

# DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

for

Ordination Credential Committee

Prepared By

*Howard Brown*  
*Reformed by Grace Baptist Church*  
*Vermillion, Alberta*  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

I am of the opinion that what a man is and what he does will be completely affected by what he believes. So, my ordination paper will focus heavily on what I believe; my systematic theology. My intention is to write this paper so that the core of my essential beliefs that would be affecting a life of pulpit ministry would be summarized. I want it to be subject to the scrutiny and refinement of other brothers in the Lord. Additionally, my intention is to so construct it, that the brothers and sisters I am privileged to serve at Reformed by Grace Baptist Church may also read it with benefit. Thus, it is written with this broad audience in mind.

Years ago, I reviewed dozens of faith statement of churches as I was (in concert with the two other elders I was serving with), looking for a statement that reflected our doctrinal distinctives: five point Calvinist, pre-millennial with a pre-tribulational rapture, cessationist and baptistic with a high view of inerrancy and, of primary importance, a clear, accurate understanding of the Gospel-affirming sovereignty of God with the Lordship implications inherent in it. I found that the faith statement of Grace Community Church was the closest that I could find in articulating what I have come to believe. As such, with their permission, we posted it as our faith statement, with some minor alterations of wording, as we began a church planting work in the Vermilion area.

In writing this paper, I again found that the statement served as a core and framework for expressing *what I believe*. You will find my statement is essentially that document with minor changes and corroborative additions. So, from the beginning, I would like to acknowledge that major contribution of Grace Community Church. Additionally, I have benefited from various sermons from men like Dr. John MacArthur, Dr. John Piper, Dr. R.C. Sproul, reaching back to Jonathon Edwards, John Owen and many others. Segments of their teaching have made their way into my sermons and notes, often without footnote. I have also learned from systematic theologies and commentaries such as Grudem, Charnock, Culver, McCune, Ryrie and Adams. In this paper I have not utilized footnotes, but rather in advance acknowledge my debt to them as my instructors.

Before I go on to affirm what I believe about God, salvation or angels, it is necessary for me to logically establish the truth presuppositions of the source of those beliefs. What a man believes about the Bible, and about truth as a concept will either pollute and spoil; or water and enrich every other area of human inquiry and study. So, I begin with what I believe about the Bible.

### **I. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE**

I believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the verbal (the actual words of the text, rather than just the concepts), plenary (inspired equally in all parts), unlimitedly inerrant (inerrancy extends to all facts, history and propositional assertions, not just limited to concepts or spiritual themes) and infallible, God-breathed out Word of God (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17; Titus 1: 2; 2 Pet. 1:20-21 ; 3: 16) in the original documents. Given that God imparted the faculty of communication to man, and that God caused that this revelation be preserved in written form and then held him accountable and corrected him according to what was written, I hold that the written Word of God, (that which God breathed out as a Source and caused to be written in the hard copy of the

original manuscripts) is an adequate and sufficient vehicle for the transmission of every truth needed for life and godliness and the spiritual, moral and emotional counsel of believers.

Issues of history and science that it addresses, it addresses with absolute accuracy. I hold that the literal understanding of creation is presented as an accurate account of the event, as affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 10: 6 – 8), as was the literal account of the flood of Genesis 7 and 8 (Ex. 31: 17; Luke 17: 26). The Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith, practice and spiritual and emotional counsel of believers (Matt. 5:18; 24:35; John 16:12-13; 17:17).

The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, even though there is expression of individual personality and style of writing, through those personalities and styles they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21). It was done without error or sacrifice of the divine Author's intent or integrity in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16). God would affirm that He was the all-wise, all-knowing, incorruptibly truthful source of what was actually written in the hard copy of the original manuscripts.

The Word of God will never be the cause of error, but the interpretation and application of it by man frequently is. I believe that a consistent application of the literal, syntactical, grammatical, historical interpretation (hereafter referred to as the *normal* interpretation) is to be applied in all parts and genres of the Bible. The normal interpretation allows for literary devices (such as a metaphor) when the context clearly directs that this is the author's intent.

The Word of God involves a progressive revelation, yet at no point is the message, as given to the intended, immediate audience, less than truth. Nor is it subject to contradiction or radical re-definition of terms so that the original recipients would have necessarily arrived at a wrong conclusion using the normal interpretation, or an interpretation that would have parts redefined so as to contradict meanings of passages as understood in their immediate historical context. While the progress of revelation allows for deeper meanings and significance of promises and events, as well as the elaboration and development of details already given, it never alters the meanings of terms or stated recipients of prophetic promise so as to negate or contradict the clearly stated intent of normal language. It is the responsibility of believers to study the word of God diligently and carefully (Acts 17:11). We are to rely on the enabling enlightenment of the Holy Spirit to determine the intent of the Divine/human authors in the passage to His/his audience, while considering what refinements and additions of details have been subsequently provided for us by the divine Author, Who is never disingenuous, deceptive or self-contradictory.

The Bible is to be regarded as authoritatively binding on all men, in all times, and in every culture. I would make a sharp distinction between this concept of the Biblical revelation of truth and other sources of revelation such as natural revelation or general revelation, (that in which man may, if perceptive, honest and alert, discern about God and the world), given the subjectivity and uneven fruit of that perception. I would also make sharp distinction with the concept of inspiration that I hold and what I would regard as defective flawed and dangerous understandings of revelation or inspiration such as Dynamic or Mystical inspiration (the Bible is the product of natural geniuses, not necessarily perfect or always accurate, just Spirit led); Degree Inspiration (all scripture is inspired but not all to the same degree); Partial Inspiration (parts are inspired, others not); Concept Inspiration (concepts are inspired, but not the actual words); or Barthian Inspiration (the Bible is shot full of human error and prejudices, yet can

become the Word of God to us existentially in special experiences). A fuller, more detailed statement of my beliefs about the inerrancy of the Bible and how I would understand the concept of inerrancy would be found in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy of 1978.

## II. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT GOD

Having feet planted on that pre-suppositional rock, I would love to elaborate on what I hold that the Bible teaches about God, Theology proper, Christology (the truth about Jesus) and Pneumatology (the truth about the Holy Spirit). As we proceed, I recognize the term “Person” or “Persons” may be misleading as if there were three separate individual Gods, but I will attempt to safe-guard the term with necessary qualifications. Similarly, the term “substance” could inaccurately imply a form of materialism, but the term operates within the semantic range described.

The Old Testament was less clear about the concept of the Trinity, the Three-Persons-in-One nature concept of God than subsequent New Testament revelation affirms. The celebrated “Shema” of Deuteronomy 6:4 was Israel’s basic confession of faith; the unity of God – “the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”. This taught the absolute uniqueness of God (as also articulated by the concept of “Holy”, separate) and it effectively ruled out polytheism. It also taught that He was the only true single unique living God. At the same time, terms such as plural pronouns and plural verbs were deliberately employed that intimated a plurality (Gen. 1: 26; 11: 7) and distinctions of Persons (also Gen. 1:2; Isa. 6: 8; 48: 15 -17; 63: 8 – 10; Ps. 110:1) rather than any concept of modalism.

What was intimated broadly and deliberately in the Old Testament was communicated with unambiguous clarity in the New Testament. First, the holy One-ness of God is reiterated in the New Testament (1Cor. 8: 4 – 6; Eph. 4: 3 – 6; Jam. 2: 19). However, the distinctness of Person of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are also clearly taught.

First, the fact of the Deity of the Persons within the Godhead is taught.

- The Father is God (John 6: 27; 1 Pet. 1:4).
- The Son, Jesus Christ is undiminished God (John 5: 17 – 47) including the abilities of God (vs. 19, 21), the restrictions of abilities of God (like the inability to sin or act independently of the Godhead, vs. 19, 30), the innate moral goodness and acceptability of God (vs. 20), and the appropriateness of the ascribing of honour to the Son in a way that is undiminished from the appropriate level of honour given to God the Father (vs. 23, “even as”), and the unbreakable connection of withholding God-like honour to the Son as constructively withholding and denying honour being given to the Father, a damning error. The impeccable God-level knowledge and judgment of the Son is also affirmed (vs. 20, 22). Indeed the fullness of the Godhead is innately eternally existent in Jesus, the Son in bodily form (Col 2: 9, Heb. 13: 8) to the extent that to deny the Deity of Jesus the Christ is taught by Jesus to be a damning omission (John 8: 24).
- The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5 3 – 4), He possesses God-exclusive attributes like omniscience (1 Cor. 2: 10), omnipresence (2 Cor. 6: 19) and the ability to regenerate people (John 3: 5, - 8).

And yet, mysteriously, the one-ness of God continues to be affirmed (John 10: 30; James 2: 19) and the one substance/essence of all Three in passages like Matthew 28: 19 where the term

“ὄνομα” (name) is used (a singular) and yet three Persons associated equally and united in that Name. It is pictured well and helpfully in the account of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3: 16, 17), the commendation of Jesus (John 12: 27 – 30), passages where the terms Lord are used interchangeably with Jesus (John 20: 28), where Jesus is seen in concert activity, named interchangeably with God, yet in distinction to the Father and Holy Spirit (Acts 9: 3 - 17) and in differentiated lists (John 14: 23; 2 Cor. 13: 14). Another great passage is John 10: 30. Jesus says, “I and the Father are One”. “I and the Father” clearly distinguishes two Persons. The Greek word “we are” is a plural as well. But the term for “one” is not a masculine which would have meant, the two are one male Person, but rather a neuter, that is, one as to nature or essence. Jesus distinguishes Himself from the Father yet claims equality and unity as to innate essence and nature. B. B. Warfield wrote, “There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead, there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence”.

a) God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own gracious purposes (Eph. 1: 9 – 11; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1-31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 11:36). His Fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator, He is Father to all men (Eph. 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (John 1: 12; Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:16 - 18). He has eternally decreed, for His own glory, all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chron. 29:11, 12; Rom. 11: 36). In His sovereignty, He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge or diminish the accountability and culpability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pet. 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as His own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 12:5-9). He deserves from every component of His creation honour, worship and obedience.

b) Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9). God the Father created everything in existence, except the God-head, according to His own will and through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2). In the incarnation, Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree, substance or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity voluntarily took to Himself and added to Himself all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-Man (Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 2:9). Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in undivided oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Col. 2:9). As the virgin-born God-man, Jesus uniquely is able to be our atoning sacrifice, (Isa. 53: 4 – 6; John 1: 29; 1Cor. 11: 24, 1 Pet 1: 18, 19), Representative (Rom. 5: 19), Advocate (1 John 2: 1 2), High Priest (Ps. 110: 4; Heb. 7: 14 – 26) is able to reveal God to man (John 1: 18), and rule from His earthly-father David’s throne over Israel and the entire universe in His coming kingdom (Ps. 2:7-9; Isa. 9:6; Matt. 2: 5, 6; Luke 1: 31 – 33; Phi. 2:9-11). His death was voluntary, vicarious, propitiatory, and redemptive, rather than merely exemplary (John 10:15; Rom. 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24).

On the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day, the very presence of sin. He is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Rom. 3:25, 26; 5:8 - 10; 8: 15 - 17; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). Our justification is made sure by His literal, physically real resurrection from the full bodily death on the cross. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection-life for all believers (John 5:26 - 29; 11: 23 - 26; 14:19; Rom. 1:4; 6:5-10; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; 1 Thess. 4: 14). He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father (Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 9:24).

I also believe that Jesus Christ Himself will return bodily to receive the church, (which is His Body), up to Himself at the snatching away described in 1 Thess. 4: 17 and 1 Corinthians 15: 50 - 55, and, returning with His church later in great glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Dan. 2: 44, 45; Isa. 9: 6, 7; Luke 24: 44; Acts 1:9-11; 2 Tim. 4: 1; Rev. 20). The Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- Believers (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matt. 25:31-46)
- Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15)

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

c) The Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and Deity, including intellect (1 Cor. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1 Cor. 12:11), eternity (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139: 7-10), omniscience (Isa. 40: 13-17), omnipotence (Isa. 40: 15 - 17; Rom. 15: 13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes, He is co-equal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5: 3-4; 28: 25-26; 1 Cor. 12: 4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Jer. 31: 31-34 with Heb. 10:15-17). He was sovereignly active in creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Matt.1: 18), the production of the canon of scripture (2 Pet. 1: 20, 21) and the sovereign, God-initiated work of salvation (John 3: 5 - 7).

While the Old Testament clearly reveals the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in every epoch of history, the work now during the church age beginning at Pentecost was unique enough that the Lord referred to it as the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 15: 26; 16: 5 - 14; Acts 11: 15), that is, His coming in church-age unique ministries. To believers, the present ministries include baptizing every believer into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 13), guiding the disciples into all truth (John 14: 26; 16: 12, 13, 2 Pet. 1: 19), permanently indwelling believers (John 14: 16, 17, Rom. 8: 9), leading them (Rom. 8: 14), re-assuring them (Rom. 8: 15 - 17), empowering them (Acts 1: 8; Romans 8: 11), gifting them (1 Cor. 12: 7 - 11), transforming them into the image of Christ (Rom. 8: 13) and the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2: 22) and then sealing them until the day of redemption (Eph. 1: 13, 14). To unbelievers particularly, there began a distinct ministry of convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment that did not hitherto exist in the same way (John 6: 7 - 10).



### **III. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT MAN (ANTHROPOLOGY)**

Moving logically from the Theology, I now wish to discuss some basics of the doctrine of man: anthropology. Man was created male and female directly and immediately in unconfirmed creature holiness (Gen. 1: 31). They possessed a will (Gen. 2: 23), intelligence (Gen. 2: 15, 19), the capacity to obey commands (Rom. 5: 19), and the responsibility to do so (Gen. 2: 16, 17). Both Adam and Eve were created distinct in their manhood and womanhood, yet equal before God as persons. The gender distinction mandated distinction in roles and resultant male headship in the family, even in pre-fall conditions of moral, environmental and societal perfection, this distinction is maintained at our present time.

In Adam's subsequent sin, mankind (with the sole exception of Jesus Christ) sinned in Adam (Rom. 5: 10-12), incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt in nature as well as utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no innate natural ability to counter his very nature, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby rendered possible with fallen man, wholly and solely on the basis of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus 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) and not on the merit (which no man possesses), any supposed anticipated human merit (which no man is capable of unassisted by God), or works (Titus 3: 5).

### **IV. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT SALVATION**

This leads us naturally to consider the work of regeneration. Salvation, and specifically, regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 6: 63) by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the effectual choosing in eternity past, and timely calling and drawing of the Father (John 6: 39, 40, 44, 65) by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24; 1 Peter 1: 23). When the sinner is repentant, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, he is made alive and therefore responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world and without condition, human merit, human initiative, human determination (John 1: 12, 13), or supposed "anticipated merit", He chose in Christ. He chooses individually and in particular (not just corporately), those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4-11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2) according to His own pleasure, mercy, grace and eternal council and the kind intention of His will (Eph. 1: 3-6). Sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (John 1: 11, 12; Rom. 10:13-17; Rev. 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election is all of grace (1 Thess. 1: 4; Titus 3: 5) and will of necessity result in what God determines. All whom the Father draws to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father and the Son will certainly not cast out (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

Genuine regeneration results in justification. Justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; Isa. 55:6-7) and confess Him as Sovereign Lord (Romans 6: 22; 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). This

righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6) and involves the gracious imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Justification as a judicial declarative act by the Father on the basis of the finished, fully satisfying payment of Christ's atoning sacrifice, inevitably guarantees that the believer is the present-possessor of a life that is characterized by the quality of eternity. All the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-8; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24). This will not produce the effect of sinful indulgence and carnality, but rather, a love of the Saviour that results in submission, thanksgiving, praise, and holy living (Rom. 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Gal. 5:13, 22-24; Titus 2:11-14).

Justification yields sanctification as its fruit. Sanctification is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct in every one sanctified. In scripture, individual ordinary believers are identified and referred to as "saints". This describes their position in Christ, and legal standing, and increasingly, yet not with completeness in this life, their experiential standing. Sanctification will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life, through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:16; 2 Pet.1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Such a conformity will inevitably climax in the elected believer's glorification at Christ's appearing (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Thess. 4: 14-18; 1 Pet. 1: 4; 1 John 3:2-3). Every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh— but adequate provision is made for victory, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor.10: 13). The struggle, nevertheless, stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended (Rom. 7: 19, 21, 23, 25). All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural (Rom. 7: 14). Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

## **V. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT THE CHURCH**

This group of disciples struggling to achieve victory over sin who are secure in Christ are called, collectively, the Body of Christ; the Church. I believe that the Church, as an entity began on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit began a ministry of baptizing believers into the Body of Christ. Believing-Israel is included in the church, without losing its distinctive national prophetic identity. More specifically, Gentile believers, now baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit and thereby joined to the church, have been grafted into the olive tree of Israel (Rom. 11: 17 – 25) through the Person and standing of Jesus Christ. This entitles those who were once strangers to the covenants of promise, because they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and were therefore without hope, to now be participants in the New Covenant- the full expression of which has not yet been fully realized. The church will be completed when the last soul that the Father has given as a love-gift to the Son is called, believes, and is justified. At that time, the entire body of Christ, both sleeping and alive will be

caught up to the clouds to meet Jesus in the air. Until that time, members of the body of Christ are to associate themselves together in local assemblies, referred to as local churches.

## **VI. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

The one supreme authority for the church is Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23). Church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty, according to standards He has established as found in the Scriptures. The next in operational authority is the office of an Apostle (Paul declared that he was the last one who would qualify for this position, 1 Corinthians 5: 8; 9: 1). As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus, it carried a great amount of responsibility. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource to understand the mind and heart of God (as revealed in the Scriptures) with regard to issues in the church, than the local college of elders. Therefore, the biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called overseers, shepherds, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11) with deacons assisting them. Men serving in either office are required to meet biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

When Timothy left Titus in Crete, he was charged with the responsibility to “set in order” what was “lacking” or “what remained”. One of the first issues in need of correction was that elders (plural) were to be appointed (in this case, conferred apostolic authority appointment). The office of an elder is to be carried out within the context of a plurality, a college of men who Biblically qualify and tend to the flock of God as slaves of Christ. They therefore serve Christ by serving the body of Christ in the role of an elder.

The primary responsibility of an elder is to serve as a manager and caretaker of the church (1 Tim. 3:5). That involves a number of specific duties. As spiritual overseers of the flock, elders are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); oversee the church (Acts 20:28); ordain others (1 Tim. 4:4); rule, teach, and preach (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2); exhort and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the New Testament church’s work. These leaders are to operate as servants of Christ (1 Tim. 5:17-22) and have His mediated authority in directing the church.

Because of its heritage of democratic values and our long history of congregational church government, modern evangelicalism often views the concept of elder rule with suspicion. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, demonstrates that the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders, and only by following this biblical pattern will the church maximize its fruitfulness to the glory of God.

The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Heb. 13:7, 17), while holding them accountable to Scriptural standards of doctrine and purity (1 Tim. 5: 19 - 21), as all believers are to dwell within a community of mutual accountability to each other, praying for, teaching, forgiving, disciplining, admonishing and encouraging one another. In addition, the office of elder is limited to men. First Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” In the church, women are to be under the authority of the elders, excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over them.

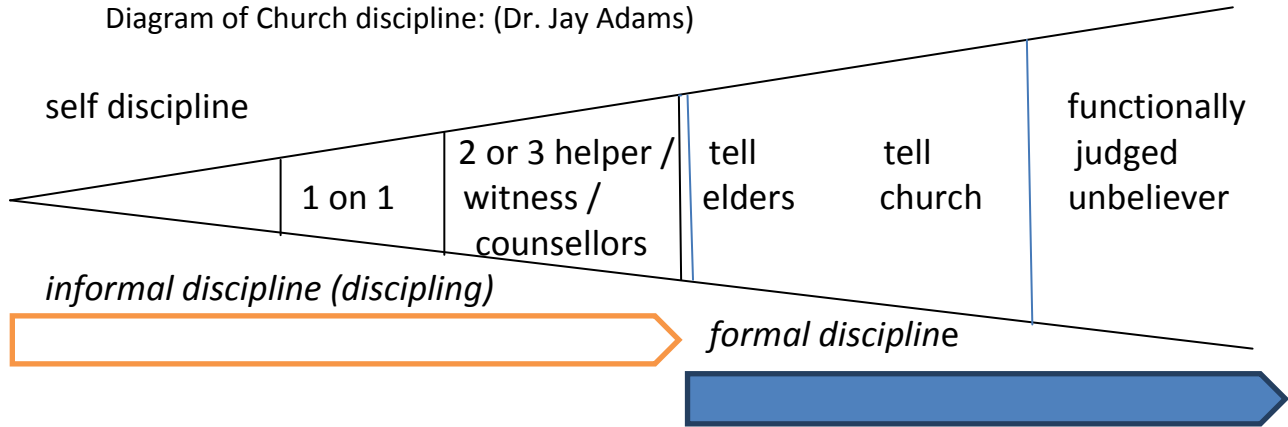
## VII. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT CHURCH DISCIPLINE

One of the responsibilities that the Lord has laid on His disciples is the practice of church discipline. The phrase may bring to mind historic incidents involving ill-willed confrontation and frightening, ugly scenarios that everyone would rather avoid. That, of course, is not what the Bible commends in the practice of this commandment. Church discipline, Biblically, is the formalized, systematic and consistent framework of order that directs members who care deeply for each other to gently draw close to their fellow brothers and sisters and disciple them (the underlying principle of discipline), admonish, teach, help, correct and encourage them. The goal is always greater conformity to the image of Christ and a deeper level of trust and love between those in the family of God, and always the goal is full restoration and affirmation as well as improved functioning of that member within the body of Christ. I have been greatly benefited by caring brothers and sisters who came along side and encouraged, instructed and corrected issues in my life that I had not seen or could not see. The perspective of others who are trusted is intuitively sought out for big issues and big decisions, and our sanctification is of cardinal importance. The Lord has commanded that others who are redeemed and care would lovingly helping us with the problem solving and the sin issues that we are all battling. It has been mandated and institutionalized and therefore enjoys a standardized methodology.

Broadly speaking, there are two phases of church discipline. The first is informal, and is outlined in Matthew 5: 23, 24; 18: 12 – 35 (esp. vs. 15, 16 as the informal phase), Luke 17: 3, 4; and Galatians 6: 1, 2. Most frequently, when dealing with fellow Christians, the process would never proceed past this point, where matters are kept confidential. This protects both the body of Christ and His glory, and also the testimony of the struggling believer from public spectacle. On occasion with believers, or when dealing with unbelievers who have attached themselves to the church, the process would escalate to the more formal, more public phases described in Matthew 18: 17, 18; 1 Timothy 5: 19 – 21 (in the case of elders); and 2 Thessalonians 3: 6 – 15.

The first priority in this practice of Church discipline is always the purity, reputation and glory of Christ in His church, not the comfort and protection of individual believers. The second priority is that the actions be done with a view to full and useful restoration of the believer to service and fellowship, which is why a Biblical concept of confidentiality is developed. The third priority would be that of the corrective warning of believers, and then the discovery and identifying of false brethren in the fellowship – for the benefit of the false brethren so they do not continue to labour under a false hope of salvation, and to the benefit of the local church, so that they can change the focus of involvement from fellowship to that of cordial (if possible) evangelism. It protects the church from the ignominy of continuing, open, unrepentant sin in its members. Church discipline is to be utilized as an instrument in striving to present every man complete in Christ and as a clarification of an individual's profession of faith and standing as a genuine disciple. A church group failing to practice this commandment is operating in dysfunctional disobedience, scorning the Lord's unambiguously mandatory requirement and gracious provision.

Diagram of Church discipline: (Dr. Jay Adams)



### VIII. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT CHURCH ORDINANCES

Two ordinances given to the church are the Lord’s Supper and baptism which we will now consider. Participation in the Lord’s Supper and baptism is the privilege and the responsibility of every believer. The logical order of events would be that a believer would give evidence of trusting Christ as his Lord and Saviour by being baptized. This is an outward profession that he or she has been buried with Christ and made alive in Christ. It is the outward symbol of an already completed spiritual reality, the baptism of the Spirit.

Spirit baptism did not occur before Pentecost (Acts 1: 5, compare with John 20: 22). Peter referred to the event at Pentecost as “the beginning” (11: 15, 16). The purpose of Spirit baptism is to join the believer to the body of Christ, something that all genuine believers have experienced (1 Cor. 12: 13). This is the “one baptism” referred to in Ephesians 4: 5. Spirit baptism is not repeated in the life of a believer (whereas, filling, or being filled with the Spirit is).

Water baptism symbolizes this truth and is a vehicle whereby a disciple gives testimony that he has been joined to the body of Christ. He or she is now identifying with the body of Christ, the teaching of Christ, and now has trusted the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, baptism certainly does not make a disciple saved, but rather publicly affirms that the disciple has been saved.

Years ago, if the Greek word for baptism had been translated into the English, rather than transliterated for political reasons, the mode of baptism would never have been an issue, for the word translated means to dunk, to immerse. The ordinance of baptism was commanded to be performed with the giving of the Great Commission, and New Testament examples indicate that believers were baptized right after they believed. The scriptures and the early church never contemplated a believer remaining unbaptized. It is the first act of obedience that is commanded of a new disciple. It would, therefore, be an action divorced from these principles if we were to baptize (and therefore give testimony of having believed and been baptized into the body of Christ) an unbeliever, infant or otherwise.

The second ordinance commanded to be regularly performed by the disciples of the Lord is that of the Lord’s Supper. To believers, the only acceptable participants in the ordinance, the bread and the cup symbolize the Lord’s death; the body, broken; the blood, shed. We do this ordinance and partake of these symbolic elements in remembrance of these essential,

stabilizing truths, and “show” (give a physical, visual sign) the death of Christ. It is an event which encourages us (or forces us) to confess sin and restore compromised relationships within the body of Christ or to face temporal judgment. We are commanded to “do this”. We are forbidden to “do this” in an unworthy manner, without judging ourselves. And, of course, we are forbidden to neglect the assembling of ourselves to do this important practice, amongst the other things associated with the assembling of ourselves together.

I believe that it is scriptural for true, doctrinally-sound, gospel-proclaiming churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. If a given church does not communicate the gospel with clarity or accuracy, or is behaving in a settled, institutionalized pattern that is contrary to sound faith and doctrine, then association and joint participation with that church is to be scrupulously avoided (2 Cor. 6: 14 – 18).

## **IX. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

A word is needed concerning spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit gives a unique blend of special spiritual abilities that transcend mere physical abilities to each member of the body of Christ. This is for the purpose of building up the body (1 Pet. 4: 10, 11). A believer discovers this enabling in the context of community- the church, as he or she practices the full range of spiritually-helpful tasks to others (Eph. 4: 15, 16).

I understand that there were two kinds of gifts given the early church: *miraculous gifts* of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles’ message (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12); and *ministering gifts*, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man’s message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Cor. 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Cor. 13:13-14:12). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Rom. 12:6-8).

The position I have just described is called a Cessationist position. Good and godly men disagree with this position formally (referred to commonly as “Continuationist”), but I would (perhaps somewhat mischievously, yet gently) suggest that there is a sense in which most conservative evangelical theologians would, in fact describe themselves as “cessationist”. If most Continuationists were asked if they believe that all of the spiritual gifts described in the Bible continue to operate, all but those who are Apostolic would say, “Yes, except...” Most would be in agreement that the office of a New Testament Apostle, exercising full apostolic authority, insight, and canon-expanding, revelatory ability, has ceased. At least one of the gifts has ceased to function. If I were to further ask this now somewhat numerically refined group (Apostolic tradition responders now excepted) if they believe that all of the gifts continue to function in a fashion and capacity identical to the New Testament standard, they would mostly, again, concede that while the gift remains in operation today (broadly, their contention) yet the function is somewhat different than the New Testament description. So what is the nature of the disagreement? Perhaps a diversionary illustration may be employed. Picture in your mind’s eye a common dog with a long luxurious tail. If one were, for the sake of discussion to call a tail a leg, how many legs would that dog have? Some may answer, “Five.” I would yet answer,

“Four.” Calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg. Calling, for example, a practice “tongues” does not make it “tongues”.

Similar to Robert L. Thomas, I would contend that the gift of tongues, the gift of healing (a sub-section of working miracles, in my view and a different issue than the physical healing God can and does perform today) and the gift of prophesy as described by current practitioners, is today, fundamentally different than the operation of the gifts described in the early church (the oft cited case of Agabus included). Perhaps then, most would agree that some of the gifts as functionally described in the New Testament have ceased. My concern is that describing these lesser or altered manifestations using New Testament terminology is misleading. To further practice some of these actions and sanction their practice by christening them as “Biblical” because of their perceived resemblance to a New Testament, historic reality, is confusing and, in cases, dangerous.

Let’s consider using tongues as a closet prayer language as a case in point. I have had dear brothers and sisters (whom I warmly regard in love) report to me that their prayer life has been wonderfully enhanced and permanently altered by the practice of private tongues. We could discuss at length whether that practice qualifies according to 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul (verses 6 – 10) discounts the advantage of un-interpreted tongues, and whether what is under discussion in this chapter is still an unknown, yet knowable, language. The deeper problem, in my view, with private tongues as a closet prayer language, is revealed by asking the question, “Is it prayer?”

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, (Luke 11: 1) He told them, “When you pray, say...”, and what followed is coherent, thoughtful, prayer (general language discourse directed to the Father) including praise, thanksgiving, confession and supplication (specific “grocery-list” requests on behalf of ourselves or others). The wonderful affirmation is that you can speak to God in a language that you know and converse in. I was taught in my youth that a “higher” form of praying was this private tongues because then your prayer (described to me as an angelic tongue or language) would not be intercepted by Satan. This, I trust is a very minority view, unshared generally. Nevertheless, for some, a sizeable percentage, for others, the majority of time they have devoted to the deeply needful task and discipline of prayer has been high-jacked by a practice that utters no known praise, no known confession of sin, no known affirmation of the will of the Father, and no specific request on behalf of our needs or the needs of others, as we are encouraged to boldly produce. I fear that time is spent without obeying the basic command to pray and a somewhat enigmatic emotional experience may be supplanting it.

## **X. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT ANGELS**

I have been asked as a pastor if I believe we are alone in the universe, or if there is a race of beings of superior intelligence whose original home was not this planet. As a matter of fact, there is such a race, but they have been in our world a long time. They are angels. Angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9). They are spirit beings, yet on occasion, they assume physically discernible forms. They usually appear as male (with the possible exception of Zechariah 5: 9). At some point subsequent to Genesis 1: 31 but prior to Genesis 3, there

came a cataclysmic division of their impossibly large company described in Isaiah 14: 12 – 14 (where the prophet, while speaking to the puppet, the king of Babylon, changes the focus of his prophetic gaze to the puppet-master, Lucifer, the star of the morning, as affirmed by Jesus, Luke 10: 18), Ezekiel 28: 12 – 17a and Revelation 12: 3, 4). Now, the division is described as the holy angels, the host of heaven, and the devil (described variously Satan, Lucifer or the accuser of the brethren, the old serpent, the dragon, the slanderer) and his angels, described as demons or unclean spirits. The angelic host of heaven are described as under the direction and sovereign rule of the Lord of Sabaoth, the Captain of the Lord's Host, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They operate as ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit eternal life. They are powerful, brilliantly directed, unimaginably large in number, and confirmed in creature holiness and loyalty to our King. Michael is described as an archangel, or one of their princes.

They are opposed by a former leader of their company, Lucifer, now called Satan. Satan was speaking through the serpent in the temptation of Eve and together with his fellow angelic followers, is the open and declared enemy of God. He is currently walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, tempting and deceiving the nations and masterminding and directing the persecution and temptational testing of the church as well as the persecution of Israel. He currently enjoys a latitude of freedom that allows him to be described as the "god of this world" and "the prince of the power of the air" and "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" with unbelievers described as being taken "captive by him to do his will".

But lo, as Luther wrote, his coming doom is sure. Revelation 20 describes a time where he will be bound for a thousand years (in contrast to his present relative freedom) and thrown into the abyss (vs. 3), also called a prison (vs. 7, in contrast to his current sphere of abode, this earth), which will be shut and sealed over him. To what effect? He would not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were completed (in contrast to his currently varied, extensive and effective activities within his current boundaries). After these thousand years of confinement in a bottomless, sealed pit, cut off from mankind, he must be released from his prison for a short time to once again deceive the nations of the world. He will have a frightening and astonishing measure of success, but then the rebels he will be leading in defiance to the earthly-kingdom rule of King Jesus will be devoured by fire. He will be thrown into his final place of hostile torture (not his place of rule and domain as comically misrepresented) where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

## **XI. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT DEATH**

This logically leads us to the next topic of discussion: what is death? Death is helpfully understood as separation which is described in three ways:

- Spiritual death. God promised Adam that in the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. He became subject to physical mortality, but he did not physically die. He was, however spiritually separated from God immediately, on that day. All of his descendants except one, Jesus the Christ, have been born spiritually separated from God ever since. The result of this is an inability to perform works worthy of merit, moral excellence or God's commendation and reward. The result is an inability to receive the things of the Spirit of God, or even to understand or know them. It renders mankind as under the domain and sway of the evil one, and a hopeless, incorrigible slave to sin.



- Physical death. The eventual inevitable outcome of sin entering the world was physical death. Physical death is separation of the body from the soul-spirit (theoretically able to be separated perhaps, but the separation being unprecedented and the terms used interchangeably). Before Adam sinned, there was no physical death in the universe (in contrast to the understanding of theistic evolution). For mankind, the body is consigned to the grave, Sheol, where it decays but the soul will appear immediately in either the literal tormenting flames of hell, or the comforting joyful presence of the Lord. This depends on whether that person's sins are paid for by an adequate, eternal Substitute, or if the one has physically died in their sins, under the proper condemnation and wrath of God, awaiting final sentencing.
- Eternal death. If a man perishes in his sins, he will, after the thousand year reign of Christ and subsequent short lived rebellion, be assigned an eternal, literal body, with a physicality prepared to eternally endure confinement and torment in the lake of fire. It will, at least, have sensitivity to pain, and, apparently perhaps, smell (the purpose of brimstone, the fragrance of that place). This is the second resurrection, not of number, but of kind. If that man's name is not found in the book of life, which was fully authored and edited from the foundation of the world, he will be caused to stand in the docket for sentencing. The punishment being justly determined by the remarkably complete record of his words, thoughts, deeds and lapse of deeds. He will then be cast eternally alive (in his damned body) into the lake of fire and brimstone. This is the second death, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. This is a place where there is never any merciful annihilation. In fact, this is a place without mercy, companionship or comfort of any kind, only justices meted out in exact response to his deserve, conscious torment and un-redemptive punishment. The quality and depth of the believer's thankfulness and praise to God for deliverance, would be adversely affected by our ignorance or neglect of these facts.

To fill in some of the gaps I have left unaddressed with respect to my understanding of the future events, I believe and teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself to the clouds, the atmosphere of the earth before the seven-year tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2; Titus 2:13) to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11) and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The snatching away of the church is not preceded by any sign in contrast to the coming of our Lord to set up His earthly kingdom. Immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thess. 2:7-12; Rev. 16), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 2:7-12). At that time, the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan. 12:2-3; Rev. 20:4-6). This period is the fulfilment of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 24:15-31; 25:31-46). After the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matt. 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for 1,000 years on the earth (Rev. 20:1-7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over all the nations of the earth (Ezek. 37:21-28; Dan. 7:17-22; Rev. 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of

the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Dan. 7:17-27; Rev. 20:1-7).

I believe that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Isa. 65:17-25; Ezek. 37:21-28; Zech. 8:1-17) to restore them to the land that they temporarily forfeited through their disobedience (Deut.28:15-68). The result of their disobedience was that the earthly aspect of Jesus Christ's kingdom reign was temporarily set aside (Matthew 21:43; Romans 11:1-26), but it will again be awakened through God's sovereign, effectual calling. His illuminating, and regeneration that was long ago promised, will result in the ethnic Israelis alive at that time being brought to repentance, faith and submission to their Messiah Saviour King. They will be saved spiritually and then physically from a hostile army surrounding them, and subsequently, be graciously invited to enter into the land of blessing (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; Rom. 11:25-29). This time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isaiah 11; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 36:33-38), yet people will age (Zech.8: 1 – 8) and some will die as a judgment (Isa. 65: 19, 20), clearly distinguishing this time from the eternal state. This millennial reign will end with the release of Satan (Revelation 20:7). After the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 20:15; 21:1-27; 22:1-21). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Rev. 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28), that in all spheres the triune God will reign forever and ever (1 Cor. 15:28).

## **XII. WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT THE FAITH THAT SAVES**

I have left an exceedingly important issue until end. What is the faith that saves? Many in scripture are recorded as believing on Christ unsavingly (John 2: 23, 24; 12: 42; Acts 8: 13 – 24), trusting God (Matt. 7: 21 – 23; at least profess to trust) and yet in the end find that the faith that they possess is not the faith that saves. The faith that saves has:

- The right content of faith
- The right object of faith
- The right response of faith
- The right source of faith

### **Content**

The crowd gathered on Pentecost at the preaching of Peter had a great deal right about God, the Bible, and even Jesus. As one considers the crowd generally, by virtue of being adherents of Judaism, it could be broadly assumed they:

1. believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
2. believed this God was Creator, Holy, and Perfect
3. believed God was Sovereign
4. believed the scriptures to be perfectly correct and authoritative
5. believed they were sinners

6. believed sinners went to hell if not for God's provision
7. believed in blood atonement as payment for sin
8. believed Jesus really lived (they knew who Peter was preaching about)
9. believed that His miracles were Divinely worked : verse 22
10. believed Jesus died on a cross : verse 23, 36
11. believed He rose again : verse 24, 32

When they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?", he responded that they needed to repent- "about face". Concerning what? Concerning the climax of his sermon, verse 36. They needed to know for certain that God has made Him (the Jesus he had preached) both Lord and Christ. This struck at the very heart of the deficiency of the content of their faith. They needed to accept that Jesus was Lord – more than man, in fact, very God, with the inherent right to command and be obeyed that is resident within that title. Additionally, he was Messiah, the Christ, and the Anointed One – striking at the very heart of their faith content deficiency. He was the fulfilment of the entire substitutionary-atonement sacrificial-system and the Anointed One spoken of so extensively in the scriptures, Who was both Servant and eternal Saviour. They needed to repent, both of their sins and their current blasphemous belief system. To believe in a Jesus different from the one described in the pages of scriptures, for example, constitutes a defective content of faith and therefore a faith that does not save.

### **Object**

In the book of Galatians Paul is didactically reacting to some who were teaching a salvation equation that could be stated as follows:

Faith + good works => Justification

Paul corrected it to a teaching that could be stated as follows:

Faith => Justification + good works

If the object of my faith is, in the smallest fraction, partly some good action I have done or thought, then salvation is no longer all of grace and grace is no longer grace (Rom. 11: 6). The importance of this is stated by Paul in a twice repeated curse upon anyone who would espouse such a damning concoction (Gal. 1: 8, 9). The object of one's faith cannot be a prayer one has prayed, the act of going forward, some spiritually meritorious deed or level of attainment (Phil. 3; 7 - 9), in your own faith (as the Word of Faith teachers damningly teach) or even in the orthodoxy of your faith. The proper object of the faith that saves is the Person and Work of Jesus. I am saved because my sins were imputed to Christ, and His perfect righteousness was imputed to me (2 Cor. 5; 18 – 21). I am accepted in the Beloved because I have the legal standing of Christ and the Father phileos, the Son- continues to have the love of admiration and unqualified commendation toward the Son (John 5; 20).

### **Response**

The faith that saves distinguishes itself from non-saving faith by the response it produces. The faith that saves:

1. Acts 8: 9 – 25 : it causes the person to repent of sin
2. Luke 15: 25 - 33 : it causes the person to embrace Jesus as Master
3. 1 Corinthians 16: 22 : It causes the person to love the Lord Jesus Christ –compare 2 Timothy 4: 10

## Source

The faith that saves comes from God. John tells us that the ones that received Him and were granted the right to become the children of God were born:

1. Not of blood. Being from the right family or of the right racial heritage does not contribute as a source to anyone's salvation. In fact, Paul counted his heritage and attainments as dung in order that he might gain Christ (Phil 3: 8, 9)
2. Not of the will of the flesh. A "felt needs" approach to the gospel proclamation, that seeks to produce a desire for the benefits of God, like peace or a release from guilt, or a greedy desire for God's material blessing, will not operate as a source of the faith that saves.
3. Not the will of man. Man in his fallen state is not capable of even being willing to believe. Further, the fervent desire of others that someone come to faith, or the faith of another (as found in the oft repeated affirmation, "I am trusting God for the certainty of my son's salvation.") is not a source of faith that saves.

God is the source of the faith that saves. God uses His Word, as ministered to the mind and heart of a man by the Holy Spirit, as a source to produce the faith that saves. James 1: 18 tells us, "In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the word of His truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

A professed faith in God often occurs apart from (without) the Word of God or any of the necessary components of the gospel, without an accurate understanding of Jesus or God, without the submission of the heart, without growing love for Jesus and hatred of sin. Saving faith never occurs without these things.

## XIII. PERSONAL TESTIMONY AND MINISTRY

I don't frequently dwell on my personal testimony because I believe that it is the word of God that has the ability to edify and sanctify, not my own history. I record this, though, in the recognition that a life has a context, and for the purposes of evaluation and verification, my background needs to be investigated.

### *Early Youth*

I was born in Nipawin, Saskatchewan and I was baptized in the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Nipawin at the age of ten. My family then moved to a farm in the Peace River country of Alberta and we attended a local Canadian Sunday School Mission church. That church experienced a split over the charismatic issue, and I was confronted with the thought that I had not yet experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I was familiar with some of the issues previously, as my maternal grandfather had worked as a Pentecostal Assemblies of Christ pastor. The idea was put to me, that the reason I had no ability to understand the word of God, or any desire to pray, was that I needed the second blessing which, I was told, was certified by speaking in tongues. I attended several charismatic services and was repulsed by what I regarded as madness. Yet the assertion that I could not properly understand Scripture, had no real desire to pray, and no sense of assurance over whether I was saved, and did not seem to have the Holy Spirit, dogged me.

### *My Time of Conversion*

The church had a very confrontational meeting between the two factions eventually, and there was a great deal of ill-tempered shouting and accusations. In the middle of it, someone quoted Romans 8: 9, "...anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." For the next few minutes, I lost track of what was being said in the meeting (I understand an offer to a fist fight was issued) and I just read that passage, and came back to verse 9. It dawned on me that the reason I had all of the perceived deficiencies was because I was a stranger to the Holy Spirit. I was not saved. I had "prayed the prayer" many times at the end of Billy Graham crusades on television or radio, and had "gone forward", put up my hand, raised my head to make eye contact, and thrown sticks into fires at Bible camp. In that time, either I had not understood, or I had not been told that the object of my faith needed to be the finished work of Christ, not some religiously sincere action. We had been told all about the crucifixion and resurrection, but then the response recommended was always to do some religious act that became the focus of my faith and assurance. I had never made the connection that I needed to trust what Jesus had done, rather than what I was doing.

Graciously, that vital truth finally clicked, and I dismissed myself from the fray of the evening. I sat alone in the church furnace room and prayed, and asked that Jesus would be my Saviour and Lord. I was in a church that taught confessional non-lordship salvation, but I what I had read led me to understand that the key issue was whether the offering of Jesus was a sufficient sacrifice for sin, and whether or not I wanted to have God's will take precedence over my own. Later, I was re-baptized.

### *Early years as a Disciple*

I farmed in the Peace River area for a few years working oil rigs in the winter. During that time, I developed the practice and love of door to door evangelism, worked at Bible camps and helped at young people's clubs. At the age of 20, I began to wonder if the Lord wanted me in full time missions work. I was deeply moved by the description of tribes in New Guinea that had never heard the gospel, or had the scriptures in their language. As I was on my twelve hour shift off, living in rig camps, I began to prepare for service of some kind by studying systematic theologies and learning the Greek alphabet and basic grammar.

### *Marriage and a year of Bible school*

Shortly after this I met a young lady as I worked at Bible camp, whose parents had been accepted as missionaries to Kenya, East Africa with A.I.M. She could recite more Bible verses than anyone I had met. And she was cute! And astonishingly, she seemed to be willing to marry me. This gift from the Lord remains perhaps the most beautiful, wonderful, ministry-enabling gift I have ever received, apart from my salvation. At the age of 22, I sold off my farm

and equipment, married that girl, and headed to Prairie Bible Institute by Christmas (I had to get the last crop off). At the end of one year I was part way through my sophomore year. I was attracted to what was being taught by particularly one professor named Dr. Wheatley; a pre-millennial, cessationist, five point Calvinist, with a high view of Scripture, who was rather alone amongst the other professors. I also was greatly encouraged to hear a man named Dr. John MacArthur speak at the conference at Prairie, a year earlier. What those men said made sense to me amid the clamour of conflicting voices.

### *Rolla Bible Baptist Church*

At Christmas of 1987, I received a phone call from my home church pastor. He said he needed help in the church for a bit. My original game plan was to help out there as an associate pastor for a few months, and return to school. As it turned out, I never made it back. I was an associate pastor of that church and did regularized preaching, teaching Sunday school, youth group, counselling and evangelistic work as I supported myself at a full time job.

### *Foothills Hospital and Calgary*

I left the work in order to live close to Calgary's Nuclear Medicine Center (the Baker Cancer Clinic) at the Foothills Hospital for treatments of a medical condition. While there, I worked as a heavy equipment operator, and helped out in a Baptist church in their Stockades boy's program, as well as the youth group. I also did some evangelism and a little preaching.

### *Buick Gospel Mission; Buick, British Columbia*

Within a year and a half, my health was better and we were a family of four. We headed to Buick, British Columbia where I served as the pastor of Buick Gospel Mission. They paid me \$540.00 / month so I worked in the logging and oilfield industry and preached or taught two or three times on Sunday, conducted a mid-week Bible study/prayer meeting, and held other Bible studies every week. The sheer volume of work forcibly taught me to multi-task, redeem the time, and start in on one book and just teach my way through it verse by verse, phrase by phrase, using every preaching/teaching slot as a Bible book series. The various homiletic instructors I had in my life, would have described this as very inferior in method to a more spontaneous, reactive, sermon topic selection process. With a heavy heart, I adopted this method because I did not have the time "luxury" of spending hours searching my soul for what topic I "sensed that the Spirit might lead me" this week, for a given study group or preaching slot. In retrospect, I am so thankful for God's wonderful Providence in this necessity, because it very much forced me to be very Scripture focused, and to systematically study the entirety of the books of the New Testament before I could teach them. It also required me to produce a certain kind of sermon – one that preached an exegesis of the passage and then the

application, rather than a topical treatment of current issues, with a sprinkling of Scripture as may be found to back up my topic thesis.

The work at Buick was ethnically diverse, with two native reserves, two huge end-times cult farms, a major linguistically and culturally segregated community of old colony Mennonites, a sprinkling of folks with a political or military past they were hiding from in the seclusion of the north, and oilfield ranchers and tradesmen, all with whom I worked and logged. At Buick, therefore, there was a heavy load of counselling as well. Thankfully, I had received very little instruction from Prairie on a syncretic philosophy of Bible-plus-secular, humanistic psychology, the eclectic approach taught at many Bible schools. By God's grace, I found a copy of Jay Adam's book, *Competent To Counsel*, and that became the formation of my counselling presuppositions, and began to fill that instructional void.

The board of elders I served under in this congregational rule church, was all of one family. It became necessary to begin a process of church discipline on a serving elder, over an issue of a physical altercation with a member of a local aboriginal group. As the issue developed, my wife and I decided that I would step down as the viability of Biblical follow through and continued ministry, became unworkable.

#### *Upper Pine Gospel Chapel, Rose Prairie, B.C.*

I then accepted a call to ministry with Village Missions of Canada, in a church forty minutes away, that served roughly the same area and community profile. Here I was fully financially supported, and I had a vigorous schedule of formal ministry, as well as personal work. Personal work usually involved being out in the calving pens pulling calves, doing work as a farrier, driving log truck, welding, or helping fix machinery, as I taught house to house, or counselled about wayward children, husbands, or wives. I endeavoured to cover every house in a 18 mile radius, once a year. Once again, the sheer volume of work forced me to teach exegetically; verse by verse. I developed an increasing respect for men like Feinberg, MacArthur, Sproul and Adams.

#### *Northern Oilfield and Goodlow Evangelical Free Church*

I worked in the Buick/Rose Prairie area north of Fort St. John for about six years. I was a bit exhausted in the ministry, and I longed for more formal instruction. After conferral with the board of elders; the supervisors at Village Missions, and the securing of a man I felt was an excellent replacement at my post as pastor of Upper Pine Gospel Chapel, I resigned. I first took an agri-business job as a high clearance sprayer/operator, then various oilfield construction jobs, with a view to earning the money to return to a Bible college. As I did various jobs, including heavy equipment operation, oilfield environmental soils reclamation, equipment supervision, and contract gas plant operation; I preached Sundays at an Evangelical Free church

in Goodlow, British Columbia. They had recently lost their pastor, and a portion of their congregation, in a split. I also worked as a camp speaker at Camp Sagitawa Trail Rides, which was in the area.

### *Avonglen Gospel Mission*

In 1999, Avonglen Gospel Mission, a church that my brother-in-law served as elder in, had lost their pastor and eventually asked me to consider filling the position, at least on a temporary basis. I served there for 8 years. At the time I began my ministry there, the principal strategy of the church to fill the position of elder, was to select men who were well respected as business leaders and/or represented some key component of the body politic. I first concentrated on establishing a qualified, theologically equipped elder's board in the environment of a congregational-rule church. I continued a practice of working through books of the Bible as a pulpit strategy, by now convinced that this was a better method of declaring the whole council of God.

I preached a morning and evening service, a midweek Bible study, a kid's club (grades 1 to 6), and, occasionally Sunday school and youth group. During this time, a severe drought hit our area, followed by an agricultural disaster related to the discovery of B. S. E. in Alberta cattle, so I took a reduced salary and drove truck or helped the family oilfield service company to partially support my family.

In an effort to fill a need of the congregation, Kelly and I acted as assistants to another couple (Wayne and Tammy Younker) who wanted to establish a home school co-operative where the parents established a central location to teach a Christian curriculum and hire a tutor to assist with more advanced mathematics and science subjects, and pool resources for grammar and literature instruction. Kelly helped as a monitor often focusing on grammar, and I conducted school chapels.

I spoke every year at the local Bible camp for the teen-age group, but had a growing concern about the quality of counselling being conducted in the cabins, and the general approach to evangelism. I was especially concerned about what the directorship accepted as a salvation experience, and whether it was proper to have those who could not correctly articulate the gospel, or whose testimony was suspect or compromised, or, in cases, the unsaved, counselling in the cabins. A fellow pastor from Elk Point, Jason Goulet; my brother-in-law, Wayne Younker, and I, began running a wilderness discipleship training camp that was specific for teens.

In my time at Avonglen, I taught verse by verse through Genesis, select portions of Exodus and Numbers, Judges, the life of David and Solomon, Elisha and Elijah, Daniel and Zechariah in the Old Testament (and other passages used as illustrations in New Testament



teaching etc.) When I resigned, I was in series on each of the four gospels, and Hebrews. I had done verse by verse exposition of the rest of the New Testament.

In 2007, my son became aware of the fact that he was not saved and was not at that time, interested in altering that issue. On the basis of Titus 1: 6, I quickly resigned. By God's abundant grace and mercy, my son came to faith in Christ about three months later.

### *Reformed By Grace Baptist Church*

Nine months subsequent to my resignation from Avonglen, in the early summer of 2008, two elders I had worked with at Avonglen, were in a doctrinal conflict with the rest of the board about an issue that came up under my ministry there, but did not come to the flower of extreme contention until after my resignation. The issue of Calvinism was the battleground, but what constituted salvation – confession of a deficient gospel or repentant faith and submission to Christ, was the real issue. Wayne Younker and Tony Zlot resigned as elders at Avonglen at the pressure of the rest of the board, and the three of us began a church plant in the little building that was operating as a Christian school.

The church plant, Reformed By Grace Baptist Church was established with a doctrinal stance that was five point Calvinist, pre-millennial, and cessationist with a high view of Scripture in all areas, including counselling. Church governance was established as complimentary elder rule, with a multiplicity of elders sharing the shepherding tasks, and working with their hands to supply financial needs. The church began with these three elder families, the school teacher, Sarah Kinter, Jenn Brown, the Burton family and Emily Ford. The church today is composed of that which the Lord has added to it since that time. It is a wonderful, vibrant, zealous, loving group that I am both bound and privileged to serve.