public statement by the parents that they will train their children in the Christian faith and seek to instill that faith in them. Baby/Child dedication is a symbolic ceremony undertaken by Christian parents soon after the birth of a child. The Act is intended to be a public statement by the parents that they will train their children in the Christian faith and seek to instill that faith in them. There is no implied salvation in the ceremony whatsoever. The idea of dedicating a child to the Lord can certainly be found in the Bible. Hannah was a barren wife who promised to dedicate her child to God if He would give her a son (1 Samuel 1:11). Luke 2:22 begins the account of Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the temple after forty days in order to dedicate Him to the Lord as a firstborn.

How To Be Saved

1. Understand that the Bible declares you to be a sinner who is in need of forgiveness from God due to the penalty attached to sin, which is both physical death and spiritual. Those who die physically without forgiveness will die a second death by being placed in Hell for all eternity. However, God has provided the means of that forgiveness, which is found in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:23 & 6:23 – “All have sinned”, “The wages of sin is death.”)

2. Therefore, believe (trust/be persuaded/rely on) that Jesus Christ is God who came in the flesh and was the perfect substitutionary sacrifice on your behalf when He died on a cross for your sins, was buried, and rose physically from the dead on the third day. Trust/believe that Jesus, the Messiah, is your substitute for and as your Savior from the penalty of sin (John 1:1 “The Word was God” & Romans 5:8 “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”)

3. Since Jesus accomplished the work of salvation on your behalf, you must understand that salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned nor worked for. It is provided to the individual by grace and through the means of faith. Faith (trust/believe/be persuaded by/rely on) in Jesus the Messiah’s death as your substitute for your sins, His burial and resurrection is the only necessary condition for salvation. (**Ephesians 2:8, 9** - "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.")

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I ask you to forgive me of all my sins. I believe you are God who came in the flesh and lived the perfect life I couldn’t live. I believe You died on a cross for my sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. I receive and trust You as my Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me and giving me eternal life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Pastor Brandon Holthaus