

STARTING POINT MEMBERSHIP CLASS

**Our Journey Together At
Jacksonville Bible Church**

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My Membership Process

Class

Check off each session once you have attended that class and completed the reading assignments for each session. [Reading assignments, if any, are located at the end of each of session.]

- Session 1 | Beginning the Journey: The Gospel & Our Response
- Session 2 | Continuing the Journey: Our Sanctification
- Session 3 | Understanding the Journey: Our Beliefs
- Session 4 | Together on the Journey: Our Local Church
- Session 5 | Participating in the Journey: Our Service & Stewardship
- Session 6 | Care Along the Journey: Our Leadership

Commitment

- I have turned in the Application for Church Membership Form

Conversation

- I have completed the conversation with one of Jacksonville Bible Church's Elders.
 - [An Elder will contact you and schedule an interview once your application has been submitted.]

Congregation

- My request to come into the church membership has been presented to the church body for affirmation at a members' meeting.

Beginning the Journey

The Gospel & Our Response

Welcome to the Class

A. Becoming a Member of Jacksonville Bible Church.

- There are 4 Phases in the Membership Process:

1. Class

- a. Attendance

- b. Reading Assignments

2. Commitment

- The Application for Church Membership Form

3. Conversation

- Meet with an elder to discuss membership

4. Congregation

- a. Article 6, Section 1 of our Constitution states...

- All requests for membership shall be made to a member of the board of elders. Upon making such requests, the person shall be given an application for membership, along with a copy of the doctrinal statement and constitution. Upon receipt of the application designated elders will meet with the applicant regarding his/her Christian experience, assurance of salvation and doctrinal belief. Upon acceptance by consensus of the board of elders each applicant shall be presented to the church to be enrolled as an active member.*

- b. The congregation, and not the elders, has the authority to add or remove people from membership. We are elder-led and congregation-ruled.

B. Why a Starting Point Class?

- *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

1. To help establish or strengthen your foundational understanding of church membership.

2. To help unify us as a local church.

3. To help prepare you for membership at Jacksonville Bible Church.

Our goal today is to unpack the meaning of the word *“gospel”*. We’ll seek to discover why the gospel is such good news and why it’s appropriate to call it *“the main thing.”*

- *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)*

I. The _____ of the Gospel.

A. When we are asking what the Gospel is, we are asking an ULTIMATE question.

B. Any religious worldview will at least try to answer three basic questions:

1. *Who is God, or of what does ultimate spiritual existence consist?*
2. *What’s wrong with us? Why aren’t we as good as we ought to be?*
3. *What are we to do about not being as good as we ought to be?*

C. The Bible presents clear answers to each one of those basic questions, all of which are wrapped up neatly in the Gospel message – what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1:18 as the preaching/message of the cross.

II. What is the Gospel _____?

- A. *“I’m OK, you’re OK.”*
- B. *“God is LOVE.”*
- C. *“Jesus wants to be my FRIEND.”*
- D. *“We should straighten UP and fly RIGHT.”*

III. What are the Essential Elements of the Gospel?

A. God is both our sovereign _____ and our righteous _____.

1. The Bible portrays God as the self-existent and all-powerful Creator.
2. The Bible portrays God as Holy, so He must respond with fierce opposition to sin. This is the meaning of God’s wrath.
3. Because God is both our Creator and Judge we are doubly accountable to Him for all our behavior – word, thought, and deed.

B. Man was created by God, in God’s image, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But man _____ against God by disobeying His holy law. Man, therefore separated himself from God’s holy and satisfying presence, and incurred His _____ displeasure.

1. *What is sin?* Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.
2. *What is sin's true nature?* Defining sin in relationship to God reveals its true nature: sin is essentially rebellion against God.
3. *Who has sinned?* All people are sinners and stand guilty before God.
4. *What is impacted by sin?* Man's sinfulness extends to every part of his being; nothing in him has been unaffected by sin.
5. In light of our sin and God's holiness, there are grave and inevitable consequences:
 - a. A Broken relationship with God.
 - b. Enslavement to sin and Satan.
 - c. Consequences in life.
 - d. Eternal Punishment.

C. Jesus Christ's death was the _____ payment for the penalty that we deserved for our sin. His death is God's only provision for the forgiveness of man's sin and the _____ of God's wrath against him.

1. Consider Jesus' birth and perfect, sinless life.
2. Consider Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.
3. Consider Jesus' authority and return.

D. We are called to _____ to this good news in repentance and belief – turning away from our sin and self-sufficiency toward God and trusting in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as the substitute penalty that we deserved to pay for our sin.

1. The first component is *repentance*.
2. The second component is *belief/faith*.
3. Now, an *outward* action that demonstrates an *inward* change:
Believer's *baptism* by immersion after salvation.

Assignments:

- Read "God's Plan of Salvation" – Appendix 1 (Pgs. 20-25 of this workbook)
- Read Mark 3 "Gospel Saturated" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 39-47)
- Read Mark 5 "Biblical Evangelist" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 57-62)
- Write down any questions you have for review next week.

Continuing the Journey

Our Sanctification

The Purpose of Jacksonville Bible Church

We exist to glorify God by growing together in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet 3:18)

A. To Glorify God

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

B. To Grow Together Through Fellowship

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

C. To Grow Together Through Evangelism

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20)

D. To Grow in the Grace Jesus Christ

...make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (2 Pet 1:5-7)

E. To Grow in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Col 1:9-10)

I. The Goal of Our Salvation: _____.

A. *What Prevents Holiness?*

The Barrier to Holiness: _____.

B. *What Does Holiness Look Like?*

The Model for Holiness: Jesus Christ.

C. *Why Be Holy?*

The Motive for Holiness: Our _____ for God.

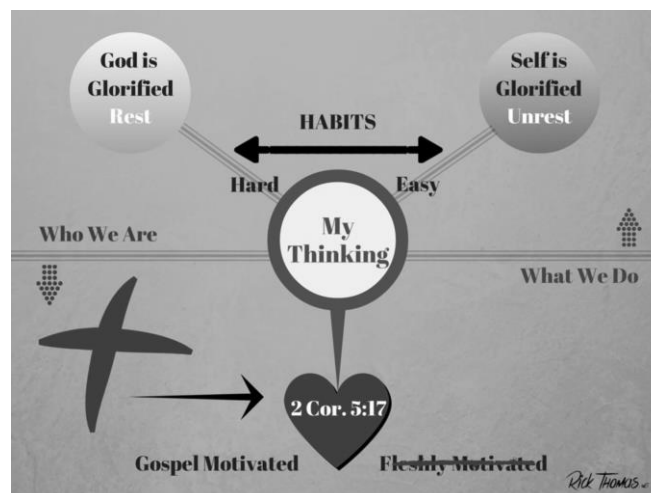
II. The Battle for Holiness.

A. The Power & Penalty of Sin Was Broken.

B. The Presence of Sin Remains.

C. The Heart Is the Battlefield.

1. Growth in *holiness* always comes through the pathway of the *heart*.
2. The remaining sin in our hearts is *deceptive, wicked, and in active rebellion* against God.
3. The Bible teaches that our sinful behavior is not caused by other *people* or our *circumstances*, but by our own *desires, cravings, longings, or lusts*. Whatever rules our hearts determines what we do and say in response to people and situations.



III. The Process of Holiness: _____

A. Sanctification Defined.

1. It is a lifelong process.
2. There is discernable progress.
3. It is a work of grace.

B. The Holy Spirit Works.

C. We Work.

1. The Goal of Change:

- a. Christlikeness
- b. Being pleasing to God

2. The Process of Change: *“to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)*

a. Put Off: *Ephesians 4:22*

b. Be Renewed in Thinking: *Ephesians 4:23*

c. Put On: *Ephesians 4:24*

d. To practice identifying “put-off’s” and “put-on’s”, please complete the following chart after reading the verses in the left column.

Verses	Put Off	Renew	Put On
Ephesians 4:25			
Ephesians 4:29-30			

IV. Weapons for the Battle.

A. The _____ exposes and judges the motives, intents, and desires of the heart. It provides truth—God’s perspective on reality.

B. Prayer deepens our fellowship with God, and therefore brings a greater sensitivity to and conviction of sin. In prayer we can confess our sins, cultivate a hatred for sin and a love for godliness, and receive strength for our battle with sin.

C. The Holy Spirit dwells in us so that we can say “no” to the passions and desires of our sinful nature. God has made us new creatures in Christ, and he is actively at work to transform our hearts.

D. Fellow _____ are a crucial part of this battle. Therefore, each Christian should be committed to receiving help from others. This includes confessing our sin to each other and exhorting one another.

V. The Heart of Sanctification.

Far from making us self-centered or morbidly introspective, our pursuit of holiness intensifies our joy as we become more amazed at God’s forgiveness, more free from the sin in our lives, and more intimately acquainted with our God.

Assignments:

- Read Mark 1 “*Expositional Listener*” in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 19-27)
- Read Mark 8 “*Growing Disciple*” in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 83-95)
- Read “*Gospel-Driven Sanctification*” – Appendix 2 (Pgs. 26-32 of this workbook)
- Write down any questions you have for review next week.

Understanding the Journey

Our Beliefs

I. What Is Doctrine?

A. The _____ of the Bible.

1. The Bible tells a story: *the story of God and His relationship to His creation in general, and to humanity in particular.*
2. Some of the main facets of the Bible's "plotline" provide for us a general overview of God and His purposes in the world:
 - a. Creation and the Fall
 - b. The plan of redemption and restoration.

B. The _____ of the Bible.

1. When we endeavor to *understand* what the Bible teaches about any subject, we are pursuing doctrine.
2. The study of *doctrine* and study of the *Bible* are not opposed to each other; Bible study should result in sound doctrine.

II. Why Do We Need Doctrine?

A. The _____ of Doctrine.

1. It is impossible to truly *love* God without having true *knowledge* about God.
2. What we believe determines the way we live.
3. Every Christian is a theologian.

B. The _____ of Sound Doctrine.

1. It helps us grow in our reverence for and worship of God.
2. It helps us to overcome our wrong ideas.
3. It helps protect the church against doctrinal controversies.
4. It is necessary to fulfilling the great commission.
5. It affects our behavior.

C. The _____ of Sound Doctrine.

1. It gives us a balanced and complete diet.
2. It takes us deeper into the knowledge of God.
3. It results in a maturing congregation.
4. It creates an openness to talk about difficult subjects.
5. It equips us to be ambassadors for Christ in a changing world.

III. How Is a Commitment to Sound Doctrine Expressed in This Church?

- A. A Commitment to the _____ of God's Word.
- B. A Commitment to the _____ of God's Word.
- C. A Commitment to the _____ of Truth from God's Word.
- D. A Commitment to _____ God's Word through Private Reading, Study and Meditation.

IV. Our Doctrinal Beliefs Can Be Summarized as Follows:

- We believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and the sufficient and final authority for all matters of faith, practice, and life (2 Tim. 3:16).
- We believe God is triune, being three in person and one in essence. The Father, Son, and Spirit are equally God but are three in person. This God is the center of our worship (Matt. 28:19-20).
- We believe in the sovereign rule of the Father who assumes headship of all that He created and continues to care and sustain in providence all that exists (Isa. 40).
- We believe that the eternal Son took on human flesh, being born of a virgin, and that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, the only mediator between God and man (Matt. 1:23-25, I Tim. 2:5, Phil. 2:5-7).
- We believe that the Holy Spirit possesses full personality and deity and executes the will of God. It is through the Spirit's power that the elect are saved and the Bible was written. (Matt 28:19, Rom 8:9, 2 Pet 1:20-21)
- We believe that all have sinned and are under the condemnation of death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).
- We believe that Jesus, according to the will of God the Father, offered Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice and that all who believe in Him have eternal life. On the cross, Jesus defeated evil, sin, and death. He shed His blood so that those who repent and believe will have life in Him as their Lord and Savior (John 3:1, Rom. 10:9-10).

- We believe that salvation is by grace through faith and that true faith in the gospel will be made evident by a life of godliness, which is only possible by walking with the Holy Spirit and by participation with the community of the saints (Acts 2:42, Eph. 2:10, Phil. 2:12, Heb. 10:25).
- We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the first fruits of our resurrection and His ascension into heaven to the right hand of the Father. We look forward in hope to His second coming in glory (I Cor. 15:3-8, II Pet. 3).
- We believe that baptism is a faithful response to God's grace, signifying one's identification with Christ and His church and that the church's privilege is to commune with the triune God and His people in celebrating the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:3).
- We believe that the church is the pillar and support of the truth, sharing in God's redemptive mission through proclamation of the gospel by word and deed, resulting in transformed lives committed to God's glory. The church is the community where the people of God share their lives in fellowship with God and each other (I Tim. 3:15, Matt. 28:19-20).

Assignments:

- Read Mark 2 "*Biblical Theologian*" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 27-39)
- Read our Doctrinal Statement – Appendix 4 (Pgs. 34-37 of this booklet)
- Write down any questions you have for review next week.

Together on the Journey

Our Local Church

I. What Is a Church?

A. A Church Is NOT:

1. a loose affiliation of people who hold roughly the same religious beliefs, no matter what those beliefs might be. I'm not joining a religious club when I join a church.
2. a building. A building is simply a place to meet. I'm not going to an exclusive clubhouse when I go to church.
3. a non-profit organization with a clear vision statement and lucid objectives. I'm not joining an altruistic or philanthropic society when I join a church.

B. A Church IS:

1. a regular assembly of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
2. a local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to Christ and committed to each other.
3. a display of God's wisdom and glory (Eph. 3:10).
4. a display of counter-cultural, Christ-like love (John 13:35).

C. Church membership is thus for _____ only.

II. Church Membership

A. Biblical Case for Church Membership

1. Paul's formal exclusion of the sinner at Corinth presupposes formal inclusion.
2. The various "one another" commands and instructions presuppose a knowledge of who is part of the community so they may know to whom the instructions apply (1 Corinthians 12:25-27, Romans 12:4-5)
3. Paul's reference to "by the majority" in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 seems to refer to a group commonly recognized as the church's members.
4. The early church kept a list of widows. (1 Timothy 5:9)
5. Pastors are called to care for a specific group of believers – the members of their local church
6. God Himself keeps a list of all believers.
7. God has always made a clear distinction between His people and the world.

B. What Does Church Membership Signify?

1. Church membership signifies a church's corporate endorsement of a person's salvation.
2. Church membership signifies an individual commitment to grasp hold of one another in mutual love and discipleship.

3. Church membership signifies a regular responsibility that involves people in each other's lives for the purposes of the Gospel.
4. Church membership signifies an inward love for God and His people.

C. What are the Criteria for Church Membership?

1. _____. Churches should be careful to allow only genuine believers into the covenant of church membership. *Why?*
 - a. Because of who the church is.
 - b. Because of how the church operates.
 - c. Because of the covenant that membership signifies.
2. Observable _____. In discerning who is a genuine believer, the most reliable criterion for which we can look is the fruit of godly character and actions. *Why demand such fruit?*
 - a. Because Jesus advises us to do so.
 - b. Because other criteria are unreliable.

D. Why is Meaningless Membership Dangerous?

1. Meaningless membership sends a confusing witness to the surrounding community.
2. Meaningless membership causes division due to the sin of unconverted members.
3. Meaningless membership causes uncertainty regarding the duties of membership.
4. Meaningless membership leads to the self-deception of irresponsible members.

III. Four Reasons to Join a Local Church

A. Join For Other People.

1. Join a church for the sake of non-Christians.
2. Join a church for the sake of weaker Christians.
3. Join a church for the sake of the church leaders.

B. Join for the Corporate Health of the Church.

1. Join a church to expose false gospels.
2. Join a church to edify the church.

C. Join for Your Individual Health as a Christian.

1. Join a church for your own spiritual protection.
2. Join a church for your own spiritual assurance.

D. The Best Reason to Join a Church: Join for God.

1. Join a Church for the sake of God's name.
2. Join a Church for the sake of God's cause.

VI. The Church: Dear to God and Dear to Us.

Our main concern is not whether you become part of our church, but that you become a part of a church. Ultimately, this is not an issue of our personal preference or convenience, but of the glory of God. We exist for His glory, and Scripture is clear that God desires to make His glory known through the church. This is why the church—the gathering of God's redeemed—is so dear to Him. We trust it will become dear to you as well.

"If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all. And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us."

— Charles Spurgeon

Assignments:

- Read Mark 4 "*Genuinely Converted*" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 47-57)
- Read the Church Covenant & Constitution – Appendix 5 (Pgs. 40-51 of this workbook)
- Write down any questions you have for review next week.

I. Service

A. Consider the Christian's Call to _____.

1. There are to be no passive participants in the church.
2. Since our service to God is closely connected to our salvation by God, we begin our exploration of servanthood with the greatest servant of all, Jesus Christ.
 - a. Servanthood is Modeled by Jesus' example.
 - b. Servanthood is Mandated by Jesus' call.
 - c. Servanthood is Motivated by Jesus' sacrifice.

B. Consider the Marks of Christian Service.

1. Christian service is God-centered.
2. Christian service is others focused.
3. Christian service is characterized by humility.
4. Christian service is empowered by the spirit of God.

C. Giving Expression to Servanthood in Our Church Family.

1. _____ ministry opportunities: We all have numerous opportunities provided to us by God to serve Him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and in cultivating the heart of a servant.
2. _____ ministries of the church: These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as Care Groups, Ministry Teams, and Children's Ministry.

II. Stewardship

A. Consider the _____ of stewardship. The faithful use of our resources begins with a stark realization: *God owns everything!*

B. Consider the _____ of stewardship. In addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of His kingdom through the local church.

1. In the New Testament, giving to support the work of the *church* remained an expectation of believers.
 - a. We give to our local church to support the needs of individuals.
 - b. We give to our local church to support the church's leaders so they can devote their time and energies to serving the church.
 - c. We give to our local church to support the extension of the gospel.
2. What are some guidelines for our giving?

- a. Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and training. This demonstrates gratitude and support of the leadership God has in place at that local church.
 - b. We learn in the New Testament that obedience to God's law is intensified due to the transforming work of the Spirit in light of Christ's work on the cross. In the same way, our giving is not merely to be thought of as "paying our dues," but should flow from the giving of our entire selves to God.
 - c. We also learn that we are to give regularly and systematically. This demonstrates a commitment to God and a trust that He will provide for all our needs.
3. What about tithing? A tithe may be an appropriate starting point – but the New Testament commands and examples are always of sacrificial giving, not merely counting a percentage.
4. If you desire to contribute financially to our church, you can do so with or without offering envelopes to our two funds:
- a. *General Fund* – the day-to-day operations of ministry at our church including operating expenses, salaries and funding for all the individual areas of ministry. If nothing is designated in the memo line or offering envelope, it will default to the general fund.
 - b. *Mission Fund* – the specific support of Global and Local Outreach ministries.

- C. Lastly, consider the _____ of stewardship.** The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health.
- 1. Giving is to be generous, not stingy.
 - 2. Giving is to be enthusiastic, not reluctant.
 - 3. Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard.
 - 4. Giving is to be discreet, not showy.

Assignments:

- Read Mark 6 "*Committed Member*" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 63-72)
- Read Mark 10 "*Prayer Warrior*" in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 105-114)
- Write down any questions you have for review next week.

Care Along the Journey

Our Leadership

I. Biblical Offices of a Church

A. The Two Offices

1. _____

- a. Definition: Deacons serve as physical stewards of the church.
- b. Responsibilities: Contrary to popular thought, deacons are not responsible for matters of spiritual oversight or for teaching. Rather, their biblical areas of responsibility include:
 - i. Meeting the *physical needs* of the church.
 - ii. Managing the *financial matters* of the church.
 - iii. Maintaining the *unity* of the body.
 - iv. Supporting the ministry of the elders.

2. _____

- a. Definition: Elders serve as spiritual overseers of the church.
- b. Responsibilities: Elders devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. This is biblical shepherding.
 - i. *Graze* - Elders feed the flock on God's Word.
 - ii. *Guide* - Elders lead the flock to rest.
 - iii. *Guard* - Elders alertly and courageously defend.
 - iv. *Give* - Elders provide care and restoration.

B. The Implications of the Two Offices.

The confusion of official leadership roles is unhelpful because...

1. it often makes it more difficult for the church and her leaders to function in the way God designed them to function.
2. it often results in unnecessary confusion about who is responsible to do what, resulting in some responsibilities slipping through the cracks.
3. it overloads the men who serve in either capacity with too many responsibilities, resulting in delinquent performance, early burn out, and often disillusionment.
4. it often results in poor leadership that fails to shepherd souls well.

II. The Biblical Response to Leadership in the Church.

Hebrews 13:17 *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."*

A. How to Bring Them Joy

1. *Believe* in Christ.
2. Walk in *Obedience* to Christ. (3 John 3-4)
3. Cultivate and Preserve *Unity* in the Body. (Phil 2:1-2)
4. *Pray* for Them. (Eph 6:18-19)
5. Express Personal *Love* and *Loyalty* to Them. (Phil 4:10)
6. Seek Their *Counsel* and *Direction*.
7. Receive Their *Reproof* with Gratefulness. (2 Cor 7:8-9, 13-16)
8. Believe the *Best* about Their Character and Decisions. (1 Cor 4:1)
9. Work *Beside* Them in Ministry. (1 Cor 16:15-18)

B. We Bring Them Grief When...

1. we are *indifferent* about salvation.
2. we fail to examine ourselves regularly (2 Cor. 13:5).
3. we *sin* against Christ or fail to *grow* the way we should.
4. we *bite and devour* one another (Gal. 5:15).
5. we sow discord among the brethren (Prov. 6:19).
6. we make no effort to *affirm* our love for them.
7. we seek counsel in the realm of the *ungodly* (Psalm 1).
8. we respond to their loving reproof with *callousness* (Prov. 9:7).
9. we *distrust* their motives or *judge* them unfairly (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

Assignments:

- Read Mark 7 “*Seeks Discipline*” in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 73-83)
- Read Mark 9 “*Humble Follower*” in *What is a Healthy Church Member* (Pgs. 95-105)
- Read “*Questions to Ask When Choosing a Church*”, Appendix 4 (Pg. 37 of this workbook)
- Fill out the Application for Church Membership

God's Plan of Salvation

By Mark Dever

A troubled jailer in the first century once asked two Christian leaders, “what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). This in fact is the most important question that anyone can ask. We are troubled not only by the evils of our world but also by our own faults. We often feel guilty for those words and deeds that our own consciences tell us are wrong. We probably sense that we deserve God's judgment, not his favor. What can be done—or what has been done—to rescue us from our helpless situation? We begin our answer by offering an overview of God's plan and his work to bring salvation, followed by a more detailed unpacking of these truths.

An Overview

Creation

God made this world and all that is in it: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:1, 27). He created human beings to be like him and to have unhindered fellowship with him, and when his work of creation was finished he saw that it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Rebellion

Although the first people God created, Adam and Eve, had complete freedom to live in friendship and trust with him, they chose to rebel (Gen. 3:1–7). Because God designed that Adam would represent the entire human race, his sin was catastrophic not only for him but for us: “one trespass led to condemnation for all men” (Rom. 5:18). Our fellowship with God was broken. Instead of enjoying his holy pleasure, we instead face his righteous wrath. Through this sin, we all died spiritually (see Rom. 3:1–20; Eph. 2:1–10) and the entire world was affected. God also cursed the world over which humanity had been set to reign as his lieutenants (see Gen. 3:17–19). “The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it” (Rom. 8:20). And we all individually sin against God in our own lives: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Redemption

God would have been perfectly just to leave matters there, with all human beings under his holy judgment, but he didn't. God instead set in motion his plan to save his people from sin and judgment and set free the entire creation from its subjugation to sin and the curse. How? By sending his Son as a true man who would bear the penalty

for our sin and die in our place: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

The best-known verse in the Bible summarizes the required response to this good news: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). To “believe in” Jesus includes both a wholehearted trust in him for forgiveness of sins and a decision to forsake one's sin or to “repent”: All who truly “repent *or turn from their sins+ and believe *in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins+” will be redeemed (Mark 1:15) and restored to a right relationship with God. To “believe in” Jesus also requires relating to, and putting trust in, Jesus as he truly is—not just a man in ancient history but also a living Savior today who knows our hearts and hears our prayers.

Consummation

God not only rescues lost sinners but he restores all of creation. We read in Romans 8:21: “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The heavens and the earth will “pass away” and be radically transformed (2 Pet. 3:7–13; Rev. 21:1). We read of the glorious culmination of this in the book of Revelation, where God's people, the redeemed, are brought into the presence of God to live (Rev. 21:1–22:6). This is life as it should be, literally as it was meant to be.

Filling in the Details

Let's now stop and review this more carefully and specifically, addressing the questions of God, man, Christ, the response, and the result.

God

The God of the Bible is the one and only true God. He is the greatest of all beings. He depends on no other being for his existence. He exists eternally as one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a mystery beyond our understanding, but not a contradiction. He plans and acts according to his own good pleasure. He “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11). God created the world and acts in it today in accordance with his own perfect, holy, good, and loving plan, in accordance with his own good pleasure.

In the same way that this perfectly good God created everything according to his own purposes, so he has acted to save people who have rebelled against him. This action, too, is not because of anything external compelling him, but it is “according to his great mercy” that “he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

Man

People are made *in the image of God* (Gen. 1:27–28). What does that mean? In part it means that we are privileged to act as God's representatives, as sub-rulers over God's creation, subduing the creatures of the earth, reflecting God's good rule over us. Our authority is derived from God's (Eph. 3:14–15) and is meant to reflect his own. But beyond function, being in God's image also means that we are *like God* in many ways. Like God, we are spiritual and rational beings. Like God, we communicate and establish relationships. Like God, our souls endure eternally.

However, the Bible also teaches that there has been an enduring effect of the sin of Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 3. Because of that sin, we are born morally *fallen*. We are naturally turned away from God and toward sin in every area of life. We are not as bad as we possibly could be, but we are at no point as good as we ought to be. We are now all sinners, and we sin in all areas of life (Rom. 3:23). We are corrupted and make the wrong choices. We are not holy, and are in fact inclined to evil; we do not love God, and therefore we are under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse. We are guilty of sinning against God, fallen from his favor, and under the curse of Genesis 3, and the promise of his right and just judgment of us in the future and forever is guaranteed to us (“the wages of sin is death,” Rom. 6:23). This is the state from which we need to be saved.

Jesus Christ

It was, then, when all human beings were desperate and helpless, that God “loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Fully God. The Son of God, who has eternally existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and who has eternally possessed all the attributes of God, became a man. He was born as Jesus, son of the virgin Mary. The Son entered this world with a purpose: he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), which means he came to redeem us from sin and guilt. He was not an unwitting or unwilling sacrifice. He, following his Father, chose to love the world in this way. Though now fully human, he was also fully God throughout the time of his life on earth (and remains fully God to this day). Jesus himself clearly taught his deity in the way he fulfilled prophecy, which was associated with the coming of God himself (Mark 14:61–62). Jesus forgave sins (Mark 2:5), he accepted worship (John 20:28; Revelation 5), and he taught, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Fully man. Jesus Christ was also fully man. He was not a deity pretending to be human when he was not. Jesus was fully human (and remains fully human to this day).

He was born and lived in submission to his earthly parents. He had a fully human body. He “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40). He learned the carpentry trade (Mark 6:3). He experienced hunger, felt thirst and tiredness, faced temptation, and eventually suffered even death itself. Jesus Christ was, and is, fully God and fully man. The eternal Son of God became a man in order to save sinners.

Perfect life. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. Indeed, all his actions were as they should be. His words were perfect. He said only what the Father commanded. “What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (John 12:50). He did only what the Father willed (John 5:19; e.g., Luke 22:42). So, the writer to the Hebrews concludes, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus lived the life of consistent, wholehearted love to the Father that Adam and Eve and Israel—and all of us—should have lived. He deserved no punishment from God because he was never disobedient.

Teaching. Jesus came to teach God's truth, especially about himself (Mark 1:38; 10:45; Luke 20:42; 24:44). He taught the truth about God, about his relationship with God the Father (John 14), about our sin, about what he had come to do, and about what we must do in response. He explained that the Scriptures of the OT were about him (Luke 24:44).

Crucifixion. But God sent his Son especially to die for us (Mark 10:45; John 3:16–18). This is how God has shown his love for us (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9–10). Christ gave his life as a ransom for us (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). By his death he paid the penalty for our sin. Jesus Christ's crucifixion was a horrible act of violence by the people who rejected, sentenced, mocked, tortured, and crucified him. And yet it was also a display of the self-giving love of God, as the Son of God bore the penalty of God's wrath against us for our sin (Deut. 21:23; Isa. 53:5; Rom. 3:25–26; 4:25; 5:19; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 9:28).

Resurrection, ascension, return. On the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus was raised from the dead by God. This demonstrated an acceptance of Christ's service in his ministry and specifically showed God's acceptance of his sacrifice for all those who would repent and believe (Rom. 1:4; 4:25). He ascended to heaven and “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Christ's return will bring God's plan of salvation to completion.

Response

So if God has done this in Christ, what are we to do to be saved? We must turn to God in Christ, which entails turning back from sin. If we *repent* of (decide to forsake and turn from) our sin (as best we understand it) and *trust* in Christ as a living person, we will be saved from God's righteous wrath against our sins. This response of repentance and faith (or trust) can be explained in more detail as follows:

Turn to God. In the OT, God commands people to turn or return to him, and so be saved (e.g., Isa. 6:10; Jer. 18:8). In the NT, Christ preached that people should turn to God, and Paul summarized his account of his preaching with that phrase: “that they (everyone) should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20; cf. Acts 26:18). Thus, as Paul said earlier, he preached “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). To repent means to turn. And the turning that we are called to do in order to be saved is fundamentally a turning to God. James could refer to the Gentiles who “turn to God” (Acts 15:19).

To “turn to,” in this sense in the Bible, is to orient your life toward someone. As God's people—those who are being saved—we are to play the part of the Prodigal Son who, though conscious of sin, guilt, and folly, flees to the Father (Luke 15:20). Paul at Lystra calls the people to turn to the living God (Acts 14:15). Paul refers to the Galatian Christians as those who had come to “know God” (Gal. 4:9); this is what we do in repentance: we repent *to*, we turn *to* God, and henceforth know him as the God who forgives our sins and accepts us for Christ's sake.

Turn away from sin. Turning to God necessarily implies our turning away from sin. The whole Bible—OT and NT—clearly teaches that to repent is to “acknowledge *God's+ name and turn from *our+ sins” (1 Kings 8:35; cf. 2 Chron. 7:14; Jer. 36:3; Ezek. 14:6; 18:30; Acts 3:19; 8:22; 26:18; Rev. 2:21–22; 9:20–21; 16:11). We cannot start to pursue God and sin at the same time. First John makes it clear that our basic way of life will either be oriented toward God and his light, or toward the darkness of sin. Christians in this life still sin, but against our deepest desires and better judgment; our lives are not guided and directed by sin as before. We are no longer enslaved to sin. Though we still struggle with it (Gal. 5:17), God has given us the gift of repentance (Acts 11:18), and we have been freed from sin's dominating power.

Believe and trust. Put another way, our response is to believe and trust God's promises in Christ, and to commit ourselves to Christ, the living Lord, as his disciples. Among Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel are “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The obedience that typifies God's people, beginning with repentance, is to result

from the faith and trust we have in him and his word (e.g., Josh. 22:16; Acts 27:25). Thus sins are sometimes called “breaking faith with God” (e.g., Ezra 10:2, 10). Having faith in Christ, which seals our union with him through the Holy Spirit, is the means by which God accounts Christ's righteousness as our own (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:17–21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 3:9). Paul could refer to “salvation through faith in Christ” (2 Tim. 3:15). Frequently this initial repentance and faith can be simply expressed to God himself in prayer.

Grow in godliness and battle for holiness. Such saving faith is something that we exercise, but even so it is a gift from God. Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). At the same time, Paul explained that Christians know an internal battle: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal. 5:17). God's *gift* of salvation has been given to Christians, but the evidence of that salvation is *lived out* in the continual work of God's Spirit. We can deceive ourselves, and so Paul encourages his readers to “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter encourages Christians to grow in godliness and so become more confident of their election (2 Peter 1). We don't create our own salvation by our actions, but we reflect and express it and so grow in our certainty of it. Because we Christians are liable to deceive ourselves, we should give ourselves to the study of God's Word to be instructed and encouraged in our salvation, and to learn what is inconsistent with it. Jesus' descriptions of his followers (see Matthew 5–7), or Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit's work in us (see Gal. 5:22–23), act as spiritual maps that help us locate ourselves to see if we are on the path of salvation.

Result

God's plan is to save his people from their sins—and to bring his people fully and finally to himself (Matt. 1:21; 2 Tim. 2:10). Christians experience salvation in this life in both a past and present sense, and we anticipate salvation in a future sense. Christians have been saved from the *penalty* of our sins; we are currently being saved from the *power* of sin; and one day, when God's plan of salvation is completed and we are with Christ, we shall be like him, and we shall be saved even from the very *presence* of sin. This is God's plan of salvation.¹

¹ Mark Dever, Ph.D., “God's Plan of Salvation,” *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2008) 2501-2503.

Gospel-Driven Sanctification

by Jerry Bridges

Early in my Christian life I heard someone say, “The Bible was not given to increase your knowledge but to guide your conduct.” Later I came to realize that this statement was simplistic at best and erroneous at worst. The Bible is far more than a rulebook to follow. It is primarily the message of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ, with everything in Scripture before the cross pointing to God’s redemptive work and everything after the cross—including our sanctification—flowing from that work. There is an element of truth in this statement, however, and the Holy Spirit used it to help me to see that the Bible is not to be read just to gain knowledge. It is, indeed, to be obeyed and practically applied in our daily lives. As James says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jam. 1:22).

With my new insight, I prayed that God would use the Bible to guide my conduct. Then I began diligently to seek to obey it. I had never heard the phrase “the pursuit of holiness,” but that became my primary goal in life. Unfortunately, I made two mistakes. First, I assumed the Bible was something of a rulebook and that all I needed to do was to learn what it says and go do it. I knew nothing of the necessity of depending on the Holy Spirit for his guidance and enablement.

Still worse, I assumed that God’s acceptance of me and his blessing in my life depended on how well I did. I knew I was saved by grace through faith in Christ apart from any works. I had assurance of my salvation and expected to go to heaven when I died. But in my daily life, I thought God’s blessing depended on the practice of certain spiritual disciplines, such as having a daily quiet time and not knowingly committing any sin. I did not think this out but just unconsciously assumed it, given the Christian culture in which I lived. Yet it determined my attitude toward the Christian life.

Performance-Based Discipleship

My story is not unusual. Evangelicals commonly think today that the gospel is only for unbelievers. Once we’re inside the kingdom’s door, we need the gospel only in order to share it with those who are still outside. Now, as believers, we need to hear the message of discipleship. We need to learn how to live the Christian life and be challenged to go do it. That’s what I believed and practiced in my life and ministry for some time. It is what most Christians seem to believe.

As I see it, the Christian community is largely a performance-based culture today. And the more deeply committed we are to following Jesus, the more deeply ingrained

the performance mindset is. We think we earn God's blessing or forfeit it by how well we live the Christian life.

Most Christians have a baseline of acceptable performance by which they gauge their acceptance by God. For many, this baseline is no more than regular church attendance and the avoidance of major sins. Such Christians are often characterized by some degree of self-righteousness. After all, they don't indulge in the major sins we see happening around us. Such Christians would not think they need the gospel anymore. They would say the gospel is only for sinners.

For committed Christians, the baseline is much higher. It includes regular practice of spiritual disciplines, obedience to God's Word, and involvement in some form of ministry. Here again, if we focus on outward behavior, many score fairly well. But these Christians are even more vulnerable to self-righteousness, for they can look down their spiritual noses not only at the sinful society around them but even at other believers who are not as committed as they are. These Christians don't need the gospel either. For them, Christian growth means more discipline and more commitment.

Then there is a third group. The baseline of this group includes more than the outward performance of disciplines, obedience, and ministry. These Christians also recognize the need to deal with sins of the heart like a critical spirit, pride, selfishness, envy, resentment, and anxiety. They see their inconsistency in having their quiet times, their failure to witness at every opportunity, and their frequent failures in dealing with sins of the heart. This group of Christians is far more likely to be plagued by a sense of guilt because group members have not met their own expectations. And because they think God's acceptance of them is based on their performance, they have little joy in their Christian lives. For them, life is like a treadmill on which they keep slipping farther and farther behind. This group needs the gospel, but they don't realize it is for them. I know, because I was in this group.

The Gospel Is for Believers

Gradually over time, and from a deep sense of need, I came to realize that the gospel is for believers, too. When I finally realized this, every morning I would pray over a Scripture such as Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," and then say, "Lord, I have gone astray. I have turned to my own way, but you have laid all my sin on Christ and because of that I approach you and feel accepted by you."

I came to see that Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me," was made in the context of justification (see vv. 15-21). Yet Paul was speaking in the present tense: "The

life I now live” Because of the context, I realized Paul was not speaking about his sanctification but about his justification. For Paul, then, justification (being declared righteous by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ) was not only a past-tense experience but also a present-day reality.

Paul lived every day by faith in the shed blood and righteousness of Christ. Every day he looked to Christ alone for his acceptance with the Father. He believed, like Peter (see 1 Pet. 2:4-5), that even our best deeds -- our spiritual sacrifices -- are acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. Perhaps no one apart from Jesus himself has ever been as committed a disciple both in life and ministry as the Apostle Paul. Yet he did not look to his own performance but to Christ’s “performance” as the sole basis of his acceptance with God.

So I learned that Christians need to hear the gospel all of their lives because it is the gospel that continues to remind us that our day-to-day acceptance with the Father is not based on what we do for God but upon what Christ did for us in his sinless life and sin-bearing death. I began to see that we stand before God today as righteous as we ever will be, even in heaven, because he has clothed us with the righteousness of his Son. Therefore, I don’t have to perform to be accepted by God. Now I am free to obey him and serve him because I am already accepted in Christ (see Rom. 8:1). My driving motivation now is not guilt but gratitude.

Yet even when we understand that our acceptance with God is based on Christ’s work, we still naturally tend to drift back into a performance mindset. Consequently, we must continually return to the gospel. To use an expression of the late Jack Miller, we must “preach the gospel to ourselves every day.” For me that means I keep going back to Scriptures such as Isaiah 53:6, Galatians 2:20, and Romans 8:1. It means I frequently repeat the words from an old hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.”

No ‘Easy Believism’

But doesn’t this idea that our acceptance with God is based solely on Christ's work apart from our performance lead to a type of “easy believism”? In its most basic form, this is the notion that “Since I asked Christ to be my Savior, I am on my way to heaven regardless of how I live. It doesn't matter if I continue in my sinful lifestyle. God loves and will accept me anyway.”

By a similar way of thinking, the claim that God’s acceptance and blessing are based solely on Christ’s work could be taken to mean that it really doesn’t matter how I live right now. If Jesus has already “performed” in my place, then why go through all the

effort and pain of dealing with sin in my life? Why bother with the spiritual disciplines and why expend any physical and emotional energy to serve God during this earthly life if everything depends on Christ?

The Apostle Paul anticipated such “easy believe-ism” in Romans 6:1 when he wrote, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” His response in Romans 6:2, “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” answers the question, “Why bother?” Paul was not responding with “How could you be so ungrateful as to think such a thing?” No, instead he is saying, in effect, “You don’t understand the gospel. Don’t you realize that you died to sin and if you died to sin, it’s impossible for you to continue to live in it” (see Rom. 6:3-14).

We Died to Sin

Now, however, we come to a big question. What does Paul mean when he says we died to sin? It’s fairly obvious he doesn’t mean we died to the daily committal of sin. If that were true, no honest person could claim to be justified because we all sin daily. None of us truly loves God with our whole being and none of us actually loves our neighbor as ourselves (see Matt. 22:35-40). Nor does it mean we have died in the sense of being no longer responsive to sin's temptations, as some have taught. If that were true, Peter’s admonition to abstain from the passions of the flesh would be pointless (see 1 Pet. 2:11). So what does Paul mean?

Some Bible commentators believe that Paul means only that we have died to the penalty of sin. That is, because of our union with Christ, when Christ died to sin’s penalty we also died to sin's penalty. Well, it certainly means that, but it also means much more. It also means we died to sin's dominion.

What is the dominion of sin? In Romans 5:21, Paul speaks of sin’s reign. And in Colossians 1:13, he speaks of the domain of darkness. When Adam sinned in the Garden, we all sinned through our legal union with him (see Rom. 5:12-21). That is, because of our identity with Adam we all suffered the consequence of his sin. And a part of that consequence is to be born into this world under the reign or dominion of sin. Paul describes what it means to be under this dominion in Ephesians 2:1-3. He says we were spiritually dead; we followed the ways of the world and the devil; we lived in the passions of our sinful natures and were, by nature, objects of God’s wrath.

This slavery to the dominion of sin then is part of the penalty due to our guilt of sin. Through our union with Christ in his death, however, our guilt both from Adam’s and from our own personal sins was forever dealt with. Having died with Christ to the guilt of sin, we also as a consequence died to the dominion of sin. We cannot continue

in sin as a dominant way of life because the reign of sin over us has forever been broken.

This death to the dominion of sin over us is known theologically as definitive sanctification. It refers to the decisive break with, or separation from, sin as a ruling power in a believer's life. It is a point-in-time event, occurring simultaneously with justification. It is the fundamental change wrought in us by the monergistic action of the Holy Spirit (that is, by the Spirit acting alone without human permission or assistance) when he delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and transfers us into the kingdom of Christ. This definitive break with the dominion of sin occurs in the life of everyone who trusts in Christ as Savior. There is no such thing as justification without definitive sanctification. They both come to us as a result of Christ's work for us.

Consider Yourselves Dead to Sin

So we are free from both the guilt and the dominion of sin. But what use is this information to us? How can it help us live out a gospel-based pursuit of sanctification? Here Paul's instructions in Romans 6:11 are helpful: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

It is important we understand what Paul is saying here because he is not telling us to do something but to believe something. We are to believe that we are dead through Christ to both sin's penalty and its dominion. But this is not something we make come true by believing it. We simply are dead to sin, whether we believe it or not. But the practical effects of our death to sin can be realized only as we believe it to be true.

The fact is that we are guilty in ourselves, but God no longer charges that guilt against us because it has already been borne by Christ as our substitute. The sentence has been served. The penalty has been paid. We have died to sin, both to its guilt and to its dominion. That is why Paul can write, "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin" (Rom. 4:8).

But the question arises, "If I've died to sin's dominion, why do I still struggle with sin patterns in my life?" The answer to that question lies in the word struggle. Unbelievers do not struggle with sin. They may seek to overcome some bad habit, but they do not see that habit as sin. They do not have a sense of sin against a holy God. Believers, on the other hand, struggle with sin as sin. We see our sinful words, thoughts, and deeds as sin against God; and we feel guilty because of it. This is where we must continue to go back to the gospel. To consider ourselves dead to sin is to believe the gospel.

This doesn't mean that we just believe the gospel and live complacently in our sin. Absolutely not! Go back again to Paul's words in Romans 6:1-2. We died both to sin's guilt and its dominion. Though sin can wage war against us (hence our struggle), it cannot reign over us. That is also part of the gospel. But the success of our struggle with sin begins with our believing deep down in our hearts that regardless of our failures and our struggle, we have died to sin's guilt. We must believe that however often we fail, there is no condemnation for us (Rom. 8:1).

William Romaine, who was one of the leaders of the eighteenth-century revival in England, wrote, "No sin can be crucified either in heart or life unless it first be pardoned in conscience.... If it be not mortified in its guilt, it cannot be subdued in its power." What Romaine was saying is that if you do not believe you have died to sin's guilt, you cannot trust Christ for the strength to subdue its power in your life. So the place to begin in dealing with sin is to believe the gospel when it says you have died to sin's guilt.

Progressive Sanctification

Warring against our sinful habits and seeking to put on Christlike character is usually called sanctification. But because the term definitive sanctification is used to describe the point-in-time deliverance from the dominion of sin, it is helpful to speak of Christian growth in holiness as progressive sanctification. Additionally, the word progressive indicates continual growth in holiness over time. The New Testament writers both assume growth (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:19-21; Col. 2:19; 2 Thess. 1:3; and continually urge us to pursue it (see 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; 2 Pet. 3:18). There is no place in authentic Christianity for stagnant, self-satisfied, and self-righteous Christians. Rather we should be seeking to grow in Christlikeness until we die.

This progressive sanctification always involves our practice of spiritual disciplines, such as reading Scripture, praying, and regularly fellowshiping with other believers. It also involves putting to death the sinful deeds of the body (see Rom. 8:13 and putting on Christlike character (see Col. 3:12-14). And very importantly it involves a desperate dependence on Christ for the power to do these things, for we cannot grow by our own strength.

So sanctification involves hard work and dependence on Christ; what I call dependent effort. And it will always mean we are dissatisfied with our performance. For a growing Christian, desire will always outstrip performance or, at least, perceived performance. What is it then that will keep us going in the face of this tension between desire and performance? The answer is the gospel. It is the assurance in the gospel that

we have indeed died to the guilt of sin and that there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus that will motivate us and keep us going even in the face of this tension. We must always keep focused on the gospel because it is in the nature of sanctification that as we grow, we see more and more of our sinfulness. Instead of driving us to discouragement, though, this should drive us to the gospel. It is the gospel believed every day that is the only enduring motivation to pursue progressive sanctification even in those times when we don't seem to see progress. That is why I use the expression “gospel-driven sanctification” and that is why we need to “preach the gospel to ourselves every day.”²

²This article originally appeared in the May / June 2003 edition of Modern Reformation and is used with permission. For more information about Modern Reformation, visit www.modernreformation.org or call (800) 890-7556. All rights served.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Church

We realize that when it comes down to deciding on which church to join, you will be faced with difficult choices. A lot is at stake. Most of us have a lot of options. And most of us have a lot of preferences, too.

So How Do We Decide What Matters Most?

- Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught?
- Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?
- Is this a church in which the gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?
- Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the gospel?
- Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?
- Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?
- Is this a church where the members are growing in Christ?
- Is this a church where I can find and cultivate Godly relationships?
- Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?
- Is this a church that is willing to discipline me out of membership?

What We Believe Doctrinal Statement

The members of Jacksonville Bible Church are committed to handling the Scriptures accurately. The affirmations that follow explain the doctrines that lay at the core of our fellowship. They also provide a framework for all of our teaching and serve as an anchor to protect from theological drift and error.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

We believe the Bible is God's **completed**, written revelation. Thus, the sixty-six books of the Bible, given to us by the Holy Spirit, constitute the plenary (inspired equally **and completely** in all parts) Word of God (2 Pet 1:20-21; **Rev 22:19**).

We believe that the Bible is the **written and** objective revelation of **God** (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim 3:16), inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. The Bible is the final rule, our ultimate authority, and is sufficient for all matters pertaining to our faith and practice (Matt 5:18; John 17:17; Heb 4:12).

We believe God, the Holy Spirit, superintended the human authors so that through their individual personalities and writing styles, they composed and recorded God's Word (2 Pet 1:20-21). This process was without error in the whole and in all parts (Matt 5:18; 2 Tim 3:16).

We believe only one true interpretation exists for any passage in Scripture. Many applications may exist, but the meaning is singular and fixed. This meaning can be ascertained through careful study of a passage's grammar and historical context. This approach to interpretation of Scripture is a central feature of dispensationalism, which champions a normal, historical/grammatical hermeneutic.

We believe the Scriptures interpreted in their natural, literal sense reveal divinely determined dispensations or administrations, economies that define human responsibility in successive ages. A dispensation is not a way of salvation but a divinely ordered stewardship by which God directs people according to His purpose. These periods are marked in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with humankind, or a portion of humankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and of human responsibility. Each **dispensational age** may be regarded as a new test of obedience for humanity and each ends in judgment—**because of** humanity's utter disobedience (John 1:17; 1 Cor 9:17; 2 Cor 3:9--18; Gal

3:17-25; Eph 1:10, 3:2-10; Col 1:24, 25; Heb 7:19; Rev 20:2-6).

We believe salvation is always by grace alone through faith alone, regardless of the dispensation in which the believer may have lived. God's purpose of salvation by grace alone through faith alone has always been based upon the substitutionary atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross (Eph 2:8-10; Heb 11:6; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

We believe in the one true and living God (Deut 6:4; Isa 45:5-7). He is an infinite and eternal spirit who is holy (John 4:24; Lev 19:2). God is perfect in His attributes and ways, and exists as one being in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). Each member of the Trinity has the same nature, attributes, essence, and perfections.

The Father

We believe God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, orders and accomplishes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps 145:8-9; 1 Cor 8:6). He rules the universe with absolute power, being sovereign over creation, providence, and redemption (Ps 103:19; Rom 11:36).

We believe the Father has decreed for his own glory all that comes to pass (Eph 1:11), yet He is not the author or approver of sin (Hab 1:13; James 1:13). The Father has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph 1:4-6). Through the finished work of Jesus Christ, He has provided salvation and adopts those who would come to Him as His own (John 1:12; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5).

The Son

We believe Jesus Christ, the eternal Son and second person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine attributes of the Father. He is equal with the Father, of the same substance, and eternal (John 10:30; 14:9). He created all things according to the will of the Father (John 1:3; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2).

We believe that Jesus Christ became man without ceasing to be God. He accepted all the characteristics of humanity

and became the God-man, fully God and fully man (John 1:1, 14; Phil 2:5-8; Col 2:9).

We believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23, 25; Lk 1:25-35) and voluntarily shed His blood on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was a vicarious (on our behalf), substitutionary (in our place), propitiatory (satisfying the righteous wrath of God), and redemptive work (John 10:15; Rom 3:24-25, 5:8; 1 Pet 2:24). The repentant sinner is saved from God's wrath only due to this sacrifice (1 Pet 2:24, 3:18).

We believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is both literal and physical. It is proof that the Father accepted the atoning sacrifice of His Son and guarantees the future resurrection of believers (John 5:26-27, 14:19; Rom 1:4, 4:25, 6:5-10; 1 Cor 15:20-21).

We believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, ascended, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He now mediates as advocate and high priest between the Father and believers (Matt 28:6; Lk 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Rom 4:23, 8:34; Heb 7:25, 9:24; 1 John 2:1). As mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), Christ is the Head of the church (Eph 1:22, 5:23; Col 1:18).

We believe that Jesus Christ will receive the church to Himself at the rapture. After the tribulation Christ will return to the earth with His church and establish His kingdom on the earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Rev 20). Jesus Christ is the coming King of kings, who will reign on the throne of David ruling over the entire earth (Isa 9:6; Lk 1:31-33). He is the final judge of all who fail to place their faith in Him as Lord and Savior (Matt 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

The Holy Spirit

We believe the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine attributes of and proceeds from the Father and Son. He is equal with the Father and Son, and of the same substance (Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Heb 10:15-17). The Spirit possesses all the attributes of personality and deity. This includes intellect (1 Cor 2:10-13), emotions (Eph 4:30), will (1 Cor 12:11), and eternity (Heb 9:14). The Spirit is all-present (Psa. 139:7-10), all-knowing (Isa 40:13-14), all-powerful (Rom 15:13), and truthful (John 16:13).

We believe the Holy Spirit executes the will of God. He is instrumental in creation (Gen 1:2), the incarnation (Matt

1:18), written revelation (2 Pet 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7). The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-9), and He transforms believers into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

We believe the Holy Spirit inaugurated the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:22). The Spirit baptizes all believers into the Church (1 Cor 12:13). He indwells, sanctifies, seals, and empowers Christians for service (Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 3:6; Eph 1:13).

We believe each believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Spirit at the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of believers to be filled with (in submission to) Him (John 16:13; Rom 8:9; Eph 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27). The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to the church. He administers them not for His own glory, or for the glory of the believer, but for the glory of Christ. Gifts are designed to build up the church (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:12).

We believe the gifts of tongues and miracles have ceased for this age. The Spirit gave these gifts in the beginning days of the church to authenticate the ministry of the apostles and their message (1 Cor 12:4-11, 13:8-10; 2 Cor 12:12; Eph 4:7-12; Heb 2:1-4). Tongues were also given as a sign of judgment to Israel (1 Cor 14:21-22; Isa 28:11-12)

III. THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

We believe men and women are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). God created humans directly and immediately, not by evolutionary process. They were created free from sin with intelligence, will, emotions, and moral responsibility to God (Gen 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).

We believe humans were made to enjoy fellowship with their creator by walking in God's will and accomplishing God's purposes on earth (Isa 43:7; Col 1:16; Rev 4:11). However, due to the sin of Adam, men and women became sinners, and inherited the condemnation of Adam's sin. They incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death as a subject of God's wrath. Their nature became totally depraved in sin, and incapable of pleasing God.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

We believe men and women are hopelessly alienated from God, dead in sin, and they can only be saved by the redemptive work of Christ (Gen 2:16-17, 3:1-19; John

3:36; Rom 3:23, 6:23; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1-3; 1 Tim 2:13-14; 1 John 1:8).

We believe salvation is made possible only because of the finished work of Christ. Repentant sinners can be saved from God's wrath only through faith in Jesus Christ and the merit of His shed blood. It is not on the basis of any work they have done (John 1:12; Eph 1:7, 2:8-10; 1 Pet 1:18-19).

Election

We believe God chose before the foundation of the world each one whom He would graciously save (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph 1:4-11; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 1:1-2). We also believe that God's sovereign choice does not negate the responsibility of each person to trust in Christ for salvation (Eze 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Rom 9:22-23; 2 Thess 2:10-12; Rev 22:17).

We do not believe that God chose to save some sinners due to any personal merit or action, or on the basis of foreseen faith. God elected whom He would save solely on the basis of His sovereign grace and mercy (Eph 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Pet 1:2). By electing some to salvation, we do not believe God elects others to damnation. We believe that if the Father did not draw anyone to Christ, none would ever be saved (John 6:37, 44).

Regeneration

We believe the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life at the moment a person responds in faith to Jesus Christ (John 6:63; Eph 2:5; Titus 3:5). Regeneration is a supernatural work whereby the one who was dead in sin is made alive in Christ.

We believe regeneration is an internal change that shows itself outwardly in a life of good works (1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10). Regeneration begins the process of conforming a person to the image of Christ, a process that will be complete only when the believer is with the Lord in glory (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:17; 2 Pet 1:4).

Justification

We believe God declares as righteous those whom He has called to salvation and regenerated to new life. Justification is a legal verdict, a declaration of fact (Rom 8:33). The Father does not overlook the believer's sins but accepts the substitution of the Son of God on their behalf. By faith, the believer's sin is imputed to or applied to Jesus Christ while

the righteousness of Christ is applied to the believer (1 Cor 1:30; 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; Col 2:14). By His death, they live.

We believe that Christ suffered once for sin, a past and completed act that is finished and will never be repeated (John 18:30; 1 Pet 3:18; Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). Thus, justification has no contingencies. We believe that the repentant sinner who has trusted in Christ is justified at the moment of salvation forevermore.

Sanctification

We believe that God sets every believer apart from the world as a saint unto Himself (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 2:11). He seals His people with the Holy Spirit and keeps them secure in Him by His power forever (Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:8; Eph 1:13; 1 Pet 1:5). Having received Christ's righteousness, believers have been declared holy. Practically, however, they still sin.

We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers His people to grow in holy living, enabling them to become more like Christ in this life (John 17:19; Heb 2:11, 3:1; 1 Pet 1:2). They do not, however, grow to the point of sinless perfection (Phil 3:12). Every believer experiences a struggle in which their flesh is set against their new nature in Christ (Gal 5:16-23; Eph 4:22-24). While believers are therefore commanded to strive for holiness, their only hope for spiritual growth is through faith and dependence on the Holy Spirit's work through the Word (Acts 26:18; Heb 12:14; Jude 24, 25, Phil 2:12-13; John 17:17; Gal 5:22-23).

Glorification

We believe the ultimate goal of the redemption of the believer is their glorification (Rom 8:29-30). All believers, at the point of Christ's return, will receive a resurrected body (1 Cor 15:50-53). It is then that the image of God, which has been marred by sin, will be restored to its full glory (1 Cor 15:49; 1 John 3:2-3).

V. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

We believe the universal church is a spiritual family comprised of all believers of the New Testament age. All whom Christ has saved have been placed in fellowship with Him and with one another (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:1-4). Christ is the head of the church (Eph 4:15; Col 1:18) and that He established the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Thus, the church is completely distinct from Israel (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 10:32; Eph 5:32).

Purpose

We believe that by the power and enablement of God, the church exists to raise up disciples through the instrument of Scriptures to the glory God (Matt 28:18-20; Col 1:28; Eph 4:11-15). A disciple is a believer, who has responded by faith to the gospel (Acts 14:21), and is thus a follower of Christ. Central to God's glory through the church is the proclamation of His Word (2 Tim 4:2). We believe God's Spirit uses the Word to bring unbelievers to salvation (Rom 10:14-15) and to grow His people in Christlikeness (2 Tim 3:16-17). We believe every church ministry should align with the church's purpose for the sake of God's glory.

We believe the local church has a leadership structure comprised, under the headship of Christ, of elders and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). A plurality of elders share in the responsibility of leading the local church. Elders are shepherds, men who are qualified and can teach the Word in public and in private to the church family (1 Pet 5:1-5; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim 4:2). Elders are called to warn the church against error (Col 1:28; 2 Tim 3:16-17), are men devoted to ministering the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:4), and to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11,12; 2 Tim 2:1-2)

We believe deacons are servants in the church. All believers who are qualified to serve, should do so with the strength which God supplies (1 Pet 4:11; 1 Tim 3:8-13). Some, however, are selected by the elders to give attention to specific needs in the church (1 Tim 3:8-13).

Distinctives

We believe the church should be devoted to God's Word, fellowship, prayer, and the ordinances (Acts 2:42). The book of Acts also shows a strong focus upon evangelism (Acts 2:28, 3:19, 8:22).

We believe the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government, and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). It is scriptural for biblical churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. However, each local church is the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation as well as on all matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government -- under the authority of Christ and the Scriptures (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 5:4-7,13; 1 Pet 5:1-4)

We believe that to fulfill its God-ordained mission, each believer, at the time of their conversion (according to God's sovereign will), is given at least one spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit, for the edification of the body. Each member should strive to develop and use their spiritual gift(s) in a way that will glorify God (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:8-13; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pet 4:10-11).

We believe these gifts are bestowed by the Lord in order to fulfill specific purposes in His program. We believe that when the purpose of any gift is fulfilled, that particular gift is terminated. Thus, we believe that speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healing, gradually ceased with the ending of the Apostolic age and the completion of the canon of Scripture (1 Cor 12:11, 13:8-10 and 14-21, 22; 2 Tim 4:20; Acts 19:11-12; Heb 2:3,4; 2 Cor 12:12). (See Doctrine of Holy Spirit for more details)

We believe that God heals and works miracles today, but that He does so through the prayers of His saints and not through gifted individuals (James 5:13-18).

VI. ORDINANCES

BAPTISM

We believe that water baptism is a scriptural ordinance of the church during this age. Baptism, while not a requirement for salvation, is a public testimony by the recipient that they have personally trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. Baptism is the outward symbol of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is the inward work whereby each believer is inseparably joined to the body of Christ. For this reason, we do not practice infant baptism.

We believe that immersion in water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is the biblical method which best typifies what takes place at conversion (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:41, 8:36-39, 9:18 and 18:8; Eph 4:5; 1 Peter 3:21; 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 6:3, 4).

LORD'S SUPPER

We believe the Lord's Supper is a memorial testimony of the church, instituted by our Lord just before His betrayal, and to be observed by His children until His return as a sacred, symbolic, and scriptural means of remembering His death for our sins (1 Cor 11:23, 24).

VII. THE DOCTRINE OF ANGELS

We believe angels are spirit beings created by God (Col

1:15-17). Two kinds of angels exist: holy and fallen.

Holy Angels

We believe holy angels exist to serve the elect and to worship God (Lk 2:9-14; Heb 1:6, 7; Rev 5:11-14). They were created before (Job 38:7), and are exceedingly more powerful than human beings (2 Kings 19:35). The angelic host is innumerable (Jere 33:22), well ordered (Matt 26:53), and not to be worshipped (Rev 22:8-9).

Fallen Angels

We believe the fallen angels are those who have rebelled against God. Satan, a fallen angel himself, leads this host in promoting spiritual darkness (Eph 6:12), deception (2 Cor 11:13-15), idolatry (Ps 106:37), false doctrine (1 Tim 4:1), and death (John 8:44).

We believe the fallen angels (i.e. demons) are active in our world today (Eph 6:10-18). Though possessing great powers and abilities their influence is severely limited by the power of God (Job 1:12; 2:6; Rom 8:38-39). For instance, demons cannot possess believers in Christ, for they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). They unwittingly serve God's purposes (Jud 9:23), and even tremble before Him (James 2:19). Furthermore, God has judged the angels who rebelled against Him, and they will be eternally punished (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6)

VIII. THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

We believe God's Word provides clarity concerning events pertaining to the end of time (this is known as the doctrine of eschatology). Studying eschatology gives believers hope (Titus 2:13), and encourages godly living (1 John 3:2-3). God's redemption of sinners, which was planned before the foundation of the world, culminates with Him and His people dwelling together forever (Rev 21:3-4).

The Rapture and Tribulation Period

We believe the church will not suffer God's wrath (1 Thess 5:9). Thus, the Lord will come to rapture (or remove) His people out of this world, taking them with Him into heaven, prior to a period of worldwide tribulation (1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thess 4:17). Scripture describes this period as a time when God will pour out His wrath in judgment upon the world for seven years (Dan 12:1-2; 2 Thess 2:7-12; Rev 16; Dan 9:24-27).

The Second Coming and Kingdom

We believe the Lord will return to Earth with His raptured church at the end of the tribulation period (Matt 24:27-31; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 2:7-12). Old Testament believers and all believers who were martyred during the tribulation, will be raised to life. These will join living saints, and entering with them into the kingdom, which will last 1000 years. The unsaved who are alive at the return of Christ will be judged (Dan 12:2-3; Rev 20:4-6). Satan will be bound in the abyss as the Millennial Kingdom begins, in order that he can no longer deceive the nations (Rev 20:1-3)..

We believe Israel will be restored to the land promised to them through God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:6-8) during the Millennial Kingdom, never to be removed again (Amos 9:15; Eze 34:28). Jesus Christ will reign during this time from Jerusalem, seated on the throne of David (Isa 9:7), bringing blessing throughout the world (Isa 11:9; Micah 4:3; Rev 20:1-6). Peace, harmony, justice, and long life will characterize the Kingdom age (Isa 65:17-25; Eze 36:33-38).

The Final Judgment and Eternity to Come

We believe Christ will bring His Millennial Kingdom to an end by releasing Satan from the abyss (Rev 20:7). Satan and his fallen angels will then once again deceive the nations of the earth, leading them in rebellion against the Lord. The rebels will be judged along with the devil and the fallen angels, who will be sentenced to eternal suffering (Rev 20:10). The souls of unbelievers who have died will be raised to be reunited with their bodies to receive the same judgment and sentence (Matt 25:41-46; 2 Thess 1:7-9; Jude 6, 7; Rev 20:11-15).

We believe the souls of the redeemed of all times are, at death, absent from the body and present with the Lord; where in conscious bliss they await resurrection, when soul and body are reunited and glorified to be forever with the Lord in His eternal kingdom (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23, 3:21; 1 Thess 4:16, 17; Rev 20:4-6).

IX. CREATION

We believe the triune God, by a free act and for His own glory, without the use of existing materials or secondary causes, brought into being -- immediately and instantaneously, by the Word of His mouth over a period of six literal days -- the whole visible and invisible universe (Gen 1:1-27; Exodus 20:8-11; Neh 9:6; Psa 104:25, 26; Is

40:21-31; John 1:1-5; Col 1:16,17).

X. BIBLICAL SEPARATION AND UNITY

We believe that all the redeemed are to live in such a manner as to seek to bring glory to their Savior and Lord, and, avoid all behaviors and associations which would compromise this aim. (2 Tim 3:1-5; Rom 12:1, 2; 14:13; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

We seek to cooperate, wherever possible, with other churches, missions, and organizations whose doctrine and policies are homogeneous with our understanding of Scripture. It is the believer's responsibility to endeavor to maintain the unity of the faith while separating from apostasy and those who have deviated from biblical doctrine and behavior. Every proposed alliance must be considered in the light of our commitment to biblical purity in doctrine, life and practice. We will not cooperate with, or endorse any movement, organization or program, which is contrary to the teachings of Scripture as we understand them, and are expressed in this Statement of Faith. (Matt 18:15-17; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:7-11; 2 Cor 6:14-18; Eph 4:1--6; 2 Thess 3:11- 14; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Titus 3:10; 2 John 9-11).

JACKSONVILLE BIBLE CHURCH

Adopted December 2020

CHURCH COVENANT & CONSTITUTION

Having individually received the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and desiring to unite in the worship, fellowship, and testimony with Jacksonville Bible Church, having read the doctrinal statement of the church and understanding it to be the essence of its belief and teaching, we, therefore, joyfully enter into this covenant with one another, as one body in Christ:

1. We purpose by the power of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this body of believers in knowledge and holiness; to promote its spirituality; to sustain its worship, God's ordinances, Scriptural discipline and doctrine; and to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of its ministry.

2. We will endeavor to maintain personal devotions; to train our children in the nurture, respect and admonition of the Lord; to walk carefully before the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, exemplary in our behavior, and zealous in our efforts to advance the work of the gospel by seeking the salvation of the unsaved.

3. We will always seek to minister to one another in brotherly love and remember each other in prayer; we will seek to aid one another in times of sickness and distress; to admonish and rebuke one another for sin; to be slow to take offense and always ready for reconciliation.

4. We, as members of Jacksonville Bible Church, having experienced new life in Christ (II Cor 5:17) and believing that as members of the family of God we should be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22) agree not to seek legal action, to sue any of our membership or Jacksonville Bible Church in obedience to I Cor 6:1-8. We also agree to treat one another as brothers and sisters, and to fulfill our promises to one another in good faith, to the best of our ability.

ARTICLE I - Name of Church

Jacksonville Bible Church

ARTICLE II - Government

Our local church body, under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, is organized as elders (overseers), deacons (servants), and body members. The needs of the church shall be fulfilled through:

1. The faithful teaching of the Word.
2. Diligent oversight by elders who shall represent the perspectives of both pastors and body members.
3. Organized commissions focused on the needs of the body, under the direction of elders and deacons.
4. All members making use of their spiritual gift(s) in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The ministry of Jacksonville Bible Church shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ by means of a plurality of elders when possible who function under the authority of the Scriptures and God's Spirit. The board of elders, appointed with the consent and support of the church body, are the main decision making body. (Heb 13:17; I Pet 5:1-3; I Tim 5:17).

ARTICLE III - Board of Elders

Section 1

The spiritual affairs, government and discipline of the church shall be vested in the board of elders. All pastors, officers, boards, committees and staff shall be responsible to this board of elders. The board of elders shall be composed of a minimum of three elders (plus the pastor-teacher) when possible.

Section 2 (Appointment and Term of Office)

Duly qualified men shall be nominated by the board of elders to the board of elders. These nominations shall be confirmed by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the active members present who choose to vote at a duly called business meeting. Upon confirmation by the congregation, the board of elders, at their discretion, may appoint the nominee to the office of elder. Confirmed appointments shall be for a three-year term of office, renewable upon request of the elder and upon consensus of the remaining elders and confirmed by the members in the manner stated above. With the exception of the Pastor-teacher and all Associate Pastors, who are perpetual members of the Board of Elders, no elder shall serve more than six consecutive years without at least one-year intervening.

Removal of non-paid elders from office shall be effected by personal resignation, by disciplinary action in accordance with I Tim 5:19-20 and Gal 6:1, or by consensus of the remaining elders. The need for an additional elder, paid, or non-paid may be recognized by elders or members of the church body. The board of elders, in consultation with or in response to members, shall determine if such a need exists; and if so, appoint a man to fulfill that need.

The duly appointed chairman of the elder board shall serve in that capacity for a period of one year.

Section 3 (Elder Qualification)

Each member of the board of elders must be an active member of this church and possess the qualifications described in I Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Prior to becoming an elder, a man must be a member of Jacksonville Bible Church. (The pastor-teacher being an exception per Article VIII Section 2). All elders, prior to every annual church business meeting shall sign a statement of their agreement with the constitution and doctrinal statement of this church.

Section 4 (Elder Duties)

The board of elders are responsible for shepherding and having oversight of the flock. Specific duties of this board shall be as follows:

- A. To watch over the spiritual affairs of the church, to guide, guard and feed the flock of God, according to the principles of the Scriptures.
- B. To elect a chairman and secretary annually.

- C. To establish policies, create committees as needed, delegate certain business to the deacons, and determine practices for the church.
- D. To hear and consider all reports and recommendations submitted by pastors, councils, committees, staff and members.
- E. To assist the pastor-teacher in the administration of all ordinances (Lord's Supper & Baptism).
- F. To oversee and give direction to the hiring and removal of pastors and staff as may be deemed appropriate (see Article VIII for details).
- G. To exercise general oversight of financial matters of the church (Acts 11:29, 30). They may make expenditures of up to \$5000, without the authorization of the church.
- H. To exercise general oversight of church property.
- I. To examine and approve applicants for church membership.
- J. To provide for the discipline of erring members when such is deemed necessary, while continually striving for reconciliation (See Article VII).
- K. To serve as nominating committee for elders, deacons, deaconess and all other officers, after welcoming input from the congregation.

Section 5 (Elder Meetings and Quorum)

The board of elders shall conduct regular meetings and special meetings at such other times as called for by the pastor-teacher or chairman of the board. Two-thirds (2/3) of the board membership shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of conducting church business. However, board decisions shall consist of a consensus of all elders (including the pastor-teacher).

Section 6 (Elder Decisions)

Decisions made by the board of elders shall be based on carefully assembled facts, Scriptural insight and the solicited input of body members as needed. Input from the church membership shall be solicited by such means as the Sunday bulletin, newsletters, information cards, pulpit announcements, group or congregational meetings or advisory ballots. The board of elders must seek through the application of Biblical principles, the mind of Christ, and come to a consensus before deciding matters of church business.

Should any church member disagree with any action of the board of elders, that member is encouraged to discuss the area of disagreement with any elder. If any member desires to meet with the entire board of elders, that member will be scheduled to do so by the elder board chairman.

ARTICLE IV - Other Boards & Committees

Section 1 (Deacons)

The board of deacons shall consist of male members possessing the qualifications described in I Tim 3:8-13. The board of elders shall act as the nominating committee for deacons and shall welcome input from the congregation. After prayerful review, one nomination per needed deacon position shall be submitted to the congregation for their approval. They shall be confirmed by two-thirds (2/3) majority of the active membership present, who choose to vote, at a duly called business meeting. Upon confirmation by the congregation, the board of elders, at their discretion, may appoint the nominee to the office of deacon.

All deacons must be an active member of Jacksonville Bible Church. Deacon's term of office shall be for a three-year period, with at least one year intervening before beginning another term.

It shall be the duty of deacons to undertake the tasks set before them, including care over the material needs of the church, serving the needs of the people, maintaining properties and equipment, and other services which are designated to them by the board of elders. With the approval of the elders, they may make expenditures up to \$1000 without authorization of the church toward the physical needs of the church buildings.

Section 2 (Deaconess)

The board of deaconesses shall consist of female members possessing the qualifications described in I Tim 3:11. It shall be the duty of deaconesses to undertake the tasks set before them, including care over the material needs of the church, serving the needs of the people, maintaining properties and equipment, and other services which are designated to them by the board of elders. They shall be chosen in the same manner as the deacons and have the same term of office.

Section 3 (Committees)

To enable the efficient handling of board matters, the board of elders may appoint various committees. These committees shall perform tasks solely in accordance with the duties and with authority specifically delegated by the board of elders. The general functions of committees are:

- A. To bring considerations and recommendations to the board of elders concerning ministries.
- B. To provide a wider base of counsel to the elders having the oversight of specific ministries.

All committees shall exist for the period specified by the board of elders, or until the purpose for which they were established has been fulfilled.

ARTICLE V – Officers

The following officers will be nominated by the board of elders and approved by two-thirds (2/3) of the majority of the active membership present and choosing to vote at a duly called business meeting. They shall serve one year terms and may be reappointed indefinitely.

Section 1 (Organizational Officers)

A. Clerk

The church clerk shall keep an exact record of all the business meetings of the church and read the same at the regular business meetings of the church for approval. He/she shall also keep a complete register of the members.

B. Moderator

The church moderator shall conduct all business meetings of the church. In his absence the board of elders will appoint a temporary moderator. (See also Article XI Section 2)

Section 2 (Financial Officers)

A. Financial Secretary

The duty of the financial secretary shall be to administer the appropriate care in receiving the offerings of the church, recording necessary records for such contributions and depositing these funds into the church's accounts.

B. Treasurer

The duty of the treasurer shall be to administer the appropriate care in maintaining the financial accounts of the church, maintaining pertinent records of these accounts and related transactions, disbursing authorized payments and reporting on a quarterly basis to the church a summary of the financial activity of the church.

C. Non-elected Positions

In order to provide for the desirable separation of duties corresponding with the proper handling of money, it is recognized that other elders, deacons or members may be involved in various positions related to the church's financial cycle. Those occupying these positions will be approved by the board of elders and perform sundry duties under the auspices of the financial secretary and treasurer.

ARTICLE VI – Members

Section 1 (Qualifications)

Any person who has accepted Jesus Christ as his/her own personal Savior, having been baptized, and is in agreement with the doctrinal statement and constitution of this church to the satisfaction of

the board of elders, is welcome to join in membership with Jacksonville Bible Church.

While any person is welcome to attend the services of this church, only active members may hold office, teach, vote at business meetings or serve in any capacity that represents the church, unless by special consent of the board of elders. The elders reserve the right to determine in what capacity members are allowed to serve.

All requests for membership shall be made to a member of the board of elders. Upon making such requests, the person shall be given an application for membership, along with a copy of the doctrinal statement and constitution. Upon receipt of the application designated elders will meet with the applicant regarding his/her Christian experience, assurance of salvation and doctrinal belief. Upon acceptance by consensus of the board of elders each applicant shall be presented to the church to be enrolled as an active member.

Section 2 (Membership Defined)

The church will maintain active, associate and inactive membership lists. It will be the duty of the board of elders to keep these lists current, updating these lists at least once per year.

The active membership list shall be composed of those who, regularly attend the services of the church, regularly support the ministries of the church financially as able, and actively minister in and through the church. Those who do not attend the services of the church for a period of six consecutive weeks, may be called on by the elders, and at their (board of elders) discretion moved to the inactive list. Such a person may be restored to the active list at the discretion of the board of elders.

The associate membership list shall be composed of those who, when residing in the area, regularly attend the services of the church, regularly support the ministries of the church financially as able, and actively minister in and through the church. This list is intended for those who reside outside of the local area for extended periods of time but attend the church when in the local area. Examples would be missionaries, college students and part-year residents. Members on the associate list are permitted to vote in a congregational meeting and minister in any capacity when residing in the local area. During periods of absence from the local area these members will not be counted toward the required percentage of members needed to obtain a quorum at a congregational business meeting.

The inactive membership list shall be composed of three basic types of members:

- 1) Those put on the inactive list, by the board of elders, due to lack of attendance (Section 2 Paragraph A). Once a member is placed on the inactive list, due to lack of attendance, they may be removed from membership by the board of elders if they continue to be absent for a period of six months.

- 2) Those members who are under the second phase of church discipline: suspension, see Article VII Section 4.

Those members on the inactive list are not permitted to vote in a congregational meeting and will not be allowed to hold any office or minister in any official capacity in the church without the consent of the board of elders.

Members placed on the inactive list may be removed from membership by the church under the leadership of the board of elders for the following reasons:

- 1) By request of the member.
- 2) For continued absence for more than six months.
- 3) For unwillingness to submit to any stage of church discipline.

ARTICLE VII - Discipline

Section 1 (Board of Elder's Responsibility)

The board of elders shall seek to reclaim those members who blatantly disregard their church covenant obligations. When the board of elders are convinced that attempts to reclaim have failed, it will be the responsibility of the board of elders to lead the church to withdraw the hand of fellowship from those members (see Sec 4 C).

Section 2 (Purpose)

The purpose of church discipline shall always be to restore the sinner by the use of Biblical guidelines, purify the church and protect it from decay (I Cor 5:5,6; II Cor 2:6-8; Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15).

Section 3 (Causes)

- A. Unrepentant Immorality (I Cor 5:2,5)
- B. Unrepentant Doctrinal Heresy (I Tim 1:20; II Tim 2:18)
- C. Unrepentant Divisiveness (Titus 3:10)
- D. Any other unrepentant sin (I Cor 5:11)

Section 4 (Phases)

A. Confirming the facts: When the board of elders become aware of a situation which has the appearance of meeting the conditions necessary to exercise church discipline (see Section 3), the board of elders will make diligent effort to establish the facts and communicate with the member who is overtaken in a sin (Matt 18:16). The member will be confronted with the situation and clearly advised of the church's position on the matter.

Once the process of church discipline has begun, the church will continue to follow the biblical mandates regardless of the member's attendance or desire to withdraw their membership. No member may withdraw their membership if they are involved at any stage of the church discipline process. All

members of Jacksonville Bible Church waive their right to withdraw their membership while being disciplined by the church.

If the facts are as believed, and the member overtaken in a sin does not turn from this sin, the board of elders may proceed to the subsequent phase of church discipline,--suspension.

If the member overtaken in a sin confesses this sin and repents, the board of elders will take appropriate steps in gently and fully restoring this individual as their turning from sin becomes evident (Gal 6:1; Matt 18:35). These steps may include, but are not limited to, removal from some positions and/or responsibilities within the church, a period of supervision of the member's ministries within the church by the board of elders, and a period of counseling with an approved pastor, elder or elder approved counselor.

B. Suspension: After a member who is overtaken in a sin has been confronted by the board of elders and the member displays no intent to turn from this sin, the following actions may be taken:

- 1) Removal from the active membership list of the church and placement on the inactive membership role.
- 2) Removal from all offices, positions and/or responsibilities within the church.

The board of elders will continue efforts, as able, to reclaim the individual including confronting the sin anew, advising of the consequences of church discipline and the progression of removal from church membership.

C. Removal from membership: When the board of elders is convinced efforts to reclaim the member overtaken in a sin are exhibiting futile results, it shall be the responsibility of the board of elders to lead the church to withdraw the hand of fellowship and remove this individual from church membership (Matt 18:17; I Cor 5:3-6). The sinning individual will be advised of this action including the consequence of no longer being welcome to fellowship and worship with our church. This action must be taken by a consensus of the board of elders (Matt 18:15-18).

The board of elders shall arrange for a special informational meeting of the membership to notify, inform and attest to the circumstances and actions taken by the board of elders. The purpose of this meeting shall be to clearly communicate the situation, answer questions, and prevent the spread of erroneous information.

It shall be the duty of each member of the church to fulfill the Biblical mandate concerning those who remain in sin, including discontinuing Christian fellowship with such a one (I Cor 5:11; Matt 18:17).

ARTICLE VIII - The Pastor-Teacher

Section 1 (Appointment)

The pastor-teacher of Jacksonville Bible Church shall be chosen by the members for an indefinite period of time by ballot upon the recommendation of the board of elders in the following manner:

A. A pulpit committee shall be appointed by the board of elders to interview prospective candidate(s) and make recommendations to the board of elders. The prospective candidate(s) shall be considered as to educational qualifications, spiritual condition (I Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), previous experience, spiritual gifts, and must be in agreement with the doctrinal statement and constitution of Jacksonville Bible Church without reservation.

B. Upon being approved by a consensus vote of the board of elders the prospect shall be invited to candidate before the congregation. As soon thereafter as it is practical, the board of elders may (at their discretion) call a congregational meeting at which time the members shall vote on asking the candidate to be the pastor-teacher. A three-fourth (3/4) majority of active members present (and choosing to vote) shall be required to call a pastor-teacher.

A quorum shall consist of fifty percent (50%) of active membership. Upon confirmation by the congregation, the board of elders may appoint the candidate to the position of pastor-teacher.

C. The pastor-teacher and his wife (if applicable), and any other paid minister and his wife (if applicable), shall automatically become member(s) of Jacksonville Bible Church upon him taking up the duties of the pastor-teacher or other paid staff position.

Section 2 (Duties)

The pastor-teacher shall be an ex-officio member of all boards and committees and he shall be responsible to the board of elders. The pastor-teacher shall arrange for and/or conduct all public and regular services of the church and shall be responsible for general oversight of the spiritual welfare of the church. He shall be an elder on the board of elders immediately upon installation.

Section 3 (Tenure)

The pastor-teacher shall remain in office for an indefinite period of time subject to the following reservations:

The board of elders reserve the right to recommend to the congregation that he be dismissed. A majority of active members present who choose to vote at a duly called business meeting will be required to dismiss the pastor-teacher. Upon the vote to dismiss the pastor-teacher he will be given one (1) month written notice. The pastor-teacher must give one (1) month notice if he intends to resign. This time limit is subject to a lesser or greater time if both the pastor-teacher and the board of elders by mutual agreement decide otherwise.

ARTICLE IX - Other Staff Positions

The authority to hire an associate pastor, assistant pastor, evangelist, youth pastor or other paid staff rests with the board of elders.

A search committee shall be appointed by the board of elders to interview prospective candidate(s) and make recommendations to the board of elders. The prospective candidate(s) shall be considered as to educational qualifications, spiritual condition (I Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), previous experience,

spiritual gifts, and must be in agreement with the doctrinal statement and constitution of Jacksonville Bible Church without reservation.

Such individuals will be recommended by the consensus of the board of elders and approved by three-fourths (3/4) majority of members choosing to vote at a congregational meeting called for that purpose. Upon confirmation by the congregation the board of elders may appoint the candidate to the needed position.

All of those hired with the title of associate pastor will automatically and perpetually be a member of the board of elders and are not subject to the term limits of non-paid elders. Other paid staff members (e.g. assistant pastor, youth pastor, youth director, director of Christian education) would not automatically be a member of the board of elders.

All staff members shall remain in office for an indefinite period of time subject to the following reservations:

The board of elders reserves the right to recommend to the congregation that a staff member be dismissed. A majority of active members present who choose to vote at a duly called business meeting will be required to dismiss the staff member. Upon the vote to dismiss the staff member, he will be given one (1) month written notice. The staff member must give one (1) month notice if he intends to resign. This time limit is subject to a lesser or greater time if both the staff member and the board of elders by mutual agreement decide otherwise.

Salary adjustments of pastors and other staff serving Jacksonville Bible Church shall be reviewed by the non-paid elders at least annually when possible and a recommendation made to the congregation at a business meeting.

ARTICLE X - Other Employees

The authority to hire and dismiss secretaries, custodians and other employees rests with the board of elders. Salary adjustments of these employees serving Jacksonville Bible Church shall be reviewed by the board of elders at least annually and a recommendation made to the congregation at a business meeting.

ARTICLE XI - Business Meetings

Section 1

The annual business meeting of the church shall be held during the month of March each year unless providentially hindered.

The following shall be the order of business at the annual meeting: (1) minutes (2) reports (3) unfinished business (4) election of officers (5) new business (6) adjournment.

Section 2

The moderator, or in his absence, any member appointed by the board of elders, shall conduct all business meetings of the church. It shall be the duty of the moderator to keep order, and in case the church is equally divided on a vote requiring a simple majority, he shall give the deciding vote.

All business meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer.

Only issues previously considered by the board of elders, and announced to the congregation prior to the business meeting, shall be discussed. All church members are encouraged to discuss any matters of concern with members of the board of elders.

A motion before the church must be disposed of before another motion may be entertained, unless the motion is to amend, adjourn, or call for the previous question.

A quorum shall consist of thirty percent (30%) of active members 18 years of age and older. A majority vote of members 18 years of age and older present shall be required to pass any items unless otherwise specified in this constitution.

Section 3

Special business meetings may be called by the pastor or by the chairman of the board of elders or by the majority of the members of the board of elders.

Notice of such meetings shall be given from the pulpit at least two Sundays prior to the meeting and shall also be published in the regular communication method of the church on the Sunday immediately preceding the meeting. The notice shall specify the date, time, place, and the general nature of the business to be transacted.

ARTICLE XII - Finances

The church is organized according to the principle laid down in Philippians 4:19. The Lord's work should be supported by the Lord's people looking to the Lord to supply their needs. Therefore, only free-will gifts and offerings shall be used to carry on this work. No entertainment, suppers, bazaars, or other such money raising projects shall be held by the church. All the needs of the church are to be laid before the Lord in earnest believing prayer by the members of the congregation. As God has planted this work, we look to Him to maintain it. The board of elders should require an annual review of the financial records of Jacksonville Bible Church.

ARTICLE XIII - Licensing & Ordaining

Section 1

Jacksonville Bible Church may license any brother, recommended by the board of elders, who is a member of this assembly, who has evident gifts for ministry, and who has been asked to perform pastoral duties in this or another church.

Section 2

If it is determined by the board of elders that a man of the fellowship possesses the qualifications for full ordination, a council of ministers and lay members shall be called to examine the candidate. Upon receiving a favorable report from the council, the board of elders may recommend to Jacksonville Bible Church the ordination of this brother.

Section 3

The license or ordination papers may be revoked at any time, by action of the board of elders, if false doctrine or conduct unbecoming a Christian is alleged and proven. The individual shall be given opportunity to defend his case before the board of elders.

ARTICLE XIV - Amendments

This constitution shall be only repealed, amended, or added to by consensus of the board of elders and three-fourths (3/4) agreement of the active membership present, and choosing to vote, at a duly called meeting.

ARTICLE XV - Enacting

Upon the adoption by Jacksonville Bible Church of the constitution as herein set forth, it shall be in lieu of all previously adopted constitutions and by-laws.

ARTICLE XVI - Dissolution

No part of the net earnings of this corporation shall ever inure to the benefit of any donor, member, director, officer of the corporation, or any private individual; and no donor, member, director, officer of the corporation, or any private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any of the corporate assets. Upon dissolution, any assets of the corporation must be distributed to one or more organizations recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as one organized exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes. The institution(s) will be selected by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of active members present, and who choose to vote, at a special business meeting called for this purpose.

Dissolution Clause Amended March 2021
Adopted December 2020

