Covenant Membership

Handbook



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PREFACE: A PARABLE[1]

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"
—1 CORINTHIANS 12:18-21

Nose and Hand were sitting in the church pew, talking. The morning service, led by Ear and Mouth, had just ended, and Hand was telling Nose that he and his family had decided to look for a different church.

"Really?" Nose responded to Hand's news. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," Hand said, looking down. He was usually slower to speak than other members of the church body. "I guess because the church doesn't have what Mrs. Hand and I are looking for."

"Well, what are you looking for in a church?" Nose asked. The tone in which he spoke these words was sympathetic. But even as he was speaking to them, he knew he would dismiss Hand's answer. If the Hands couldn't see that Nose and the rest of the leadership were pointing the church body in the right direction, the body could do without them.

Hand had to think before answering. He and Mrs. Hand liked Pastor Mouth and his family. And Minister of Music Ear meant well. "Well, I guess we're looking for a place where people are more like us," Hand finally stammered. "We tried spending time with the Legs, but we didn't connect with them. Next, we joined the small group for all the Toes. But they kept talking about socks and shoes and odors. And that didn't interest us." Nose looked at him this time with genuine dismay: "Aren't you glad they're concerned with odors?!"

[1] From the preface of "What is a Healthy Church," by Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, Crossway, 2007.

"Sure, sure. But it's not for us. Then, we attended the Sunday school for all your facial features. Do you remember? We came for several Sundays a couple of months ago?"

"It was great to have you."

"Thank you. But everyone just wanted to talk, and listen, and smell, and taste. It felt like, well, it felt like you never wanted to get to work and get your hands dirty. Anyway, Mrs. Hand and I were thinking about checking out that new church over on the East Side. We hear they do a lot of clapping and hand-raising, which is closer to what we need right now."

"Hmmm," Nose replied. "I see what you mean. We'd hate to see you go. But I guess you have to do what's good for you."

At that moment, Mrs. Hand, who had been caught up in another conversation, turned back to join her husband and Nose. Hand briefly explained what he and Nose had been talking about, after which Nose repeated his sadness at the prospect of losing the Hands. But he again said that he understood, since it sounded like their needs weren't being met.

Mrs. Hand nodded in agreement. She wanted to be polite, but, truth be told, she wasn't sad to be leaving. Her husband had made just enough critical remarks about the church over the years that her heart had begun to reflect his. No, he had never burst into an open tirade against the body. In fact, he usually apologized for "being so negative," as he put it. But the little complaints that he let slip out here and there had had an effect. The small groups were a little cliquish. The music was a little out of date. The programs did seem a little silly. The teaching wasn't entirely to their liking. In the end, it was hard for the two of them to put their fingers on it, but they finally decided that the church wasn't for them.

In addition to all that, Mrs. Hand knew that their daughter Pinkie was not comfortable with the youth group. Everyone was so different from her; she felt out of joint.

Mrs. Hand then said something about how much she appreciated Nose and the leadership. But the conversation had already run on too long for Nose. Besides, her perfume made him want to sneeze. He thanked Mrs. Hand for her encouragement,

repeated that he was sorry to hear of their departure, then turned and walked away. Who needed the Hands? Apparently, they didn't need him.

So what are you looking for in a church? You might not have thought about that question lately. But take a moment now to ask yourself, what does the ideal church look like? "The ideal church is a place with …"

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SEMINAR?

Why do we offer this seminar? *We want to help you look for in a church what Jesus wants you to look for in a church. Plus, meaningful church membership is central to Jesus' discipleship program for His followers, for you!* Local church membership is the soil in which Jesus expects us to be potted and flourish. Not only does Jesus teach the doctrine of church membership, but He also expects you to be one. This seminar is about making the case for local church membership, what it looks like in practice, and how we at FCF are applying Jesus' principles to our life together.

Yet there is a problem. We live in an era of a "low-to-no view" of the church, meaning that it is viewed as an optional add-on to the Christian life. We treat church as consumers and spectators. Further, many today parrot the idea that the bible does not teach membership. Is this true? Our understanding of membership is similar to the Doctrine of the Trinity. The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible but is a term used to fit together and summarize all that Scripture teaches about our One-God-In-Three-Persons. Similarly, the term "Membership," as we use it, is not explicit in Scripture, but the concept is readily evident. A good systematization and summary of all that Scripture teaches about formally belonging to a local church is nicely captured by the term "Covenant-Membership." This seminar aims to prove this to you.

One of the most assumed and neglected doctrines of the last 150 years is "ecclesiology," or the doctrine of the Church.[2] In the absence of careful attention to Scripture and church history, pragmatism[3] and preferences have been the shaping and driving factors of church life and leadership for the last two centuries or so. This has been a blind spot of evangelicalism and has especially been evidenced in non-denominational seeker-sensitive churches.[4] In recent decades, however, there has been a resurgence of Scriptural attentiveness and historical awareness of what a local church is and is to do.

There are true and false churches, and there are healthy and unhealthy churches. True churches have the gospel; false churches do not. But true churches can exist on a

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[2] Case in point, see the previous section demonstrating membership from Scripture. It may not be too far of a stretch to assume that many people would not be able to make a strong biblical defense of membership.

[3] Pragmatism measures success by numbers. The sad cliche many churches use to assess health is the maxim, "bodies, buildings, and budgets." Bigger is better and the ends justify the means. But health in the Bible is a function of faithfulness to God's Word with the Lord determining fruitfulness.

[4] Local churches should be "seek-sensible" (that is, understand and communicate to the unbelieving world at a given time and place). The local church is for Christians because the local church *is* Christians. "Seeker-sensitive" churches, in contrast, saw their primary audience as unbelievers and over time began to water down preaching Christ and any doctrines considered offensive.

spectrum of health.[5] We understand a "healthy" church to be a gracious congregation that is attentive to and wisely applying what Scripture teaches regarding the life and practices of a local church. The degree to which a local church is not attentive to and intentional about these is the degree to which a church opens itself up to unhealthiness and the dangers of error and possibly even a false gospel.

The Bible regulates, defines, and pictures what health and unhealthiness look like in doctrine and practice. We want to be as healthy a church as we can, so that we may leave it to our children or find it faithful when Jesus returns. Thankfully, Jesus has not left us to do what is right in our own eyes or reinvent the wheel, but has given us His Word, found in the Bible, in our hands and lived out in previous eras, to direct our steps.

Put differently, we are convinced the health and gospel witness of a church rises and falls with their collective attentiveness to doctrine, especially the doctrine of the church. Why? The local church is the gospel made visible and God's "Plan A" for the world with no "Plan B." And this begins with attentive Christians who create cultures of healthy churches. ***The degree to which our membership does not understand, embrace, or is attentive to these scriptural principles is the degree to which our witness and health will inevitably be compromised.*** That is a bold statement to be sure, but if we don't know what we are to be and do, how can we glorify God in faithful obedience? We will inevitably fill in the gaps with something else.

Covenant-membership is:

- About joining a particular church family covenanted together in Christ.
- A conscious commitment to a specific church, in a specific place, with specific gospel practices and beliefs, such that one is affirmed, known, and welcomed by that local body.
- It's about taking mutual responsibility for one another.
- It's how we can uniquely help one another strive side-by-side for the sake of the Gospel (Philippians 1:27).
- It's how we love, guard, and protect one another from all that would seek to steal us away from Christ.
- It's how we help one another to know and grow in our discipleship to Christ.

[5] Just consider the relative health and unhealth of churches mentioned in the New Testament. Compare Philippians with Corinthians or take a glance at Jesus' words to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3.

Just as there isn't a perfect family, there is no such thing as a perfect church this side of Heaven. By God's grace, FCF is an imperfect church pursuing increasing health through a perfect Savior.[6]

There is a sense in which this seminar is like a pre-marital class. We aim to help you know what it means to be a part of this church family as we help one another know and follow Jesus.

We rejoice that there are other good and godly gospel-preaching churches in town with whom we agree on the gospel. At the same time, there are doctrinal, ministry philosophy, and applicational differences that make each church unique and necessary. We may agree on the gospel but differ on other important doctrines, such as what it means to "be" a church and how we "do" church.

We want to help you think well and wisely about becoming a part of our church family by exposing what we believe, emphasize, and practice, especially on "church matters." We offer this seminar for those ends.

Our intent is not to walk through every word of this resource together. *Rather, the intent is for you to study and reflect on this on your own and for it to serve as a conversational resource during the seminar.* Throughout this seminar, the Elders will highlight various parts of this resource tailored for each class session. We believe the more we help you on the front-end of deciding to join FCF, the better your welcoming into the church will be, or possibly, for you to be confident in pursuing another gospel-preaching church. As far as possible, we don't want you to have any unwelcome surprises about FCF after becoming a member.

Lastly, we will assume everyone in this seminar is hearing these things for the first time. So please ask questions, clarify terms, etc. We recognize that we all come from different traditions and backgrounds, are all in the middle of our sanctification, and have varying degrees of familiarity with Scripture. So we want this to be a comfortable place to ask questions (because if you have a question, you can be sure others in the room do too!). We hope this seminar on covenant-membership at FCF accomplishes several edifying things for you, including helping you know, follow, and worship our Triune God all the more, and furnishing you with the details you need to make a prayerfully informed decision on becoming a covenanted family member of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship.

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[6] We use the term "health" frequently. We believe churches can exist on a spectrum of "health," where "health" is the attentive, faithful, and wise application of Scripture to their life together as a church. "Unhealth" might take a number of forms. It might look like a church allowing sin in its ranks and/or misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture to their life together. The church in Corinth is an example of this. They were still a church, but greatly diminished the light of the gospel in and through them because of sin and theological confusion. Another example would be the early churches planted in Acts. The Apostles (and their delegates) circled back, in part, to appoint elders. The churches were still churches, but they were not as healthy as they could be because they were lacking Biblical leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Local church health matters because the glory of God matters.

Why do we say, "Covenant-Membership?"

Defining Terms - "Covenant"

In the Bible, a Covenant is a formal oath-bound commitment that typically creates a familial relationship, especially in the Divine Covenants (marriage is a good example of a covenant in Scripture, Malachi 2:14).[7] To be a child of God, saved by Jesus, and filled with the Spirit is to be a member of the New Covenant.[8] The New Covenant is not only how we relate to God (vertically) but also the context in which we relate to one another in the church (horizontally). To be in covenant with Christ is to be in covenant with one another. Therefore, the term covenant not only alludes to this Biblical reality in Christ (New Covenant) but also describes the oath-bound relationship we make with one another at FCF (e.g., 1 Samuel 23:18; Malachi 2:14).

Defining terms - "Membership"

Membership is about belonging. *It conveys the idea that we belong to one another in Christ as fellow "body parts" with Christ as our Head*. The term membership is another way of describing our union with Christ and the resulting union with one another. The term is used in 1 Corinthians 12 to describe how all believers are "members" ("body parts") of one another with Jesus as our Head (see also Romans 12:4–5; Ephesians 4:25; 5:30). The word also conveys our membership (participants) as citizens in the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 2:19). The notion of membership is also implicit in the metaphors used to describe the church such as "family" and "temple." This word is not meant to be confused with a transaction of goods and services, like having a membership at a gym, resort, or Sam's Club. In the Bible, membership is closely related to the idea of fellowship, where we practice the "one anothers" of Scripture and help one another know and follow Jesus.

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[7] The Biblical story unfolds and expands across six Divine covenants: Adamic (Genesis 1–3; Hosea 6:7), Noahic (Genesis 9), Abrahamic (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22), Mosaic (Exodus 19–20), Davidic (2 Samuel 7), and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; Luke 22). The divine covenants provide the literary backbone of redemptive history and reveal how God progresses His revelation in Scripture. All the divine covenants find their end, goal, and fulfillment in Jesus Christ's New Covenant.

[8] This is what is repeatedly signified every time we partake in the Lord's Supper: "This cup that is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A COVENANT-MEMBER OF FCF?

1. *Attend all sessions of the Covenant-Member Seminar*. Note - To pursue membership at FCF does not require 100% agreement with everything we are about, but it does mean that where you may disagree, you will not cause division or conflict but instead maintain the peace and purity of this church.

2. *Fill out and submit the Covenant-Membership Application to the FCF secretary*. The application is meant to be an act of worship surveying God's grace in your life; to help the elders "meet" you; gain clarity on your understanding of the gospel, and hear of your walk with Christ. The application is not a theological test or a "pass/fail" exam. We simply want to draw out your heart and get to know you (think back to the "pre-marital counseling" analogy at the beginning).

3. *An elder will review your application, reach out, and set up an in-person interview*. The purpose of the interview is to discuss your application, get to know you better, and hear and affirm your testimony of the gospel and conversion.

4. *The elder then reports on the interview to the elder council, at which point the elders prayerfully discuss and decide on recommending the applicant to the church for a vote*. An application can also be paused pending follow-up (such as getting baptized, more confidence in one's gospel profession, etc), or denied. Denial typically occurs for one of four reasons: (1) evidence that a person is not a Christian, (2) evidence of significant/dis-unifying disagreement with FCF's faith and practice, (3) it comes to light the person may immediately move into the steps of church discipline upon admittance, or (4) one intends to move away from Flagstaff in the near future.[9] *Upon an affirmative vote by the church, one officially becomes a member, and an elder will reach out to notify you.*

[9] On this last point, we have in mind people who intend to move away. Admittedly, "near future" is a bit subjective to be discerned by an elder. The idea behind this is in keeping with the marriage metaphor, that is, why marry the church if one intends to leave soon? We do not think college students or seasonal residents fit this category. That said, there are special cases in which membership is still recommended, even if a move is impending.

5. When recommended to the congregation, we typically: [1] send an email a few weeks in advance with the written testimony taken from the application. This time period allows for congregational feedback to the elders, prayer, and perhaps an invitation to coffee by a thoughtful member; [2] at a following member meeting, we put up a slide with a photo of you and some important & fun facts, and an elder reminds the congregation of the email sent and may add details from the interview time. It is important to note that the elders use discretion and privacy when sharing information with the church. It is very common for important and private issues to come up in elder interviews, and we hold this information as a trust with no intention to share it with the church. If you have a concern, please bring this up with an elder; [3] an elder leads the church in a vote, [4] and the person is notified of the vote.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

What Does the Word "Gospel" Mean?

The word "gospel" is like a hyperlink text that unfolds the entire biblical storyline. *"Gospel," which means "good news," is the central message of the Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, focused on the promise, incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension/exaltation/session, and impending return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate.*[10]

The gospel is the point of all history. It is the message of what the Triune God has done to reconcile and adopt a people to Himself by rescuing them from eternal Hell, removing their sin, and making them righteous in God's sight through Christ.[11]

The good news is that God has done all that is necessary to not only remove our sin and reconcile us to Himself but to then happily adopt us as His children and promise us eternal glory with Him forever.[12]

What Is the Heart of the Gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1–8: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.3 For I delivered to you as of* ***first importance*** *what I also received:* ***that Christ died for our sins*** *in accordance with the Scriptures, 4* ***that he was buried****,* ***that he was raised on the third day*** *in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and* ***that he appeared*** *to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*

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[10] "Session" is an old way of referring to what Jesus is doing "now," namely, seated and reigning at the right hand of God.

[11] Luke 24:25–27; 44–47.

[12] Romans 5:1; Ephesians 1–3; Revelation 21–22.

1 Cor 15:1–8 are about the matters of "first importance" to the gospel. This means there are other details to the gospel, but what is mentioned here is the nonnegotiable center of the gospel. Lose these, and you lose the gospel. The matters of "first importance" are:

(1) the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins according to the Scriptures;
(2) His subsequent burial;
(3) Jesus' resurrection from the grave according to the Scriptures;
(4) His subsequent appearances to various people and groups.

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There is more to the gospel than this, but it is never less than these matters of first importance. A "gospel" that does not include these elements of first importance is a false gospel.

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The cross is where the great exchange happened, our sin for Jesus' righteousness.[13] Our sin, past, present, and future, was placed on Christ. Jesus incurred our guilt, condemnation, and punishment in our place. Jesus absorbed the wrath of God so we could receive the Trinity's eternal love. It is by faith alone, not works, that we receive Jesus' righteousness.

But *Who Is The Real Jesus?* As the years move on, more and more false Jesuses have come on the scene. Some get the Person of Jesus wrong. Others get the work of Jesus wrong. *The true identity of Jesus matters because a false Jesus creates a false gospel, and false Jesuses and false gospels cannot save.* If a person gets the Person and Work of Jesus wrong, then they cannot be saved. *The Person and Work of Jesus is always the true litmus test and measuring line of any ideology*. First Corinthians 15 above carries with it a BIble's worth of assumptions about who Jesus is. It includes:

(1) *Jesus is the eternal second Person of the Trinity.* There is One and only One God who eternally exists as three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the Second Person of the Trinity who became flesh.

[13] 2 Corinthians 5:21.

(2) *Jesus is God the Son incarnate*. That is, "made flesh." That is why He is Immanuel, "God with us."

(3) *Jesus is truly God and truly man*. He is not 50% God and 50% man. Nor is He man on the outside but God on the inside. His deity does not overrule or swallow up His humanity. Rather, Jesus is One Person with two natures, a truly divine nature and a truly human nature. As to His humanity, Jesus is just like us yet without sin (technically speaking, He was just like Adam in the Garden of Eden before the Fall). That is why He alone is able and worthy to be our substitutionary sacrifice. At the same time, Jesus is true God, meaning the incarnation did not change, alter, or diminish His deity, and as the infinite God, He is able to forgive our infinite crimes.

(4) *Jesus is the Messiah (Hebrew) or the Christ (Greek)*; the Savior sent by God the Father. "Christ" is a job description or title that functions like a hyperlink tracing across the Old Testament of a promised savior to redeem, rescue, and reconcile mankind to God. The centerpiece of His cross-work was to legally bear our guilt for our breaking of God's beautiful Law. Theologically, this is called "Penal (legal) Substitutionary Atonement" and the core idea behind the Bible word, "propitiation."[14] Jesus saves us from God's eternal wrath in the eternal Lake of Fire.[15]

What Other Core Details of the Gospel Are Necessary To Believe For Salvation?

A person is saved/justified by:

(1) *Grace alone* (not personal worth, will, or merit. It's all of God);[16]
(2) *Through faith alone* (not works or anything other than mere belief);[17]
(3) *In Christ alone* (and none else. There is no other mediator between God and man);[18]
(4) *According to Scripture alone* (not human tradition or aberrant interpretation);[19]

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[14] Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10

[15] Revelation 20:14–15

[16] John 1:13; Romans 1–3; James 1:18

[17] Ephesians 2:8–10

[18] Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:24

[19] Matthew 15:2ff; Colossians 2:8ff; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6.

(5) to God's glory alone (not praise or thanksgiving is due to any other than God).[20]

What Happens When A Person Repents and Believes the Gospel?

The command of Scripture is to repent and believe the gospel.[21] Repentance involves confessing sin, renouncing former beliefs and practices, turning to God, and putting on the ways of Christ. *Repentance is an inner change of heart and mind that leads to an outer change of life and behavior empowered by the Holy Spirit*.

When one receives Christ's righteousness, Scripture speaks of the believer as being "justified" by Christ.[22] "Justification" involves the legal proclamation by God that we are "not guilty" in Christ as well as the gifting ("imputation") of all of Christ's sinless perfection to us. *This means God now views me as completely righteous or "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. Additionally, He views me "just-as-if-I'd" lived Christ's perfect life*. It has been rightly said that God treated Jesus on the cross as if He had lived your life so that, by grace through faith, He could treat you as if you had lived Jesus' life.

Jesus' resurrection from the grave vindicated and validated all He said and did. If Jesus was not resurrected, then we are still in our sin and have believed falsely, and are to be most pitied among all people (1 Cor 15:12–58).

It bears repeating, a "gospel" that does not include these elements of "*first importance"* (i.e., death and resurrection) is a false gospel and false gospels cannot save. They only serve to further condemn.

At FCF, we aim to keep the main thing the main thing by keeping the matters of first importance to the gospel central and primary to our life together. We want to love God with our whole being, and we want to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Who Is the Gospel for?

Shockingly, 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 begins with, "Now I would remind you, *brothers,* of the gospel I preached to you…"

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[20] Isaiah 48:11

[21] Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 26:20.

[22] Romans 4:22–5:1.

The assumption and tendency for many Christians is to think that the gospel is only about salvation, or perhaps merely the facts you need to believe to get saved. This then implies that to become mature as a believer, one needs to move on to (presumed) deeper theological issues. This viewpoint assumes the gospel is only for unbelievers.

However, 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 proves otherwise. This passage reveals that the gospel is meant to make and shape disciples of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is re-preaching the gospel to this church full of various and sordid sins, doctrinal confusion, and general unhealth, not because they were unsaved, but because the gospel is the only antidote and cure for ongoing sin and the only means for the church's increased holiness.

To state this theologically, your one-time-in-the-past justification has present realities that inform and drive your ongoing sanctification. For the church in Corinth, their salvation wasn't at stake (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4–9); their sanctification was. The same gospel Paul preached for their justification was the same gospel he reminded them of to fuel their sanctification (i.e., putting off their worldly ways and putting on the ways of Jesus, Ephesians 4:17–24).

From the opposite vantage point, the sinful and cancerous problems the church at Corinth faced were because they had forgotten the gospel and failed to regularly rehearse, remind, and apply it to one another. A church that assumes, misapplies, or forgets the present and ongoing realities and resources the gospel provides will inevitably slip into all manner of sin, such as legalism, lawlessness, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, gracelessness, and more.

It has been said, "Mature Christians don't move on from the gospel; they move deeper into it." At FCF, our central aim is to apply and move deeper into the gospel for all of life. This is, in part, why Christ and His gospel of grace is woven into all we say and do.

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The gospel is meant to make and shape disciples of Jesus Christ. The same gospel we preach for salvation to unbelievers is the same gospel we preach for sanctification to believers.

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It's all About Jesus!

The gospel (and therefore the Bible) is not primarily about us and what we should do; it is primarily about the Triune God and what He has done for us. At FCF, *we are all about Jesus,* which means we are all about His gospel![23] *Not only does the gospel message describe the person, promises, power, and provisions of God in Christ, but Jesus Himself is the gospel*. The gospel, then, is not merely the greatest news in the world and the only hope for humanity; the gospel is actually the greatest person in the world, Jesus Christ! Preaching, theological study, and biblical conversations are not ends in themselves; rather, their end is knowing and following Jesus.

What This Means at FCF

We are pursuing the centrality of Jesus and His gospel in all of life. We want the Person and Work of Jesus, from all of Scripture, to be the motivation, means, and goal for all that we do. It has been noted that *one generation preaches the gospel, the next generation assumes the gospel, and the following generation loses the gospel.* Our sacred task is to keep the gospel central and clear in all we say and do for every generation.

Warm-hearted brotherhood. A gospel-centered life produces an unshakable joy in the Lord and affection for fellow saints. The "one anothers"[24] of Scripture provide an excellent snapshot of church life.

A culture of grace. A culture of grace is a culture shaped and informed by the gospel of grace. We give to each other what we have been given in Christ, namely, *grace*! Scripture says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Therefore, a culture of grace is characterized by assuming the best rather than the worst,[25] letting love cover a multitude

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[23] Colossians 1:12–23

[24] There are a number of admonitions in Scripture that describe how Christians are to relate to one another as the church (eg. "love one another;" "forgive one another;" etc). A list of these "one anothers" is provided in the appendices.

[25] 1 Corinthians 13

of sins, [26] confession,[27] repentance,[28] forgiveness,[29] humility,[30] and joy.[31] The opposite of a culture of grace is a toxic culture characterized by judgmentalism,[32] legalism,[33] hypocrisy,[34] and bitterness.[35] A toxic culture reveals a people who no longer see themselves in daily need of the gospel.

A culture of mission. Jesus' mission for the church is to make disciples of all nations, beginning with the geographical priority of one's hometown.[36] While FCF has a strong foreign missions program, we aim to strengthen our local witness by asking, in part, "Who would miss us if we suddenly ceased to exist?"

Please join us in praying that the Spirit would cause FCF to be characterized by the centrality of Jesus in all we say and do, a warm-hearted brotherhood, a culture of grace, and faithful/fruitful local missions.

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[26] 1 Peter 4:8

[27] James 5:16.

[28] 2 Corinthians 7:9–10.

[29] Ephesians 4:32.

[30] 1 Peter 5:5.

[31] Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22.

[32] Romans 14:1–4; Galatians 5:15.

[33] Galatians 3:3.

[34] Galatians 2:13.

[35] Hebrews 12:15.

[36] In Acts 1, Jesus presents the expanding geographical circles of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The literary flow of Acts bears this out. We believe this serves as a prototype for every local church in their local "Jerusalem." Put differently, every local church is the center of the world from which the gospel is to radiate to the ends of the earth. We believe that the aim of missions is nothing less than planting and strengthening healthy local churches who, by God's grace, will do the same. Each local church is first and foremost responsible for its "Jerusalem," since if a local church does not tend to its own fields, it will cease to exist and be unable to support any other churches. This is evidenced especially in large cities where beautiful church buildings, once full of vibrant Christians, now serve as Buddhist Temples, theaters, apartments, etc.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

A Christian is a person who has been "born again" as a "new creation,"[37] believing the gospel of Jesus Christ,[38] having repented of sin,[39] and, by the Spirit,[40] united to the church,[41] bearing fruit[42] in keeping with repentance[43] to the glory of God.[44]

The Bible, however, knows of no such thing as a healthy Christian who is not vibrantly committed to, in fellowship with, and under the authority of, a local church,[45] collectively on mission to make, mature, and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ.[46] ***A Christian is designed by Jesus for the local church and vice versa.***[47] In this way, a Christian should not be defined or understood apart from the local church.

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[37] John 3 indicates regeneration precedes faith and is exclusively the work of God by His Spirit. See the full context of John 3:1–21. See also 2 Corinthians 5:11–21.

[38] Romans 10:9–10; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

[39] Matthew 4:17; Acts 17:30

[40] John 5:21; 6:63; Romans 8:11.

[41] Ephesians 2:11–22.

[42] Luke 6:43–44; John 15:2–8; Romans 6:21–22; Galatians 5:16–26; Philippians 4:5; James 4:10.

[43] Matthew 3:8.

[44] Matthew 3:8; 7:15–27.

[45]Hebrews 13:7, 17. If the local church were unimportant or unnecessary, then we would expect to see that reality reflected, for example, in the Book of Acts. Instead, the "birth" of new Christians was inseparable from the "birth" of new local churches in which these believers would live as a new family. The entire assumption of the New Testament is covenanted life together in a local church.

[46] Matthew 28:16–20; Ephesians 4:1–24.

[47] 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.

WHAT IS A CHURCH?

The gospel comes with a "family picture," so to speak. Above, we looked at the many personal blessings and benefits the gospel gives, but that is not all. The gospel unites us "vertically" to God, and at the same time, that gospel unites us "horizontally" with Christ's Body and Bride, the local church.[48]

Consider **1 Corinthians 12:12–27**:

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

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

[19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, *[25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.[27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.* (ESV)

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[48] It is common to distinguish between the Universal Church and the Local Church. The Universal Church is all true believers of all times and all places who have or ever will exist. The only time the Universal church will be visible and together present is when Christ returns to establish the New Heavens and New Earth. Until then, the Local Church is the only visible manifestation of the people of Christ. Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 12:12–30, when the church is spoken of as a complete and complementary body with Christ as Head, this is not a reference to the Universal Church (which of course is true!), but a reference to each and every true local church.

A profound reality of this passage is that what is said is said about the local church in Corinth, not the invisible, universal church of all Christians of all times and places. In some mysterious way, each local church is a "complete" Body of Christ." And for our purposes, according to this text and others like it, *there is no such thing as a Christian who is not a functioning "body part" of a local church*.

The Local Church in a Tweet

If we were to "tweet" a definition, it would be, ***"an assembly of Christians covenanted and administering the keys of the kingdom together."***[49]

The Local Church: A Fuller Definition

For a fuller definition, "A local church is an assembly[50] of believers in the gospel,[51] covenanted together[52] in faith and fellowship,[53] holding the keys of the kingdom,[54] marked by the right preaching of the Word,[55] the right administration of the

[49] The "Keys of the Kingdom" is a vital yet neglected doctrine in our day and age. It will be discussed in greater detail later.

[50] The term, "church" or "*ekklesia*" means assembly or gathering.

[51] Jeremiah 31:31–34 indicates everyone in the New Covenant is a believer in Christ in contrast to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. This is a central facet or what makes the New Covenant "new." People who do not have faith in and profess the gospel of Jesus Christ are not part of the New Covenant community. See also discussion on 1 Corinthians 15 above.

[52] Not only "covenanted" in the New Covenant together but also around shared beliefs and practices that promote unity, encouraging the local church to "strive side by side for the sake of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

[53] "Faith" captures the idea discussed previously of "gospel matters" and "church matters." That is to say, a shared understanding and application of what the Bible teaches regarding the gospel and local church life. "Fellowship," for example, captures all that attends to a Sunday Service as well as the "one another's" of Scripture. See the appendix list of "One Anothers" as an example of "fellowship."

[54] Matthew 16:15–19; 18:15–20.

[55] Acts 20:18–27; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:1–5; 2 Timothy 3:16–4:5.

ordinances,[56] and the right exercise of excommunication,[57] on mission to help one another make, mature, and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ,[58] all to the glory of the Triune God."[59]

Church membership is only for those who have repented and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ – those who are genuine members of the Body and Bride of Christ, part of the Temple of God, and citizens in God's Kingdom. Part of what makes the New Covenant "new" is that all the covenant members will have been born again (Jeremiah 31:31–34; John 3:1–21).

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[56] i.e., Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ordinances are external and objective signs of belonging to and participating in the New Covenant. This is akin to the rainbow as the sign of the Noahic Covenant, circumcision as the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, and the Sabbath as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. While there is debate about whether baptism is included as a sign of the New Covenant in Christ, certainly Jesus teaches that the supper is ("this cup that is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood," Luke 22:19–20). In this way, baptism and communion are not matters of conscience or subjective experiences to partake in as one feels but objective commands to be obeyed and enjoyed. No doubt they are wonderfully personal and experiential, but they are intended as objective signs of ongoing participation in the New Covenant life of the local church.

[57] Matthew 18:15–35; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 1 Timothy 5:19–22.

[58] Matthew 28:18–20. See also the similar but unique charge for pastor-elders to disciple up future pastor-elders in 2 Timothy 2:2.

[59] 1 Corinthians 10:31.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM – THE BASIS OF MEMBERSHIP

Please scan this QR code for a supplemental teaching on the "Keys of the Kingdom."

The "Tweet" above defined the church as ***"an assembly of Christians covenanted and administering the keys of the kingdom together."*** What are the "Keys of the Kingdom?" Further, how are they the basis of a group of Christians covenanted together as fellow church members?

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To begin with the conclusion, the "Keys of the Kingdom" symbolize the authority and responsibility Jesus assigns to each local church:

1. **To know, guard, and preach the gospel together;**
2. **To evaluate professions of faith, with true ones leading to baptism & membership;**
3. **To regularly welcome and watch over one another, especially in Communion;**
4. **To confront and finally remove a member who is unrepentant through excommunication;**
5. **To determine who is and is not a pastor-elder or deacon**

Among other responsibilities, a central role of pastor-elders is to equip, guide, guard, and make recommendations to the membership on how to use the "Keys." The pastor-elders are not permitted by Christ to exercise the "Keys" on behalf of the church.

To be a member of a church, then, is to join in holding and exercising the "Keys of the Kingdom" together. It is to take ownership and responsibility, under the leadership of the pastor-elders, for the life and flourishing of the church.

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The "Keys of the Kingdom" is perhaps one of the most neglected doctrines in our era. Very few churches teach it. Yet the "Keys" are essential to understanding the church and what Jesus assigns the church to do. The "Keys" go to the heart of not just understanding what a church is but what Jesus expects of each individual member.[60] In other words, Jesus has expectations and a job description for you personally and specifically as a fellow church member. *A church is defined by what the keys symbolize and who holds them together.* That's how important this doctrine is! And be forewarned! Once you see the "keys" from Scripture, you will never be able to "unsee" them again. So what are the "keys?"

Institutional Symbols:

To begin, the Bible uses word pictures that summarize the authority and job description Jesus assigns to different institutions God created for the world to function as He intends:[61]

To the Home, God assigns the gracious *"rod of discipline."*[62] Parents are authorized, under God, to create and enforce rules in the home in keeping with Scripture. But note, all parents hold the "rod" but only for their children, not all children.

To the State, God assigns the "*sword*."[63] Governmental leaders are authorized, under God, to write laws, enforce justice, and protect citizens. Yet, like the home, the government only holds the sword for its region and citizens, not the whole world or all people.

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[60] It is beyond the scope of this survey to go into detail, but the "Keys of the Kingdom" are essential to a right understanding of a related doctrine, namely, the "Priesthood of believers" [Romans 15:16; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6]. Administering the "Keys of the Kingdom" is the way Christians function as a "kingdom of priests."

[61] An "institution" is a system of rules and norms that regulate how people relate to and live with one another. A biblical institution is designed and defined by God for the right ordering of His world (but now frustrated by sin). A biblical institution is a God-given authority structure where God assigns to certain individuals responsibility and authority, according to God's Word, to make rules, regulations, decisions, etc, for the flourishing of that institution. While all people are equally image bearers of God, institutions create an "authority-submission" structure. Some are authorized to lead, others are authorized to submit and obey, and all are accountable to Christ for both leadership and submission.

[62] Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15; Hebrews 12:3–14.

[63] Romans 13:1–7

To the local church, God assigns *"the keys of the kingdom*."[64] "Keys" open and shut, lock or unlock. Jesus authorizes local churches with the responsibility to affirm or deny gospel professions leading to baptism. Jesus also authorizes local churches to remove gospel affirmation through church discipline/excommunication by removing someone from membership and the Lord's Table. Like the "rod" and "sword," the "keys" are held by local churches for that local church, not all churches everywhere.

Background to the Keys:[65]

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for misusing the "keys of the kingdom."

Matthew 23:13 [13] "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces*. For *you neither enter* yourselves *nor allow those who would enter* to go in. (ESV)

Or similarly, **Luke 11:52** [52] Woe to you lawyers! For you *have taken away the key of knowledge*. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."

The religious leaders had a responsibility to teach and lead the people to the "kingdom of heaven," but instead prevented people from coming to the Lord! They used the "key" to not only lock themselves out, but the people, too!

So God gave the "keys" to Jesus (see Isaiah 22:22), who preached **Mark 1:14–15** [14] … Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Here, Jesus rightly uses the "key of (gospel) knowledge" to open the "kingdom of heaven" for others, as the Pharisees were supposed to do.

The "Keys" and the Local Church:

Matt 16:15–19*, "[15] [Jesus] said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' [16] Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' [17] And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will*

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[64] Matthew 16:13–19; 18:15–20

[65] The symbol of the keys begins in Isaiah 22:22 in association with the promised virgin born Christ child, Son of David, who is Himself Israel [Isaiah 49] but space prevents a background study.

build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"[66]

Notice that Jesus vetted Peter's gospel confession. Jesus was checking and verifying that Peter had the correct Jesus (rather than a false Jesus) and the correct work of Jesus (rather than a false work).

The correct Jesus is the "who" of the gospel. Jesus is the "Son of the Living God" (i.e., Second Person of the Trinity made flesh), not the Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, New Age, or Muslim false Jesus.

The correct work of Jesus is the "what" of the gospel. Jesus is "the Christ," which is like a hyperlink text that traces the sinless life, substitutionary death, resurrection, and more of Jesus, as well as being saved and justified by faith, not works.

Jesus affirms the confessor (Peter) and the confession (what Peter believed).

Then Jesus placed the "keys of the kingdom" into Peter's hands as the first gospel confessor (and no longer the Pharisees!). The "rock" is not Peter himself, but the gospel profession which Peter made.

To Review:

V16 - Jesus' gathering/assembly/church is built on a shared confession, the "who and what" of the gospel

V17 - Jesus' gathering/assembly/church believes and is built on the revealed Word of God

V18 - Jesus' gathering/assembly/church is His life's work; will prevail over all evil, even death; and will go on forever

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[66] A parallel passage to "binding and loosing" is John 20:23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." To harmonize, "binding = withholding forgiveness" and "loosing = granting forgiveness." To be sure, only God in Christ can truly forgive sins. That said, Jesus authorizes and expects churches to hear gospel professions, determine whether it is true or false, and then let that person know whether or not they have forgiveness from God. In other words, we can say, "Yes, that is a true gospel confession, and we want you to know that Jesus promises to forgive your sins. You are forgiven!"

V19 - Jesus places the "keys" He used on Peter into Peter's hands, authorizes and commissions Peter to now use those "keys" on others by "binding or loosing" based on their profession. "Binding" is like shutting or locking the kingdom in light of false gospel professions. It's like saying, "You are still in your sins and have not received forgiveness from Jesus." "Loosing" is like opening or unlocking the kingdom and saying, "You have the right gospel! Jesus forgives you!" welcoming people into the church based on true gospel confession.

It is true that in context, Jesus is only talking to Peter. But as we will see, in Matthew chapters 18 and 28, Jesus expects and authorizes the whole local church to administer the "keys."

Jesus expects YOU to be in a place where YOU can have Matthew 16 done to YOU and then for YOU, with the church you just joined, to do Matthew 16 to others!

Matt 18:15-20, *"[15] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector. [18] Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [19] Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

If Matthew 16 is about affirming gospel confession, acknowledging that a person has been "loosed" from sin by Jesus, and welcoming into church membership, then Matthew 18 is the opposite.

Matthew 18 is about when a person's gospel confession and/or gospel witness is willfully denied in word and/or deed, and, after being confronted on multiple occasions, refuses to repent.

Matthew 18 is one of a number of passages in Scripture about how to confront a brother in sin and what to do if that brother stubbornly refuses to put off their sin and put on Christ.

In the case of Matthew 18, four escalating steps are given by Jesus, with steps 3 and 4 involving the whole church. These steps may occur multiple times over multiple weeks, even months, and are largely a matter of wisdom when it comes to pacing and procedure.

V15 Step 1 - One-on-one loving confrontation

V16 Step 2 - One or two others brought along to witness the next stage of confrontation(s)

V17 Step 3 - The whole church is brought into the process

V17 Step 4 - The whole church decides to remove their Matthew 16 affirmation, declaring this person is no longer "loosed" from sin but rather "bound" in sin. It is critical to note that the person was designated "brother" in v15, but with this final step is no longer designated "brother" but "gentile and tax collector."[67] That is, he is now "excommunicated," that is, removed from Communion and membership.

V18 - Jesus makes clear that church discipline/excommunication is an exercise of the "keys of the kingdom" by repeating His "binding and loosing" language from Matthew 16:19. In the same way each member of a church shares responsibility for vetting and affirming true from false professions of faith, so too Jesus expects the members to also exercise a loving, gracious watch over one another and if need be, pursue a sinning, erring brother as an errand of gospel grace to bring them back to Jesus.

V19–20 - Jesus is not teaching that any grouping of two or three Christians is an independent church, regardless of church size. In other words, Jesus is not turning a local church into the Wild West where small roving bands can independently excommunicate one another! Rather, Jesus is showing that the authority of the keys requires at a minimum two to three Christians who have previously done Matthew 16 for one another.[68] Now that they hold the "keys" together, Jesus also authorizes them to do Matthew 18. Undoubtedly, as a group of two to three Christians does Matthew 16 for others, that specific group holding the keys together expands. It is not a specific group

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[67] A "gentile" was a person outside the covenant community. A "tax collector" was a betrayer of, and from within, the covenant community. J

[68] At this point, we should not confuse Jesus' institution of the home with His institution of the church. In other words, just because mom, dad, and a child are believers does not make them a church. It makes them a Christian household. The assumption of the text is that the "two or three" are of different households, even different extended families.

within the church that holds the "keys," rather it is the whole, local church that holds the "keys." This is why Jesus holds the whole local church responsible to do Matthew 18.

To emphasize, Jesus expects YOU to be in a place where YOU can have Matthew 18 done to YOU for your own gospel good and for YOU, with the church, to do Matthew 18, if need be, to others!

A quick word about pastor-elders. In both Matthew chapters 16 and 18, Jesus is not saying all He has to say about church leadership and processes. We can discern from later texts that a central role of pastor-elders is to teach, equip, and guard the church in their right use of the "keys." Pastor-elders, as fellow members, do not administer the "keys" on behalf of the church but make recommendations to the church on how to proceed on a matter and then lead the church in voting on that matter. To be sure, pastor-elders do the work of vetting, affirming, or denying gospel confessions on behalf of the church to then present to the church for the church to decide. When it comes to a disciplinary process, Pastor-elders are typically brought in fairly early, usually around step 2, and then guide the process. But again, when it comes to the end of the matter, the pastor-elders make a recommendation on the disciplinary process to the church, and then the church decides by vote. These are a few ways the pastor-elders guide and guard the church in administering the "keys of the kingdom."

Matthew 28:18–20 [18] 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." (ESV)

In the context of the Gospel of Matthew, this Great Commission passage is both a capstone and a summary of the book. This famous passage has one command, "make disciples," and three actions that explain how we "make disciples," namely, "go… baptize…teach." That is how you make a disciple. But as with many other familiar passages, there is more than meets the eye. Let's take a look.

V18 - Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and earth. Anyone, therefore, who has any authority has borrowed it from Jesus and is answerable to Jesus. They use their authority on Jesus' behalf.

V19a,b - "Go" indicates that every Christian is commissioned as a witness of Christ to make disciples, whether in the home, across the street, or across the world to all nations. Another way to say this is, "'Go' do Matthew 16." Ask and tell people who Jesus is. This is the essence of evangelism. But what is to happen when a person makes a true gospel confession, and they are "loosed/forgiven" of their sins in keeping with Matthew 16? They are to go public with their faith in Jesus.

V19c - "Baptize them." This is how a person goes public and how the whole church administers the "keys" of Matthew 16. The church baptizes, often with public testimony for the whole church to affirm, as a gospel reenactment ceremony that, among other things, displays the Matthew 16 gospel that this person has just confessed. Further, baptism is a public re-naming ceremony where this person receives a new name and identity in "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The baptism command of Matthew 28 cannot be understood apart from the Gospel Confession and keys of the kingdom of Matthew 16. One way to think of this, for illustration purposes, is that the "key" of Matthew 16 unlocks the door to the baptismal of Matthew 28.

V20 - "Teach them." This is not a call to private discipleship apart from the church but to the teaching ministry of the local church, especially preaching.[69] The newly baptized person is enfolded into the local flock, holds the "keys" with them, and begins a learning life with the church under Christ.

Don't miss the order given here in the Great Commission, which summarizes the "Keys" in action:

First, "Go" administer the "keys of the kingdom" through evangelism in keeping with Matthew 16. This includes evaluating professions of faith as true or false.

Second, "baptize," before the church, those whose sins are "loosed/forgiven" as disciples of Christ.

Third, bring them into the Word-centered life of the church, "teaching" them the whole bible.

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[69] Again, Jesus is not saying all He has to say about local church life. We look to His words elsewhere in the New Testament where we gain a robust understanding of the gift of pastor-elder-teachers; preaching and the ministry of the Word, etc.

Fourth, and here we add Matthew 26:26–29, administering the Lord's Supper as an ongoing sign of faithfulness to Jesus in His New Covenant. Notice another connection with the "keys," namely, the Communion of Matthew 26:26–29 is what an unrepentant member is "ex-communed" from in Matthew 18 [review discussion above].

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A helpful way to think about what the "keys" summarize and symbolize is to picture four keys on the ring:[70]

Key 1 - The who & what of the Gospel message (Matthew 16)
Key 2 - The welcome door to the baptismal (Matthew 28)
Key 3 - The church dinner table of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26)
Key 4 - Excommunication from Communion & denial of baptismal testimony (Matthew 18)

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And you, as a fellow member, are responsible for administering these keys with the whole church under the guidance of the pastor-elders.

In short, when Jesus gives the "Keys of the Kingdom" to the entire local church, He is indicating that the gospel message and gospel membership of the church belong to the whole church, not just the pastor-elders.

The church agrees on the "who and what of the gospel" (i.e., "the message") and who is baptized, welcomed into the church, to the Lord's Table, and, if need be, who is removed from the church (i.e., "the membership").

If the membership belongs to the church, it follows that the gospel ministers (i.e., elders and deacons) also belong to the church.[71]

"Keys" Conclusion:

Jesus' teaching on the "Keys of the Kingdom" is the explicit basis for formal, official belonging to a local church. In other words, Jesus teaches "church membership."

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[70] "Keys" is in the plural. The suggestion of four keys here is simply for illustration.

[71] c.f. Acts 6:2–3; 15:22–25; Galatians 1:6–9;

Whether an underground church hiding in Iran or a megachurch in Los Angeles, Jesus does not exempt them from exercising the "Keys" together nor permit one set of Christians to exercise the "Keys" on behalf of the others. In fact, Jesus expects every Christian to be in a place where they can obey Jesus in exercising the "Keys" with others! Circumstances do not determine obedience; the Word of Christ does. To be sure, the process of formally bringing a person into the church will look different between the two churches above, but Jesus requires them both to do it.

According to the "Keys," there is no such thing as a Christian not vitally connected and belonging to a local church.[72]

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The "Keys of the Kingdom" are about:

(1) Guarding and preaching the gospel together (Matt 16; 28; Gal 1);
(2) Evaluating professions and baptizing together (Matt 16; 28);
(3) Welcoming to the Lord's Table together (Matt 26; 1 Cor 10–11);
(4) Confronting &, as needed, removing from the church together (Matt 18).

The Doctrine of the "Keys" reveals:

1. ***The message of the gospel belongs to the membership (Matt 16; 18; Gal 1).***
2. ***The membership belongs to the membership (Matt 16; 18; 26; 28).***
3. ***The ministers of the gospel belong to the membership (Gal 1).***
4. ***The gospel mutual fund (budget) belongs to the membership (inferred).***

That is to say, the membership is the final court of decision on these matters.

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[72] There are Christians who misunderstand and confuse biblical teaching on the Universal church versus the Local church. They mistakenly think that since they belong to the Universal Church, they necessarily already belong to any and every local church. This mistaken perspective functionally places the "Keys of the Kingdom" into the individual's hands as if he or she were the sole determiner of the Keys, which is false according to Jesus in Matthew 18:18–20.

How Do The "Keys" Work In Practice?

We will discuss this more later, but for now, a central role and function of pastor-elders is to equip the church in the use of the "Keys" and to guard and guide them in the process.

This often looks like the elders getting involved early on in matters and bringing recommendations to the church, should the church be called to vote on a matter. For example:

1. A member evangelizes an unbeliever who gets saved (c.f. Matt 28). The member introduces this new believer to an elder and walks alongside them as the elder guides the new believer through the membership seminar and baptism process. This leads to the elders making a recommendation to the church to receive this new believer into membership upon baptism, which they do after a congregational vote.

2. A member confronts a fellow member over unrepentant sin (c.f. Matt 18). After a few weeks and a few more confrontations, the sinning member remains unrepentant, so the confronter brings two others. The sinning person remains stubborn after a few more weeks and confrontations, so those doing the confronting reach out to the elders to step in and take the lead in the process. In the end, the elders call a special meeting, present salient facts to the membership, some of the witnesses give testimony, and now the church begins to fast and pray, and those with a relationship with the unrepentant person reach out. In the end, another meeting is called some weeks later, and the elders make a recommendation to the church to vote to excommunicate.

3. Two years later, the unrepentant person of the above example repents, reaches out to an elder, and those members involved in the process. After some time, the elders and members agree that this person is truly repentant, and the elders make a recommendation to the church to readmit the person to membership upon an affirmative vote.

4. The elders believe a constitutional change is needed to better conform to Scripture. Over the course of months, they present to the church the "what and why" of the proposed change, answer questions, and make a recommendation to the church to vote.

5. The elders come to believe that adopting a Confession would best serve the church and, similar to #4, make a recommendation to the church to vote.

6. As people leave the church for various reasons (good and bad), the elders connect with those departing and ultimately make recommendations to the church to vote to release them from membership.

7. The elders, along with a subcommittee, propose an annual budget to the church for a vote.

8. A member discovers that a person is looking to leave the church so that they avoid church discipline. The member alerts the elders, and after gracious confrontation, the elders recommend to the church not to dismiss the person for the sake of the wayward person's soul and the sake of the gospel. A similar example might be given in which a person seeks to leave to attend a non-gospel preaching church.

In all these examples and more, the pastor-elders are deeply involved on behalf of the church in baptisms, admissions, dismissals, and discipline from membership. The same holds true for doctrinal and constitutional changes and affirming the budget. The elders make prayerful, informed (including congregationally informed) recommendations to the church on how to vote on a matter.

Pastor-elders do not hold the keys for the church, but with the church. Yet since their role often requires the most involvement of anyone in the church, when they make a recommendation, the church almost always votes as the elders recommend.

FIVE ADDITIONAL BIBLICAL EVIDENCES FOR FORMAL COVENANT-MEMBERSHIP

While the doctrine of the "Keys" is the strongest argument, five broad areas:

(1) Relationship Between Pastor-Elders and the Congregation
(2) Counting, Recording Names, and Records of Widows
(3) Metaphors of the Church
(4) Voting
(5) The Nature and Signs of the Divine Covenants

(1) Relationship Between Pastor-Elders and the Congregation
Hebrews 13:17 *"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."*

Scripture indicates that Pastor-elders ("leaders"[73]) will give an account to Jesus for their "keeping watch over your souls." "Keeping watch" not only includes the faithful teaching of the Word of God but also the administration of the church and shepherding the sheep.[74] Relationship is a prerequisite for "joy" or "groaning" to occur, and for a relationship to exist, the keys had to first be exercised.

The use of "your souls" is not an anonymous mass of people but a specifically known people comprising the local church family. "Yours" has a name.

This also implies that not all elders are responsible for all Christians, but specific elders are responsible to Christ for specific Christians, namely, those in covenant with the church. The elders of FCF are responsible before Christ only for the members of FCF, and the same can be said of each local church in Flagstaff. 1 Peter 5:2 exhorts elders to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight." Proximity reveals mutual responsibility.

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[73]Given the literary context of Hebrews, "leaders" is a synonym for "pastor-elders."

[74] Some argue that pastor-elders will only give an account to Christ for their teaching and preaching. But the relational terms, "obey," "submit," "keep watch," "joy/groaning" all require a relational understanding of, and between one, another. It implies people actually know their pastors and pastors know the people.

The elders of FCF will not give an account for the Christians at, for example, Redemption Church, and vice versa. Conversely, the members of FCF are not required to "obey and submit" to the elders of Redemption and vice versa.

Why? The principle of church membership. The Bible's teaching on local church government, especially texts like Hebrews 13:17, is only possible when the shepherds know who the sheep are. This necessitates some process by which to vet and know them (see above, "keys").

In our transient, hyper-individualistic culture, and in churches with hundreds of people, how do pastor-elders know who they are responsible before Christ to shepherd, administrate, and teach? *How do the pastor-elders know "who" they will give an account to Christ for if shepherding involves "knowing" sheep?* Some mechanism must be in place by which the elders know who the congregation is that they are accountable for. This question is even more pressing given the Biblical reality that both non-Christians[75] and visiting Christians from other churches will likely be in attendance at a service. ***That is to say, elders are only responsible to Christ and will only give an account for those covenanted to the membership, not visiting Christians, or unbelievers in attendance, or Christians who belong to other churches in town.[76]***

Additionally, this implies that the congregation would also know who one another are, who they belong to, who is part of the local family, and who is just visiting. It is biblically incorrect to think that merely showing up and sitting in a seat on a Sunday provides sufficient grounds to fulfill this passage, especially since the "groaning and joy" (Hebrews 13:17) can only be displayed through an ongoing covenanted relationship. Shepherd-Elders "groan" when the sheep bite and devour one another and do not bear fruit in keeping with repentance, whereas their "joy" is when the sheep grow in the fruit of the Spirit, humility, repentance, and living out the "one anothers." All this implies a "known" relationship rather than anonymity. There is no such thing as an anonymous Christian in Scripture.

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[75] 1 Corinthians 14:22–25.

[76] This point is about establishing who local elders will and will not give an account for and therefore, to whom and for whom the majority of their time should go. This does not deny that pastor-elders do not do the work of an evangelist, build relationships with visitors, etc. They are to do both.

(2) Counting, Recording Names, and Records of Widows

While these are three distinct areas, the similarity lends to combining them as one larger point.

The New Testament records several places where the counting of people takes place.[77] *The effect of counting signals and identifies who is part of the group and who is not. It's a demarcation line. Some are counted as in; others are not. More than that, certain qualifications are necessary to be counted in, namely, the local church's exercise of the keys of the kingdom.* Counting and demarcating specific people identifies and demonstrates care and concern for those who belong to the group and share mutual responsibility for one another, thereby marking them off from outsiders. The point here is that if the church demarcated and counted those present, marking them off from the world, and if Scripture gives no indication that this practice is to cease, on what biblical basis should the church stop? This circles back to the keys of the kingdom.

Next, Scripture repeatedly refers to those whose names are written in the book of life (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). This is intended to communicate, among other things, the security and confidence of the Believer. ***If Heaven keeps a list of names of those who are part of the Universal Church, why not the local church, which is meant to be a foretaste of Heaven?***[78] If Jesus distinguishes between sheep and goats, should not the church have a process in place to at least know and affirm the profession of faith of those who participate in the life of the body (cf. Matthew 25:31–34)? Thinking back to the keys of the kingdom, this is how the local church distinguishes, to the best of its imperfect ability, sheep and goats. Good church administration would also involve some way of writing down / noting the names of those covenanted together in the local Body.

Similarly, the counting of widows identified which widows the church was uniquely responsible for and, by extension, those whom they were not (1 Timothy 5:9–11). First Timothy 5:9 explicitly commands to "enroll" widows who meet certain qualifications. To "enroll" is to officially register for something and write one's name down. An official/ formal conversation must take place with a representative of the church to ensure the

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[77] Acts 1:17, 26; 2:41, 47; 4:4.

[78] The "Universal Church" is all believers, of all times, of all places. The "Local Church," by contrast, is a specific group of people, in a specific place, at a specific time. The only time the Universal Church will be visibly and physically together is in glory. Until then, the local church is a representation of the Universal. It is a mistake to think membership in the Universal Church negates membership in the Local Church; instead, it affirms and confirms it.

widow meets the necessary qualifications, and logs her enrollment on the roster in some capacity.

Each of these three distinct areas involve counting and recording names from a variety of perspectives. *Given the priority and centrality of the keys of the kingdom expressed in and through baptism, communion, and excommunication, along with the pastor-elders knowing who they are to care for, these examples of counting and recording for demarcation purposes further strengthen the biblical principle of local church membership.*

(3) Metaphors of the Church.

While universal in scope, the metaphors of the church are local and definitive in nature: Body, Bride, Temple, Flock, Family, City, Embassy. This means universal truths will only be seen and lived out in local contexts.

A body knows its feet and hands.

A groom knows his bride.

Temple stones are fitted together side-by-side to create one structure.

A flock has definitive boundaries, with shepherds knowing their sheep.

Family is not anonymous; the members know who their brothers and sisters are.

A city knows its citizens.

An embassy knows the ambassador(s).

Yes, these metaphors are for the Universal Church, but they are only ever expressed in the local church until we are brought into glory. For example, the long metaphor regarding the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 is local in nature. In other words, each local church is an expression of the universal Body of Christ. *Each local church has its own "eyes, hands, and mouths." They must be vitally connected to actually work.* No body part is presented as unimportant or with the option to roam around to other "bodies." The "eyes, hands, and mouth" must be committed to the local body for it to work as Jesus intended. This metaphor also presumes the "eyes, hands, and mouth" know who one another are and are vitally connected to each other.

These metaphors collectively remove any notion that a Christian can be part of a local church and yet be anonymous and unknown. *Each metaphor for the church presumes intimacy, closeness, belonging, and accountability to a local church.*

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Each of these word pictures, applied and lived out in the local church, implies specific identity and definitive boundaries of belonging in contrast to anonymity or autonomy. These metaphors show there is no such thing as a Christian not vitally connected to, known by, or pursuing connection with a local church.

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(4) Voting

Second Corinthians 8:19 speaks of a man "appointed" by multiple churches to travel with Titus. The English term "appointed" translates a Greek term that literally means a "show of/to stretch forth hands." A few options are possible: (a) this refers to the "laying on of hands" to commission for a task, or (b) voting as in the raising of hands, or (c) some other mechanism for the churches to identify and choose a person. *Either way, the churches identified, vetted, selected, and sent people out, which requires a process to be in place not only to accomplish this but also to know who has the right to speak into the decision.*

Similarly, 2 Corinthians 2:6 refers to a "punishment by the majority." While not conclusive, it was accomplished by vote; it appears a mechanism was in place for the church to collectively make a formal decision to excommunicate a former member. In other words, how does a local church practically fulfill Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15–20 without some mechanism or process in place for the church to make a decision? *Any attempt to gather the choice of each member of a church to decide a matter is, by definition, a vote.* A vote can take different forms, but if a decision is made by counting the majority, call it what you like, it's still a vote. And voting always presupposes those who are authorized and not authorized to vote.

Acts 6 speaks of the assembled church "choosing from among yourselves" qualified men to perform special tasks (Acts 6:1–7). How did they do this? Somehow, they had to identify, vet, and vote to appoint men to the task.

There is no explicit verse that commands, "thou shalt vote on certain issues." But the question remains as to how the local church practically accomplishes group

decisions, especially with discipline. This further begs the question, "Who gets to vote/speak on the decision?" *This presupposes that those who vote in order to exercise the keys of the kingdom are formal members of the church.*

(5) Nature and Signs of Divine Covenants

The six divine covenants mark who and how God will relate with people. The Adamic and Noahic are made with all creation, but the remaining ones all have demarcation lines distinguishing between those in or out of the covenant.

The promises made to Abraham discriminate (in the best sense of the word, that is, recognize a distinction) and only pass to Issac (not Ishmael), then Jacob (not Esau), then the nation of Israel. The Mosaic covenant is made only with Israel. Everyone else was outside the covenant. To become a member (if not born into it), one had to convert to Israel. Only a son born from the direct line of David was eligible for the Davidic covenant. Similarly, the New Covenant is only for those who have been born again by the Spirit through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The point here is that the covenants distinguish between who is in and who is out. There are firm, non-negotiable boundary markers established by God Himself. It stands to reason that if the divine covenants, particularly the New Covenant, distinguish who is in and out, so should local churches. It is a confusion of categories to argue that if one is a member of the New Covenant and, therefore, the Universal Church, there is no need for local church membership. We would argue quite the opposite. **Given the keys of the kingdom and that communion is the sign of the New Covenant, we believe the New Covenant demands formal membership in a local church.**

The demand for local church membership is also demonstrated by the covenant signs of baptism and communion. For example, to be a member of the Abrahamic Covenant was to bear the sign of circumcision. No circumcision, then no membership in the Abrahamic covenant. Or, for example, to be a member of the Mosaic Covenant was to keep the sign of the Sabbath. No sabbath keeping, then no membership in the Mosaic Covenant. In fact, it was the death penalty to break either covenantal sign (Genesis 17:9–14; Exodus 4:24–26; 31:12–14).

But what about the New Covenant? Jesus explicitly refers to the cup during communion as the "New Covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). It is arguable that baptism is included as a twin sign of the New Covenant. But, at the very least, the Lord's Table is the sign of the New Covenant. But who partakes of the Lord's Table? Those for whom the

local church has exercised the keys of the kingdom.[79] This makes church discipline all the more significant in that it is a local church deciding together to withhold the sign of the covenant from a person. **In this way, the sign of the New Covenant and the keys of the kingdom are inseparable, and therefore a significant demonstration of the principle of membership.**

Summary and Conclusion — The Principles of Membership

By way of reminder, in this section, we are demonstrating where and how Scripture teaches the principle of membership. We have aimed to show ***the Bible teaches the principle of local church membership while providing flexibility as to its application. Membership must exist in a local church in such a way as to mark off who belongs to and who can be removed from a local church.*** But the details and specifics of how a local church accomplishes this are as varied as the context. An underground church in Iran or a multi-campus megachurch in San Diego ought to have the principle and practice of local church membership, but the application will vary based on context.

Here is a summary and synthesis:

First, the "keys of the kingdom" for "forgiving/loosing" and "withholding/binding." In Matthew 18:15–20 Jesus expects local churches to exercise the keys of the kingdom. This means it is the local church's responsibility, delegated from Christ, to vet and affirm professions of faith, thereby admitting a new member to the church. Likewise, it is the local church's responsibility from Jesus to remove the membership of anyone who willfully walks in unrepentant sin, thereby changing their status from "brother" to "gentile and tax collector." For a local church to be given the responsibility by Christ to determine who is and is not part of the Body is nothing less than the principle of local church membership. Recall that the "Keys" show that the "message; membership; ministers; money" belong to the members.

Second, baptism and communion. Baptism presumes the keys have been exercised to assess and affirm a profession of faith. Baptism is designed as the entrance into the membership of the church, coinciding with going public with one's faith. Likewise, a believer is baptized only once with a valid baptism. Therefore, when one moves to a different congregation of believers, the new church still needs to assess and affirm one's testimony as its responsibility in exercising the keys of the kingdom.

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[79] FCF admonishes and invites visiting believers to partake with us if they are in good standing with their local church.

Communion, in part, is a mutual demonstration of the membership's ongoing participation and good standing in the local body. Both baptism and communion represent the exercise of the keys by the church, which are indicators of the principle of covenant-membership.

Third, church discipline/excommunication. For a person to be removed from a local church, they first had to belong; otherwise, how could they be removed? In other words, how can a church exercise the keys for discipline (Matthew 18) without first exercising the keys for gospel profession and admittance (Matthew 16)? Church discipline/excommunication serves as an indicator of covenant-membership.

Fourth, the relationship between elders and the congregation is exhibited in Hebrews 13:17. How do pastor-elders know whom they will give an account to Jesus for, unless some mechanism is in place to identify the sheep? It is unreasonable to conclude that Jesus will hold pastor-elders responsible for people they did not know they were responsible for.[80]

Fifth, counting, recording names, and records of widows. Scripture records numerous instances of counting and recording names, demarcating who was part of the group. Scripture uses the analogy of names written in the Book of Life. If counting and recording names were actual practices of the early church, and the Bible wants us to think of our names as written down in heaven, then on what grounds would the church stop this practice? Counting, recording names, and records of widows serve as an indicator of covenant-membership in a local church. But, how do you determine who is and who is not counted? The "Keys of the Kingdom" answers who is counted.

Sixth, metaphors of the church. Each metaphor of the church speaks to the unity, responsibility, necessity, and accountability of members to one another. Each metaphor points to being a known and needed member of a local church. There is no metaphor of the church that is individualistic, isolated, or anonymous. Metaphors of the church serve as an indicator of covenant-membership in a local church.

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[80] This reality is another reason for Jesus' wisdom in appointing a plurality of shepherd-elders to oversee the church. As a church grows in size, the ability of shepherds to know sheep well decreases, so the need to administrate and delegate well increases. One way the elders of FCF seek to overcome this reality is by praying through the membership directory on an ongoing basis. Another is to utilize Home Fellowship as part of pastoral care (similar things can be said about Men's and Women's Ministry). And yet another is multiple teaching venues for members to attend and be known. See Acts 2:42–44.

Seventh, voting. While no explicit verse states, "thou shalt vote," a local church must have procedures in place to identify and count the choices/decisions/votes of the members. This further presumes a local church knows by name who is (and is not) authorized to vote on a matter. Authorization to vote is an indicator of covenant-membership in a local church.

Eighth, the nature and signs of the divine covenants. God marks who is and is not part of His covenant community. That the Lord's Supper, at the very least, is the sign of the New Covenant argues for the reality of local church membership. Thus, it is one expression of the church exercising the keys of the kingdom through mutual affirmation of standing in the New Covenant. Excommunication is the local church's act of removing a person from participation in the sign of the New Covenant. In this way, the New Covenant signs serve as an indicator of covenant-membership.

In summary, if this were a trial, what would be the verdict of these witnesses? Is Scripture "guilty" of teaching the principle and practice of church membership or not? If not, a better explanation and synthesis of each passage must be presented. We are convinced the principle and practice of membership from Scripture is evident on these many fronts.

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Each of these areas on their own are sufficient to ground the principle of membership. Yet taken as an interrelated whole, the principle of membership is strong, clear, and best accounts for both specific texts and the whole of Scripture.

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Why is Covenant-Membership a key source of health for a local church?

1. Covenant-membership is a primary way a church ensures its members are regenerated. It is not an elitist club of social arrogance. It ensures that all the members give trustworthy evidence that they believe and love the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Covenant-membership identifies who the members actually are, establishing mutual responsibility, accountability, and who is able to hold office, serve, and decide on matters.

3. Covenant-membership strengthens the church to strive side-by-side for the sake of the Gospel. By pre-deciding matters that have historically divided the church through our doctrinal statement, constitution, and by-laws (i.e, "church matters"), covenant members create a peaceable and theologically united local church body.

4. Covenant-membership protects and promotes the church's gospel witness around a shared understanding and application of Scripture.

5. Covenant-membership guards against wolves.

6. Covenant-membership promotes order and organization in the life of the church.

GUARDING THE GOSPEL TOGETHER – OUR DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

ARTICLE II. DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Introduction

This church recognizes that it cannot bind the consciences of individual members in areas where the Scripture does not speak directly or where it can legitimately be understood in more than one way, but that each believer is to be led by the Lord to whom they alone are ultimately responsible. [81]For the preservation of the peace and unity of the church, officers and teachers shall be in agreement with this Doctrinal Statement. All members should refrain from imposing doctrines that are not included in this Doctrinal Statement in such a way as to encourage doctrinal disputes which could destroy the peace and unity of the church.

By accepting and subscribing to these articles of faith, we by no means set aside or undervalue any of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.[82]

Section A - The Word of God, The Bible

WE BELIEVE the Bible, which includes the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, to be the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant, supreme, and final authoritative Word of God for faith and life. (Ps. 19:7-11; Luke 24:27; John 17:17; Acts 17:2-3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:15-16)

A note on words:

Inspired - that is, the very words themselves are God's very word through human agency. The text of Scripture itself is the very inspired Word of God, not a window to or means of accessing inspiration. What the Bible says, God says.

Infallible - the Bible will never lead astray or into error.

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[81] Even so, for the sake of unity, churches must "pre-agree" what will and will not hold to in practice. For example, there are doctrines in the bounds of orthodoxy that are nonetheless mutual exclusive and cannot operate in the same church. Indeed, there is some ground to view some views as sinful disobedience to Christ! Doctrines that have historically included: (a) Calvinism vs Arminianism (b) type of church government (c) baptism of babies or believers (d) women as pastor-elders or not (e) miraculous sign gifts of the Holy Spirit as still active or ceased, etc.

[82] Indeed, we ought always reform and conform our faith to the light of God's Word.

Inerrant - the Scriptures, in the original writing, are without error. Among other things, the study of textual transmission and manuscript evidence reveals that the Bible we hold in our laps is without error, and where there is discrepancy, it is noted.

Supreme - there is not a person, pope, pastor, creed, council, confession, or church that is the final say on the Bible. Scripture is self-interpreting and self-illuminating. Believers of all ages submit themselves to the Word of God, always conforming their understanding to it, with an eye to church history and how forbearers have understood the text.

Final Authority - Jesus, and His Word in the New Testament, is God's final revelation. There are no other Scriptures to be written by Apostles and no other prophetic revelations binding on the church. Any so-called religious work following the close of the New Testament is false. Any so-called "fresh work of the Spirit" or "prophetic utterance" that does not conform to the Written Word is false, to be marked, and avoided.

Faith and life - that is, what to believe and how to live.

Section B - The Trinity of the Godhead

WE BELIEVE that the one God eternally exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfection, and are worthy of the same homage, confidence, obedience, praise, and worship. (Is. 48:16; Matt. 28:19; Mark 12:29; John 1:1,14; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14)

Section C - The Total Sinfulness of Man

WE BELIEVE that human beings were originally created in the image of God; that we sinned through disobedience and thereby incurred not only physical but also spiritual death, which is separation from God; that all human beings are born with a sinful nature; that all have fallen short of the glory of God; that we express our sinful natures through thoughts, words and deeds; and that in and of ourselves, we cannot please God. (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 3:1-19; Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 6:44,65; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1-3)

Note - the total sinfulness/depravity of man indicates that every facet of a person is affected by sin. We are sinners by nature (it's what we are through and through), by practice (it's what we choose to do), by choice (it's what we want to do), and by God's declaration (it's who God says we are). The sinner is unable and unwilling to come to God.[83] Total depravity does not mean that each of us is as bad as we can possibly be. God's common grace even restrains sinners.

[83] See, for example, Romans 1–3; 8:7–8

Section D - The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

WE BELIEVE in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, His absolute deity, His sinless humanity and perfect life, the eternal all-sufficiency of His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, and His ascension to the Father's right hand, where, as the only mediator between God and man, He makes intercession for us until He comes again. (Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:30-35, 2:40; John 1:1-2,18; Romans 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:4; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:13-15; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 1:3; 2:14-18; 1 John 3:5)

Section E - The Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ

WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures as a substitutionary sacrifice. His shed blood is the redemptive price for sinners, the only means of atonement for sin, and is appropriated by faith alone. (Lev. 17:11; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7, 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19,23; 3:18)

Section F - Justification

WE BELIEVE that justification is a judicial act of God whereby He pardons the believer's sin and declares the sinner righteous solely on the merits of Christ's sacrificial death and shed blood. This is an act solely of God and is appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ alone. (John 1:12; 3:7-8; Rom. 3:24,28; 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8-10; Col. 1:13-15; Titus 3:5-6; 1 John 1:9)

Section G - The New Birth (Regeneration)

WE BELIEVE that the new birth, or regeneration, is the act of God which gives eternal life. When we were dead in our sins, He raised us up and made us alive together with Christ by grace alone. He imparts to us a new nature and puts his laws in our hearts and writes them on our minds. (John 1:12; 3:3-7; Rom 3:10,23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:16; 1 Peter 1:23)

Note - we believe that regeneration precedes faith and not the other way around. As spiritually dead, we must first be made spiritually alive (regenerated) in order to then repent and believe.[84]

Section H - The Assurance of Salvation

WE BELIEVE that God's Word teaches the assurance of salvation and the keeping power of God for daily living to every born-again person and that this new life is eternal for the believer. (John 5:24; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:1, 28-39; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13)

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[84] John 3:1–15; Romans 8:7–8

Note - we do not place our trust in how strong our faith is, but in how strong Jesus' promise to keep us is. We do not have faith in our faith, but in the object of our faith: our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is not in our hold of Him but His hold of us.[85]

Section I - The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead; that He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; and that He regenerates, indwells, seals, enlightens, guides, and empowers the believer. (John 3:6, 14:16-17, 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30, 5:18)

Section J - The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives each believer at least one spiritual gift; that no believer is destitute of such a gift; that He gives these gifts to believers so that they might serve the body; and that the Church has been given specific gifted believers whose purpose it is to equip the saints for service and building up the body of Christ. (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:7-12; 1 Peter 4:10)

Note - in practice, we do not believe the miraculous sign gifts are functioning or normative where the gospel has taken root

Section K - The Christian Walk

WE BELIEVE that all who are born again by the Holy Spirit are made partakers of the divine nature, and are called with a holy calling to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; and that they can be victorious over the flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit and thus not manifest the works of the flesh, which would dishonor Christ's name, but manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which glorifies God. (Romans 6-8; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 1:3-14; 4:1-6:4; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Peter 1:3-4)

Note - this is not teaching "perfectionism" in this life and does not deny the reality that sin will remain with us until Christ glorifies us. Jesus has taken care of the penalty of sin (we are no longer guilty) and the power of sin (we are no longer its slaves), but the presence of sin remains until glorification. As such, sin will always be an ongoing, present battle. When we see or are shown our sin, we confess and repent to reapply the forgiveness we already have in Christ.

Section L - Marriage and Human Sexuality:

WE BELIEVE that God has established marriage as the exclusive, lifelong covenantal union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matt. 19:3-9). Hence, sexual activities outside of

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[85] Assurance of salvation is not only a matter of faith but also a matter of evidence. For example, based on Jesus' teaching in the parable of the soils, those who persevere through temptation and trial can have assurance (Matthew 13:3–23); those who bear fruit in keeping with repentance can have assurance (Matthew 3:8); those who hate their sin can have assurance (Romans 8:12–17; 1 John 1:7–2:6);

marriage, including, but not limited to, adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, and pedophilia are forbidden (Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). Further, lewd conduct, transgender behavior, bestiality, and the creation and/or distribution and/or viewing of pornography are incompatible with Christian conduct (Matt. 5:27-28, Eph. 5:3-5).

Section M - Missions

WE BELIEVE that we should obey Christ's command to go into the whole world to make disciples, proclaiming the gospel by word and deed. (Matt. 28:18-19; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 4:5-6)

Note - while all Christians can and should engage in and support missions, we as a church send those into the field who are moving toward deacon or elder qualification. Further, based on the template of the Book of Acts, we understand "missions" to be church planting or strengthening efforts and thus prioritize efforts in those areas.

Section N - Ordinances

WE BELIEVE that there are two church ordinances, communion and baptism, which are the outward signs of inward spiritual reality and which our Lord Jesus Christ instituted and commanded for the Church.

Note - one-time baptism and ongoing communion / Lord's Supper are the twin signs of the New Covenant. As such, while they are personal, they are not private. They belong to the whole local church, not the individual. While they are emotional, they are not subjective acts based on how one feels, but objective declarations and visualizations of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the people created by that gospel. We do not self-baptize nor do we self-administer communion since the "Keys of the Kingdom" teach they belong to the whole local church, not the individual, not a father, nor anyone else. We also do not "self-excommunicate," meaning that we are not to abstain or withhold the Lord's Supper from ourselves based on how good a Christian we think we were the previous week or if someone somewhere might have something against me. Both are misunderstandings of the meaning and purpose of the Supper. Indeed, it is only our worthiness in Christ that permits us to the table. It is not our sinlessness that permits us to the table, but Jesus! Biblically, the only time a person is not admitted to Communion is if the church has excommunicated them. So if your week seemed to give sin the victory, repent and come to the Table. If a relationship is broken, pray, come to the Table, and as far as it depends upon you, seek peace and reconciliation.

1. Communion: The Church celebrates Communion with the use of bread and the cup (fruit of the vine), symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, in accordance with the accounts given in the Scriptures (Matt. 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-27; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:1-34). We believe that the Lord's Supper should be an important part of Church life and a priority for every believer. Thus, we observe communion frequently and regularly.

2. Baptism: Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is administered by immersion to born-again believers (Matt. 28:18-19). Baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ, a symbol of identification with Christ (Romans 6:4), and a public testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's inward work of regeneration (Matt. 10:32-33). Baptism does not impart salvation, but follows salvation. (Acts 8:12; Ephesians 2:8-9*) (Believer's baptism by immersion is the official teaching position and practice in this church. We will consider accepting into membership those who hold a different view of baptism, provided they agree not to teach this view in our church or make it a point of contention or division. Members accepted under this exception to doctrine shall be allowed to vote in all church matters except for amendments to this section of the constitution. They shall not be eligible to hold the position of Elder unless they come into full agreement with the view of baptism stated above. Elder board approval shall be required prior to their acceptance into membership.)*

Note - A word about Baptism and the Lord's Supper:

In obedience to the command of Christ, a believer "goes public" with their faith through baptism in the name of the Trinity, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[86] Baptism is a portrait of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection and our death with Him, along with our promised resurrection.[87] It is an appeal to God for a good conscience [ie. an act of faith] by the one being baptized.[88] Baptism does not impart grace; only faith does. Rather, baptism is a picture of what already is. It is a backward-looking act that depicts what one has already believed, namely, the gospel. Baptism

[86] Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:1–4; 1 Corinthians 1:13–17. Baptism is a response of faith in the gospel, something that an infant cannot do.

[87] Romans 6:1–11

[88] 1 Peter 3:21. Note here that a baby cannot appeal to God by faith for a good conscience

does not save, as that would be a work added to the gospel of grace.[89] At the same time, baptism is commanded of all believers by Christ and is not a matter of preference [eg. "If I feel like it or get around to it,"] but a matter of obedience to Jesus (Matthew 28:16–20).

There is such a thing as a valid (true) or invalid baptism (false). A biblically valid baptism requires a "gospel profession" in a "gospel context." In other words, one was a genuine, professing believer in the gospel when baptized (Romans 6:1–11).[90] A "gospel context" speaks to the gospel-confessing community in which one was baptized. A "non-gospel context" would be a context that does not hold to the gospel (see "What is the Gospel" above). Biblically and historically, this "gospel context" was the local church in which one was becoming a member . If one did not have a "gospel profession" or was not in a "gospel context," that would be an invalid/false baptism.[91]

There are also "regular" and "irregular" baptisms. Normally, a person being baptized would join the church they are being baptized by, with the church as witnesses. This is considered a "regular" baptism. An "irregular" baptism is still "valid" but may, for example, have occurred at a para-church context, a conference, a youth camp, trip to Israel, etc. It is "irregular" because it was not performed by and with the church family.

Baptism comes first, then Communion. The Lord's Supper (Communion), is a primary way a Believer displays their ongoing covenantal commitment to Christ and a

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[89] Ephesians 2:8–10 and compare with the Galatian heresy of adding circumcision to the gospel (Galatians 1:6–9; 2:15–3:14). If baptism were necessary for salvation in addition to believing the gospel message, then Paul the evangelist would never have said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you" (1 Corinthians 1:14). It is possible to misunderstand when Peter preaches in Acts 2:38, "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" that baptism is necessary for salvation. But on closer inspection, that is a misinterpretation. For example, in Peter's preaching and teaching elsewhere, he clearly indicates salvation is by grace alone through faith alone (Acts 3:19; 4:4; 5:31; 1 Peter 1:22–25). The confusion stems from the fact that the command of baptism (Matthew 28:16–20) is so closely aligned with believing the gospel and is the first act of obedience of a believer, that baptism can serve as a shorthand of belief, repentance, and going public with one's faith. When Peter says, "baptism, which corresponds to this [Noah and the flood], saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body [an external act] but as an appeal to God for a good conscience [internal reality], through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" he is indicating baptism portrays a pre-existing inward reality, namely, faith in the gospel. Just as Noah had faith, built the boat, and passed safely through the waters of judgment, so too the believer believes, is saved, and passes through the water as a portrait of salvation (see Romans 6:1–11). Admittedly, Peter's words are confusing, but the comprehensive witness of the Bible is that salvation has always been by grace through faith and never of works.

[90] The promise of the prophets was that, unlike Israel, all the members of the New Covenant would be genuine believers (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Therefore, only gospel confessors are to be baptized.

[91] Thus we would reject a baptism that occurred when one was an unbeliever and/or performed in a non-gospel context such as Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's witness, Churches of Christ, etc.

local church.[92] It's like a covenant renewal ceremony, much like renewing wedding vows. Taking the Supper together is like saying to the church, "I still hold to my baptism testimony, which you all affirmed for me, and am walking with Christ." Far from being a privatized experience, partaking in the bread and cup is a visible, objective gospel sign of the New Covenant in Christ.[93] In this way, like baptism, Communion "preaches" the gospel visibly. The Supper is not just with God but with one another.

Both baptism and communion belong to the local church, not the individual. They make the invisible church visible. Further, as objective corporate signs of the New Covenant, they are designed to be participated in only when the church gathers.[94] While they are personal and subjective, they are not private nor are they determined by how we feel but by what Christ says.

Section O - Second Coming of Christ

WE BELIEVE in the personal, imminent, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth in power and glory, which is the blessed hope for which we constantly should be looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14). We recognize that godly, Bible-believing scholars have different views on the end times. While these views are worth studying and debating in a brotherly manner (because the Scriptures speak much about these matters), we should not make our views on prophecy a matter of faction or division in the church. Rather, biblical prophecy is given to motivate us to godly living and increased zeal for Christ's kingdom (2 Pet. 3:3-14; 1 John 3:2-3).

Section P - Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection of the Saints

WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the saints to eternal blessedness in heaven and the lost to be raised to judgment, condemnation, and eternal punishment in hell. (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:22-23; John 5:24,28-29; 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:16-23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 1 John 5:11-13; Rev. 20)

Section Q - The Personality and Work of Satan

WE BELIEVE that Satan is a real and personal spiritual being and that, as the "prince of the power of the air," he is now working in the children of disobedience. He uses demons and humans as agents in the execution of his ungodly purposes, and his final defeat is assured. (Isa. 14:12-27; Matt. 4:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3-4,13-15; Eph. 2:2; 2 Peter 2:4; Rev. 12:9; 20:10)

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[92] 1 Corinthians 11:20–34.

[93] Luke 22:20

[94] This means that fathers do not administer them on their own, as that confuses what Jesus authorizes and assigns to the institution of the home versus the institution of the church. This also means taking the Lord's Supper at a wedding, small group, or any context outside the gathered church is to misuse and misapply Jesus' intention for it.

GOSPEL-SHAPED LIVING TOGETHER – OUR CHURCH COVENANT

The members of FCF recite this covenant out loud together at every covenant-member meeting. Notice how each section includes, "by God's grace." This is our acknowledgment that we rely on God and His power to make and keep us faithful. This is not a statement about perfection but trajectory and heart's desire. It summarizes a scriptural standard that Jesus frees us to live out, it informs how we pray for one another, and it serves as a gracious, merciful, joyous standard to help each other pursue together.

Preamble

1. As those who have been brought by the grace of God to receive and rest in Jesus Christ by faith, being united to Him by His Spirit, remembering our baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we now solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with one another, according to the Word of God, bound together by the gospel in the praise of God's glorious grace.

- Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10; Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 6:5

The Central Call of Unity

2. By God's grace, we will work and pray for our unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and His fruit among us, seeking to maintain the peace and purity of this church, abiding in Christ.

- Ephesians 4:1–3; Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 1:10; John 15:1–11

Sustaining the Church

3. By God's grace, we will work together to promote faithful gospel ministry in this church, as we sustain and cherish its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines, supporting and submitting ourselves to godly authority, serving one another in the love of Christ.

- Matthew 16:13–20; 18:15–20; Galatians 1:6–12; 5:13; 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; Hebrews 13:7, 17

Gathering as the Church

4. By God's grace, we will regularly gather together as Christ's church for worship and service, engaging in the word and work of gospel ministry, seeking to bless and build this Body of Christ.

- Hebrews 10:24–25; Ephesians 4:7–16

Supporting the Church

5. By God's grace, we will contribute willingly and regularly to our shared responsibility for the support of the ministers, ministries, and expenses of this church and for the spread of the gospel through all nations, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- 1 Corinthians 9:14; 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Matthew 28:18–17

Life Together as the Church, Part 1 - "One Another"

6. By God's grace, we will walk together in brotherly love; honoring one another's conscience; exercising affectionate care and watchfulness over one another to build one another up; guarding one another from the deceitfulness of sin; giving and receiving encouragement and admonition in humility and love, all by the example of Christ.

- 1 Peter 2:21; 3:8; Romans 1:12; 16:16; Hebrews 3:13

Life Together as the Church, Part 2 – Forgiveness and Reconciliation

7. By God's grace, we will bear patiently with one another in love, diligently pursue biblical reconciliation, forgive one another, and let love cover a multitude of sins as God has done for us in Christ.

- Ephesians 4:26–5:2; 1 Peter 4:8

Household Life

8. By God's grace, we will endeavor to follow and grow in Jesus by the ordinary means of grace and bring up those under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and, by a pure and loving word and example, seek the salvation and support of our family and friends for the sake of Christ.

- Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 5:8; Note: “Means of Grace” refers to what God has ordained in His Word by which we grow in Sanctification. These include the ministry of the Word through: Preaching & Teaching; Praying; Singing; Fellowship; Fasting; Baptism; Lord’s Supper.

Life in the World

9. By God’s grace, we will live carefully and honorably before the world, forsaking sin, seeking to make disciples of Jesus Christ, as His ambassadors. And through life amidst evil report and good report, seek to live to the glory of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

- Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 2:9–12; Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Corinthians 5:20–21

Leaving the Church

10. By God’s grace, should we leave this church, we will unite, as soon as possible, with some other gospel preaching church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Hebrews 10:23–25

Benediction

11. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

- 2 Corinthians 13:14

HOW IS FCF GOVERNED?

Given the doctrine of the "Keys of the Kingdom" and all that we have seen, what is the leadership structure of FCF? Another way to ask this is, "In what ways does Jesus distribute authority in the church?"

Philippians 1:1 [1]…To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: (ESV)

Here we are introduced to three groups within a local church: "saints, overseers, and deacons." This alerts us to the fact that Jesus distributes His authority in different ways in a local church. No single person or group has all authority on all matters. Instead, as we consider Scripture, we can summarize the model of government Jesus gives to the church as "Elder-led Congregationalism."

Let's break this down

"Congregationalism"

The term "congregationalism" may conjure up pictures or memories of churches biting and devouring one another over the color of carpets and the pastor's salary. Where every decision is made by the church, and most meetings devolve into the worst of humanity, where powerful people take over.

That is not at all what "congregationalism" means.

In fact, we have already covered the essence of "congregationalism" in our study on the doctrine of the "Keys of the Kingdom."

Based on the "Keys," Jesus authorizes and assigns to the congregation four areas over which they are to make the final decision:

1. The message of the gospel belongs to the membership. This means any doctrinal or constitutional changes are finally decided by the membership.

2. The membership belongs to the membership. This means admissions, dismissals, and discipline are finally decided by the membership. This also means that Jesus expects the members to care, provide, and watch over one another.[95]

3. The ministers of the gospel belong to the membership. This means that who is elected to the offices of either pastor-elder-overseer or deacon is finally decided by the membership.

4. The gospel mutual fund (money/budget) belongs to the membership. This means the members are the final approval of the annual budget.

"Elder-led"[96]

To begin, in the New Testament, the terms "elder" and "overseer/bishop" are used interchangeably for one and the same office.[97]

Secondly, the only people ever authorized and commanded to "pastor/shepherd" are the "elder-overseers."[98]

While the title "Pastor/Shepherd" is very common in our era, it is only used once in the New Testament to describe a human office in **Ephesians 4:11** [11], and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (ESV)

Thus, "pastor-elder-overseer" is the one senior office in the church.

What is the relationship of the members and deacons to the pastor-elders?

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[95] Please see the Appendix list of "One Anothers" which neatly summarizes what Jesus expects our interpersonal relationships to actually be like.

[96] "Elder-rule" churches are ones in which the elders exercise the "Keys" on behalf of the congregation and in which the congregation does not vote on these matters. We have already discussed passages such as Gal 1 and 1 Cor 5 where the congregation, not the elders, are held responsible for the exercise of the "Keys." Because of passages like these, Jesus does not allow churches to delegate or pastors to take that authority away from the members.

[97] Compare Acts 20:17–18 with verse 28; compare 1 Timothy 3:1–2 with 5:17–25; compare Titus 1:5 with 1:7

[98] Acts 20:28 (ESV translates the verb "shepherd" as "to care for") Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2; compare with Jesus' titles in 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4

Hebrews 13:17 [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. (ESV)[99]

Much can be said here, but for our purposes, the obedience and submission of the church to the elders does not overrule or negate what we have previously seen on the "Keys of the Kingdom."

As mentioned earlier, when it comes to the exercise of the "Keys," the elders equip the saints for this task, guard and guide the membership, and make recommendations to the membership when it comes time to vote.

That said, everything else belongs to the oversight of the elders and those to whom the elders delegate it.

"Deacons"

Acts 6:2–4 [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve ("deacon") tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry ("deaconing") of the word." (ESV)

Many view Acts 6 as the beginning of the office of "deacon."

In principle, anytime something, even a very important thing, threatens the elders' ability to pray and minister the Word, deacons are needed to take on the issue. In this way, deacons serve under the leadership and direction of the elders.

"Putting the Pieces back together"

FCF is:
1. Elder led and equipped
2. Diaconally administered and implemented
3. Congregationally affirmed and worked (i.e., Ephesians 4:11–16)

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[99] The terms 'leaders" in Heb 13:7, 17 refers to those with the teaching office in the church and whom the church is to follow and imitate. In the rest of the New Testament, it is the "pastor-elder-overseers" who are assigned these responsibilities.

Again, Jesus delegates His authority in different ways to different groups within the local church.

One extreme to avoid is presuming the pastors do all the work for the church as if the "one another's" were not in Scripture and the membership did not belong to the membership. Another extreme to avoid is to think the congregation decides on and/or micromanages every matter.

Still another extreme is not to roll up one's sleeve and get to work when deacons or ministry leaders present opportunities and needs in the church. Service is less about "calling" and more about recognizing the need is a call in itself.

FAQ ON VOTING

"Isn't voting with an elder recommendation just a rubber stamp?"

1.No…and yes…kind of!

2. We must take care not to bounce between extremes, functionally giving all authority to either the membership or the pastor-elders. Jesus expects both to work in harmony and unity, as the elders recommend and the church decides.

3. Recall that elders are chosen by the church for their imperfect but exemplary lives and clear gifting from Jesus to the office, along with biblical qualifications [c.f. 1 Tim 3; Titus 1; 1 Pe 5; Acts 20]. They are supposed to be men the church wants to love, trust, honor, and imitate, installed to office for these very purposes

4. Additionally, the pastor-elders have, almost always, put in the most thought, care, discussion, and prayer on a matter both individually and corporately. Trusting the work of the Spirit in them, they typically have the most information and experience to make wise and proper recommendations to the church. Don't forget they have also solicited feedback from the congregation and the benefit of a plurality rather than an individual making the recommendation.

5. Given all this, in nearly every case, the church should follow the recommendation of the elders, not as a blind rubber stamp, but out of love, trust, and unity.

"Can I Ever Vote Against The Elders?"

1. Absolutely, with a biblically calibrated conscience.

2. Care should be taken to self-evaluate that this is not a matter of preference or style but rooted in sound biblical doctrine.

3. When should you vote against the elders? If you believe the vote might lead to a compromise of the gospel in and through the church. For example:

    1. An unsound missionary with questionable practices

2. A financial decision that might severely hurt the church

3. A partnership with an unsound or questionable ministry

4. A minister who does not meet biblical qualifications

"What If I Find Myself Voting Against The Elders Often?"

1. Assuming the majority of the church votes with the elders the majority of the time, and you find yourself as the "odd-man-out," one of three things might be at play:

(1) You may need new elders.

(2) It may be that your elders are truly not qualified, and the church is not mature enough to see that.

2. You may need to repent of stubbornness, self-trust, and divisiveness.

(1) Votes are to be a display of church unity and submission to one another, especially the elders.

(2) Votes should never be a "no" to "balance things out" because it is a disruption of unity

(3) Unless you are submissive & supportive of the will of the congregation, trusting the Spirit in the majority, you will be a source of grumbling & division.

3. You may need a new church.

(1) If the elders and membership are mature & godly, it may be that your doctrine and/or application of doctrine does not align with the church, and you would serve and be served better elsewhere.

WHAT ARE SOME DISTINCTIVES OF FCF?

Church Polity

FCF is Elder-led, deacon-served, and congregationally-affirmed. We think this is the faithful structure of church government and life as expressed in the Bible. FCF is governed by a plurality of Pastor-elder-overseers who exist in mutual submission to one another, with one serving forth as lead (i.e., Senior Pastor). Deacons serve to unify and meet the practical needs of the church under the oversight of the elders. The congregation makes the life of the church work and votes on such matters as pastor-elders, deacons, budgets, and constitutional changes.

Doctrines of Grace (Reformed Soteriology)

From Scripture to Augustine to the Reformers of the Church, we believe the Doctrines of Grace are an accurate summary of "how the gospel works" centering on God's free and gracious sovereignty in salvation (Psalms 3:8; Jonah 2:9; Revelation 7:10; 19:1). Salvation is not based on anything foreseen or earned by man but by the free and gracious electing love of God (Ephesians 1:4); the total depravity of people render them unable and unwilling to come to Christ and worthy of God's eternal wrath (Matthew 25:31–34; 41–48; Romans 8:7); that Christ died for and saves all who he went to the cross for, namely His Elect Bride (John 6:37; 10:11–16, 26–27); that those whom God causes to be born again will most assuredly believe and embrace the gospel, persevering into glory (John 3; Jude 24).

Complementarianism; Gender; Sexuality

Scripture teaches that God creates men and women with identities that correspond to their genetic gender, that is, God designed us for our hardware and software to match (Genesis 1:27). Marriage is exclusively between one man and woman (Genesis 2:23–25). All sexual expression is gifted exclusively to the marriage covenant (Hebrews 13:4). Men and Women are created in the image of God and are equal in dignity, value, and imaging God (Genesis 1:26–31). Neither gender is superior or inferior to the other. *God has gifted roles in the home and church to advance and display His gospel purposes (Ephesians 5:22–33).* Scripture teaches the church office of pastor-elder-overseer is exclusive to men (1 Timothy 2:11–3:13). In marriage, husbands are gifted and assigned the role of head displaying Christ (Ephesians 5:25). Wives are gifted and assigned the role of helper displaying the church (Ephesians 5:24). Next to baptism and the Lord's Supper, Christian marriage is a unique display of the gospel (Ephesians 5:22–33). We hold that women can be deaconesses as it is not a spiritual oversight role of the

church but a need-addressing role that administers, implements, and organizes service under the leadership of the pastor-elders.

Gifts of the Spirit

Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit presently gifts individuals for fruitful life in the local church (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4:7–11; 1 Peter 4:10–11).[100] These texts include gifts and abilities such as serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, acts of mercy, and administration.[101] Nearly all Christians believe these gifts are in operation today. However, disagreement exists among Christians about whether certain miraculous or sign-gifts continue after the apostolic age (i.e., tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, miracles, healings).

The purposes of miraculous sign-gifts authenticated the preaching of the gospel in the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles.[102] At the same time, miraculous manifestations of the Spirit in those who believed the gospel served to authenticate for the preachers that these people were, in fact, born again. In this way, these miracles and signs of the Spirit served both the preacher and the new convert.

When the Apostles passed from the scene, some have concluded that these sign-gifts did as well (this is the "Cessationist" position). "Cessationism" does not deny the ever-present and ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit; it only denies that miraculous sign-gifts are still operative and normative for today. Others say the sign-gifts continue indefinitely for all the church (this is the "Continuationist" position).

A mediating position believes these sign-gifts are not normative for the life and practice of the church but can manifest, for example, when missionaries take the gospel into un-evangelized places (this has been called a "Nuanced Cessationist" position). This position points to the pattern of the book of Acts, demonstrating that when the gospel went into unevangelized regions, the double authorization of the work of the Spirit was present until the gospel took root.

Included in this topic is whether the offices of Apostle and Prophet continue. Acts 1:21–22 lists qualifications for a new apostolic replacement of Judas: a man who accompanied the Apostles from Jesus' own baptism to Jesus' ascension. On these qualifications, the church has almost universally agreed that the office of Apostle has

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[100] To be more precise, these passages reveal that the Trinity dispenses grace-gifts.

[101] That the various lists are similar but not identical leads many Christians to conclude that the Spirit empowers all of life, especially in the church. It is worth mentioning that many Christians fret over the question, "What are my gifts?" Rather than taking tests, simply roll up your sleeves, start serving others in the church, and God will reveal to you and those you serve where you are "gifted." It is also worth noting, "it's not my gift or calling" is not a valid biblical excuse for not serving or meeting needs in the body!

[102] They also signaled a foretaste of the reversal of the curse in glory.

ceased since these qualifications can no longer be met. It is also debated whether the office of Prophet continues since the Canon of Scripture is closed. Since Ephesians 2:20 refers to the "foundation" of the Apostles and Prophets, and in light of Acts 1:21–22, we believe both offices have ceased.

FCF's doctrinal statement allows for a variety of stances on the sign gifts of the Spirit. In reality, however, FCF does not provide space or special times for the manifestation of these sign-gifts for those who understand they continue. Furthermore, we believe the offices of Apostle and Prophet ceased when the Canon of Scripture came to a close with the Book of Revelation. FCF is functionally cessationist in practice and belief.

Mission of the Church

God gave a mission to the church that no other organization on the earth can do: preach the gospel to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Only the church is commissioned by Christ to do that. No other entity or institution on earth has the right and privilege to hold the "Keys of the Kingdom." We have no other mission. The local church is God's redemptive "Plan A" for the world. He has given no "Plan B."

The mission of the church is not any manner of socio-political issues of the day, as important as they are. The church is not indifferent to these issues; at times will speak to them, and any number of members may passionately dedicate much of their lives to them.[103] The church is also to be characterized by good works.[104] Galatians 6:10, for example: *"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

Two errors have historically plagued the church. One error is to focus on good works at the expense of the gospel (classic liberalism). The other error is to herald the gospel without any good works (classic fundamentalism).

The church's mission is to make disciples through the gospel. The church is also to be characterized by good works that express "loving their neighbor as themselves."[105] Where the gospel of grace prevails, so do good works in the community. Good works are a vehicle for and may be accompanied by the gospel, but they are not the gospel nor essential to it, since the gospel meets the greatest need every human has, redemption from sin. The danger is to take an either/or perspective, as the Bible is unequivocally

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[103] The invention and rise of academic institutions, hospitals, the abolition of slavery, and more are all by-products of the life work of Christians banded together but have never been the central purpose of local churches. That distinction is important. The mission of the church is not to change the world although change is often a by-product of regeneration and reformation.

[104] Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10); Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14.

[105] Matthew 5:43; 19:19; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; 6:10; James 2:8.

both/and. We need both the gospel and good works, but each has a place and priority, and the two should not be confused. Gospel proclamation is always the greatest good work we can perform as an act of love for our neighbor. *Indeed, we should be "good Samaritans" whose primary impulse is to unflinchingly herald the gospel.*

A church uniquely displays the gospel in its mission when saints gather across generational, socio-economic, gender, and ethnic backgrounds to worship and serve Jesus Christ. A biblical understanding of good works should not be confused with the so-called Social Justice movement, which is antithetical to the biblical teaching of marriage, gender, sexuality, the family, and more. Social Justice is not to be confused with biblical justice. They are similar terms but with different definitions (see below on Critical Theory).

This mission does not change or alter when it comes to "missions." "Missions" is simply starting and strengthening local churches across linguistic, cultural, and/or geographic barriers. "Missionaries" are to be pastor or deacon qualified Christians who endeavor to see indigenous churches planted and replicated.

Theological Triage

While all Scripture is inspired, authoritative, and sufficient, it is not all equally weighted or equally related to the gospel. Nor do all Christians uniformly interpret Scripture the same way. Jesus says some matters of the law are "weightier" than others. Paul spoke of matters of "first importance" to the gospel. In this light, we can speak of "1st, 2nd, and 3rd order" doctrines or, said differently, "Gospel Matters; Church Matters; Conscience Matters."

1st order doctrines ("Gospel Matters") are those essential to the gospel, make Christianity "Christian," and if disbelieved indicate a false gospel and denial of Christianity.

2nd order doctrines (sometimes called "divide for" doctrines or "Church Matters") are not essential to the gospel, but so close to it and/or doctrines that have a robust history such that fellowship and ministry in the same church would be prone to conflict, confusion, and division.

3rd order doctrines (sometimes called "debate and disagree for" doctrines or "Conscience Matters") are those that are important, but either have little Scriptural data or do not directly affect the life and order of the church or the church simply chooses to agree to disagree on the matter. Do not hear that these are unimportant! This last category can also fall under the category of "conscience and opinion" (Romans 14).[106]

Theological triage helps a church know what is not sinful to fight for and what might be sinful to fight over. It helps a church maintain and mature in unity and appreciate

[106] https://www.fcfonline.org/sermons/series/unity-conscience-and-christian-freedom

other fellow gospel preaching churches. It is possible to disagree agreeably and divide in ways that promote fellowship.

Music

Scripture teaches that music is an aspect of the teaching ministry of the church that also doubles as musical prayer (Colossians 3:16). *Our singing, therefore, is not just "vertical" to God or internalized and personal. Singing is just as much "horizontal" as we sing the word and scriptural truths to one another.* Our singing is a corporate gospel witness to unbelieving children and visitors in our midst and a source of encouragement to fellow saints.

Rather than being a privatized experience, the congregation is the choir who reminds one another of our Lord and evangelizes the lost in our very singing. There are very good, theologically rich old songs and new songs. There are also very bad, theologically misleading old and new songs. At FCF, we take care to sing theologically rich and accurate songs (new and old) from trusted sources.[107]

We value loud singing and choose songs that facilitate congregational singing. Further, we view the most important instrument in singing is the heart.

Budgeting and Stewardship

Financial giving is not optional according to Scripture; rather, it is a command (see last page of this manual for all the reasons we are required to give).

One way to view the church budget is as a "gospel mutual" fund that allows us to do greater gospel good in and through the church than if we were to do so individually. We pool our resources.

Budgeting and stewardship are viewed as spiritual work that seeks maximum spiritual impact. This involves three goals that collectively inform yearly expenditures, along with spiritual growth and church health.[108] These goals are *Match*, *Align,* and *Encourage*:

#1 – Match annual budget with anticipated giving. This enables a faithful and thoughtful response to the Great Commission.

#2 – Align funding with ministry priorities. This enables investing faithfully for eternity.

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[107] One item of concern for us, with the rise of Christian radio and social media, is the lack of theological vetting and discernment that takes place. "If the song sounds and feels good, then it must be good" is often assumed. But source matters. Just as we would not sing songs written by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir we will not sing songs written by contemporary ministries deemed heretical or aberrant.

[108] Ideas adapted from *Budgeting for a Healthy Church,* Dunlop, Jamie, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2019.

#3 – Encourage faithful giving. This enables the proper focus, which is the believer's heart, as opposed to preoccupation with budget numbers. Faithful giving is more important than our budget.

Biblical Framework for Preaching and Teaching[109]

Since God is the Author of all Scripture, the Bible comes to us as a diverse yet unified unfolding story of redemption. The question is, what is the unifying structure of the Bible? How does God present His Word as "fitting together in Christ?"

We teach and believe that the Bible presents itself as unfolding across six divine covenants. This is to say, the framework of the Bible is "covenantal." This is in contrast to a "dispensational" structuring and reading of Scripture. This means you can expect to hear and learn over time how the whole of Scripture points to and is fulfilled in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Abortion and the Sanctity of Life

According to Scripture, God personally creates each and every human as His image bearer, and this begins at conception.[110] To bear the image of God is not based on age, stage of development, or any capacity, but is based on God's declaration of what we are as humans. We view abortion as a uniquely heinous form of murder of innocent life.[111] Praise God this is not the unpardonable sin, and there is forgiveness and restoration in Christ.

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[109] Our preaching framework is called, "Progressive Covenantalism" and bears close, but distinct, relation to 1689 Federalism. See a discussion here https://christoverall.com/theme/a-primer-on-progressive-covenantalism/ See also, "Progressive Covenantalism" by Stephen Wellum, Crossway. Or "Kingdom Through Covenant, 2ed." by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, Crossway.

[110] Psalm 139:1–24

[111] exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17; 27:25

A Rejection of Critical Theory (the "Woke Left")

At FCF, we reject Critical Theory and its sub-applications to various areas as antithetical to the gospel and of no place in the Christian life. It is a false explanation of what is wrong with the world and what will make it right. It begins by rejecting all things biblical, the Triune God, His Word, biblical anthropology, and the Gospel. It does so precisely because Christianity is viewed as the oppressive worldview (i.e., cultural hegemony). CT and its varieties, which are social-Marxism, are an "empty philosophy" that seeks to take people captive (Colossians 2:8–9). There are grave problems in this world, but Critical Theory and its varieties are not the answer. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer.[112]

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[112] Critical Theory (CT) is a broad belief system that is philosophical-political-legal in nature and is the predominant viewpoint taught in universities, especially in Colleges of Liberal Arts (e.g., philosophy, psychology, sociology, education, economics, etc) and Law schools, to a certain degree. CT evolved out of Marxism and became culturally mainstream in the past decades, especially in recent years. It views and defines all of life as an unending power conflict between oppressor and oppressed. It is activist by nature. The only solution is a revolution overthrowing the "oppressor" (i.e., those with power, opportunity, resources, majority, or simply more). Academically, Critical Theory is subsequently applied to specific areas of study such as "legal studies," "feminist studies," "black/ethnic/race studies," "fat studies," "LGBTQ+ studies," "economics," and more. In every instance, the presupposition of "oppressor/oppressed" is applied with the goal of activism and revolution. Terms and concepts like "social justice," "intersectionality," "racism," "structural racism," "whiteness," "white supremacy," "cultural hegemony," "my truth/your truth," and "hate," are central to this system as are concepts such as #defundthepolice, #silenceisviolence, #blacklivesmatter (#blm), #pride, #cancelcultrue, etc. These terms may seem familiar to the American, but they are completely redefined to mean something entirely else. In this way, terms and concepts, which might even sound biblical on the surface ("justice," "social justice," "racism," "equity/fairness") but instead serve as Trojan horses to smuggle in anti-God, anti-gospel, anti-Bible ideas. In this way, people unaware of these redefinitions may unintentionally serve as surrogates in spreading concepts, especially Christians. In addition to the dialectic of "oppressor/oppressed," CT, and its varieties, is concerned with "equity/fairness" based on outcome (redistribution) rather than opportunity (effort/initiative). Indeed, equity of opportunity is viewed as a tool of oppression and structural racism. CT, in keeping with postmodernism, views knowledge and truth as relative. Critical Race Theory even views math and the scientific method as "structural racism" and oppression to be rejected. For CT and its varieties, as a functional religion, the State (politics) serves as the god who can wield the power to overcome, silence, and suppress the oppressors. CT activists protest, "cancel," educate, and seek to legislate to not only gain legal affirmation from the state (thereby being legitimized in their eyes) but also overthrow Western civilization as informed and shaped by Scripture. "Cultural hegemony" describes the dominant people group, system of thought, culture, and the like. CT views the hegemony as the chief oppressor. Since Western civilization was founded and shaped by Christianity (the cultural hegemony), Christianity itself must ultimately be overthrown.

A Rejection of the "Woke Right"[113]

At FCF, we acknowledge and reject a more recent reaction to the "Woke Left" and rise on the far right of Neo-Nazism that idolizes Hitler as a "Christian prince", reframes WWII and denies the holocaust, and variously believes "Jews are committing cultural genocide against straight white males and their families" or that "people of color are less save-able or sanctify-able than whites" or that inter-racial marriage is sin. This growing fringe variously views women as ontologically inferior to men. It appears the "woke right" is growing out of "theonomic postmillennialism," an aberrant species of Christian nationalism. These positions are an "empty philosophy" that seeks to take people captive and pervert the gospel (Ephesians 2:11–22; Colossians 2:8–9).

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[113] https://shenviapologetics.com/what-is-the-woke-right/
https://christoverall.com/article/longform/the-dangerous-secret-your-young-men-are-keeping-neo-nazi-thought-has-entered-the-church/

EXPECTATIONS OF LIVING AS A COVENANT-MEMBER OF FCF

The encouragement to our membership is to "marry" the church, making it central and primary in one's life as Scripture does. We offer this encouragement because we think this best accords with the teaching of the Bible.

Attend Sundays & Prayer Meetings

The Sunday morning worship service is designed by God to be central to our lives in how we exercise the "Keys" together and how we grow as Christians in faith, knowledge, and godliness through the ordinary means of grace.[114] The Bible regulates what we do when we gather since our worship is to be shaped by what is right in God's eyes rather than our own. The gathering of the church is Word-shaped and saturated as we "preach, pray, sing, and see" God's Word. In other words, the Word of God is the sum and substance of preaching, praying, and congregational singing, but we also "see" the Word of the gospel in baptism and the Lord's Supper. Following these, our fellowship with one another is shaped by the Word. Why is this so? Just as the physical body grows healthy through proper nutrition, so too God has designed the spiritual body to grow healthy through spiritual nutrition.[115]

While circumstances arise and occasional obligations prevent attendance, the normal rhythm of the Christian life is to attend consistently. Consider these admonitions from Scripture, **"Let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some*, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24–25)** and **"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:12–14).** Attendance should far outweigh absence in the Christian

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[114] Sunday is central for a number of biblical reasons. Not only is Sunday the day of the Lord's resurrection (and considered the Christian Sabbath by many), it is also when the early Church gathered (Rev 1:10; c.f. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). What are the ordinary "means of grace?" In a way similar to how a healthy eating & moving promotes a healthy body, God has ordained "spiritual health and nutrition" that we might grow in Christ-likness. How so? When the church gathered for the Word of God to be preached, the ordinances are administered, the whole church assembles, and more. There is certainly more to the Christian life, but it is never less than Sunday.

[115] Ephesians 4:11–16

life. In fact, fellowship is supposed to be a daily reality. Because of these texts and others, we would have growing brotherly concern for a member whose attendance grew less and less. Christianity is a daily group project of which Sunday is central.

When considering what the Bible has to say about prayer, such as "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and "in all things give thanks" (Ephesians 5:20), we should be praying more, not less. But prayer in the bible is both private and public; indeed, many of the prayers recorded are all public in nature when God's people assemble. While we are very intentional about our corporate prayer on a Sunday morning, we are also intentional about other forms of corporate prayer, such as home fellowships, but especially in our Evening Prayer Service. We believe the Evening Prayer Service is essential to our walk together as a church. The cliche is true: "the church that prays together, stays together!"

Attend Covenant-Member Meetings

Next to Sunday morning, the Covenant-Member meeting is essential to our partnership with one another *because it is the other means by which we exercise the "Keys of the Kingdom" together*. It's when the members gather as one body in a unique way (rather than spread across two services) to administer and participate in the life of our church family. Currently, we gather as a membership five times a year, the last Sunday, 5–7 pm, of January, April (twice),[116] July, and October. These are joyous, casual times. Our time is saturated with prayer as we have a reading of our membership covenant; admit and dismiss members; receive finance and ministry updates; review and approve the budget (April); vote on constitutional amendments; vote on elders and deacons; address any special items that may arise including church discipline; and our Senior Pastor closes with a "State of Our Union" address which usually serves to look back at where we have been, where we are, where we are going as a church, and provide updates on the elder board. We ask all members to adjust their schedules as far as possible to ensure they make these four meetings.

Attend Other FCF Functions as Far as Possible

We are intentional in the events and opportunities we provide and host as a church. Our goal is to avoid events and programming for events and programming's sake. Rather, we want to create those opportunities that would be the most "nutritious" and "healthy" in our shared walk with Christ, that would most effectively grow us as

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[116] Currently, we meet on a Sunday in early April to review and answer questions regarding the annual church budget (which is emailed to members a few weeks prior). In this way, the members can make an informed voting decision during our regularly scheduled meeting on the last Sunday of April. The early April review meeting is exclusively for discussing the budget, so in that sense, it is not a regular Covenant-Member meeting.

disciples, so that we can better make disciples. Home Fellowships, Men's and Women's ministry, Local and Global Missions, and more. We also want to guard against being overly busy and frenetic so that we can have time and energy to build relationships and extend hospitality to unbelieving friends and coworkers.

Help One Another Know and Follow Jesus

It takes the whole gospel understood across the whole Bible to make a whole Christian to build a whole Church. Jesus has designed the Christian life such that we would need each other to do that. If you are newer to FCF, consider listening through some previous sermon series such as "The Gospel Saga," "Light to Flagstaff and The World," "Ephesians," "1 Timothy," and more to get a sense of how we understand and apply Scripture to our life together.

Serve as You Are Able and Not as a Volunteer

We believe the heart posture of every Christian should not be "what can I get" but "how can I give." The Christian life comes to us with rolled-up sleeves and a towel around the waist. The Christian life is a life of generous service as slaves of Christ. Every member should have a ministry because Jesus equips every member for ministry. As a family, we both give and receive, and every person should serve as they are able. Sometimes service may be in areas in which we are comfortable and have natural gifting; other times, we will need training and prompting to step out of our comfort zone. Some areas of service may be for an afternoon, others for decades. Your elders and fellow members will be happy to help you find areas of service.

Scripture never uses the word "volunteer" to refer to a Christian. Instead, we are called servants/slaves of Christ, doing His bidding. But many in the church adopt a "volunteer" mentality. A volunteer serves on their own terms, according to their own needs and preferences. A volunteer functions as their own boss and has little to no obligation to the task at hand. A servant, on the other hand, is a slave to Christ who takes presented opportunities as a call from Christ to roll up sleeves and meet needs with a joyful heart.

Give as You Are Willing and Able

Your financial generosity advances the gospel in and through FCF. The New Testament commands giving regularly from a willing, happy, generous, and free heart (Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 9:3–14; 2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:1–15; Galatians 6:6–10; 1 Timothy 5:17–18). Giving to the Lord should not be manipulative, coercive, or reluctant.

The elders serve kind of like "gospel mutual fund managers." Our pooled resources allow us to do greater gospel good than we could on our own. Our faithful giving supports pastoral staff, ministry staff, the ministries and properties of the church, local and global missions, benevolent acts, and more. All this is reflected in our church budget, which is better understood as our shared gospel-ministry portfolio. (See Appendix)

Be Familiar With Constitutional Responsibilities

Please take time to familiarize yourself with our Constitution (composed of our Doctrinal Statement, Constitution, and By-laws). This will help you understand the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of our church life together. In no way do these documents replace or rival Scripture. Rather, they are subservient to Scripture but provide organization to our life together. On the one hand, we should be slow to change what our forbearers established. On the other hand, these documents should be adjusted to better reflect and apply Scripture as led by the elders and affirmed by the church as need arises.

(This edition revised September 17th, 2026)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSTITUTION AND BY–LAWS OF FLAGSTAFF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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ARTICLE I. NAME, DEFINITION AND PURPOSES

Section A - Name

This church shall be known as Flagstaff Christian Fellowship.

Section B - Definition of "Church"

1. Jesus Christ established the church (Matt. 16:18), of which He is the Head (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). It is composed of all who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and have placed saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-7).
2. The local Church is a fellowship of believers established by God to glorify, enjoy, and obey Jesus Christ. It is a part of the body of Christ, members of one another (Eph. 4:25), and knit together in love (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Col. 2:2).

Section C - The Purposes of the Church

1. Praise & Worship: We purpose to worship and praise God corporately and individually. (John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3; Hebrews 13:15)
2. Preach the Gospel: We purpose to preach, teach, and live the glorious gospel (1 Tim. 1:11) of the Lord Jesus Christ. We purpose to work for the spread of the gospel at home and abroad through personal witnessing, preaching, and cooperative missionary endeavor. (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 15:1-4; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1-2)
3. Teaching: We purpose to teach and instruct the believers from God's Word of Truth (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and to encourage and equip the saints for discipleship and spiritual growth. (Matthew 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11-12; Col. 1:28)
4. Fellowship: As a body of believers, we purpose to encourage and further fellowship with God and each other (Lev. 26:12; 1 Cor. 1:9) through systematic Bible study, prayer, praise, worship, personal devotional practices, involvement in small accountability groups, and through the joyful mutual ministry of the spiritual gifts as bestowed by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 14; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10-11)
5. Holy Spirit and Prayer: We purpose to do all of the above through the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit and through dependence upon God through prayer. (Gal. 3:2-5; Eph. 5:18; Jude 20)

ARTICLE II. DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Introduction

This church recognizes that it cannot bind the consciences of individual members in areas where the Scripture does not speak directly or where it can legitimately be understood in more than one way, but that each believer is to be led by the Lord to whom they alone are ultimately responsible. For the preservation of the peace and unity of the church, officers and teachers shall be in agreement with this Doctrinal Statement. All members

should refrain from imposing doctrines that are not included in this Doctrinal Statement in such a way as to encourage doctrinal disputes which could destroy the peace and unity of the church.

By accepting and subscribing to these articles of faith, we by no means set aside or under value any of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Section A - The Word of God, The Bible

WE BELIEVE the Bible, which includes the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, to be the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant, supreme and final authoritative Word of God for faith and life. (Ps. 19:7-11; Luke 24:27; John 17:17; Acts 17:2-3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:15-16)

Section B - The Trinity of the Godhead

WE BELIEVE that the one God eternally exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfection, and are worthy of the same homage, confidence, obedience, praise and worship. (Is. 48:16; Matt. 28:19; Mark 12:29; John 1:1,14; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14)

Section C - The Total Sinfulness of Man

WE BELIEVE that human beings were originally created in the image of God; that we sinned through disobedience and thereby incurred not only physical but also spiritual death, which is separation from God; that all human beings are born with a sinful nature; that all have fallen short of the glory of God; that we express our sinful natures through thoughts, words and deeds; and that in and of ourselves, we cannot please God. (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 3:1-19; Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 6:44,65; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1-3)

Section D - The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

WE BELIEVE in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, His absolute deity, His sinless humanity and perfect life, the eternal all-sufficiency of His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, and His ascension to the Father's right hand, where as the only mediator between God and man He makes intercession for us until He comes again. (Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:30-35, 2:40; John 1:1-2,18; Romans 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:4; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:13-15; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 1:3; 2:14-18; 1 John 3:5)

Section E - The Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ

WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures as a substitutionary sacrifice. His shed blood is the redemptive price for sinners, the only means of atonement for sin, and is appropriated by faith alone. (Lev. 17:11; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7, 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19,23; 3:18)

Section F - Justification
WE BELIEVE that justification is a judicial act of God whereby He pardons the believer's sin and declares the sinner righteous solely on the merits of Christ's sacrificial death and shed blood. This is an act solely of God and is appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ alone. (John 1:12; 3:7-8; Rom. 3:24,28; 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8-10; Col. 1:13-15; Titus 3:5-6; 1 John 1:9)

Section G - The New Birth (Regeneration)
WE BELIEVE that the new birth, or regeneration, is the act of God which gives eternal life. When we were dead in our sins, He raised us up and made us alive together with Christ by grace alone. He imparts to us a new nature and puts his laws in our hearts and writes them on our minds. (John 1:12; 3:3-7; Rom 3:10,23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:16; 1 Peter 1:23)

Section H - The Assurance of Salvation
WE BELIEVE that God's Word teaches the assurance of salvation and the keeping power of God for daily living to every born again person and that this new life is eternal for the believer. (John 5:24; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:1, 28-39; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13)

Section I - The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead; that He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; and that He regenerates, indwells, seals, enlightens, guides and empowers the believer. (John 3:6, 14:16-17, 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30, 5:18)

Section J - The Gifts of the Holy Spirit
WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives each believer at least one spiritual gift; that no believer is destitute of such a gift; that He gives these gifts to believers so that they might serve the body; and that the Church has been given specific gifted believers whose purpose it is to equip the saints for service and building up the body of Christ. (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:7-12; 1 Peter 4:10)

Section K - The Christian Walk
WE BELIEVE that all who are born again by the Holy Spirit are made partakers of the divine nature, and are called with a holy calling to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; and that they can be victorious over the flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit and thus not manifest the works of the flesh, which would dishonor Christ's name, but manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which glorifies God. (Romans 6-8; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 1:3-14; 4:1-6:4; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Peter 1:3-4)

Section L - Marriage and Human Sexuality:
WE BELIEVE that God has established marriage as the exclusive, lifelong covenantal union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matt. 19:3-9). Hence, sexual activities outside of marriage including, but not limited to,

adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, and pedophilia are forbidden (Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). Further, lewd conduct, transgender behavior, bestiality, and the creation and/or distribution and/or viewing of pornography, are incompatible with Christian conduct (Matt. 5:27-28, Eph. 5:3-5).

Section M - Missions

WE BELIEVE that we should obey Christ's command to go into the whole world to make disciples, proclaiming the gospel by word and deed. (Matt. 28:18-19; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 4:5-6)

Section N - Ordinances

WE BELIEVE that there are two church ordinances, communion and baptism, which are the outward signs of inward spiritual reality and which our Lord Jesus Christ instituted and commanded for the Church.

1. Communion: The Church celebrates Communion with the use of bread and the cup (fruit of the vine), symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, in accordance with the accounts given in the Scriptures (Matt. 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-27; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:1-34). We believe that the Lord's Supper should be an important part of the Church life and a priority for every believer. Thus we observe communion frequently and regularly.

2. Baptism: Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is administered by immersion to born again believers (Matt. 28:18-19). Baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ, a symbol of identification with Christ (Romans 6:4), and a public testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's inward work of regeneration (Matt. 10:32-33). Baptism does not impart salvation, but follows salvation. (Acts 8:12; Ephesians 2:8-9*) (Believer's baptism by immersion is the official teaching position and practice in this church. We will consider accepting into membership those who hold a different view of baptism, providing they agree not to teach this view in our church or make it a point of contention or division. Members accepted under this exception to doctrine shall be allowed to vote in all church matters except for amendments to this section of the constitution. They shall not be eligible to hold the position of Elder unless they come into full agreement with the view of baptism stated above. Elder board approval shall be required prior to their acceptance into membership.)*

Section O - Second Coming of Christ

WE BELIEVE in the personal, imminent, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth in power and glory, which is the blessed hope for which we constantly should be looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14). We recognize that godly, Bible-believing scholars have different views on the end times. While these views are worth studying and debating in a brotherly manner (because the Scriptures speak much about these matters), we should not make our views on prophecy a matter of faction or division in the church. Rather, biblical prophecy is given to motivate us to godly living and increased zeal for Christ's kingdom (2 Pet. 3:3-14; 1 John 3:2-3).

Section P - Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection of the Saints

WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the saints to eternal blessedness in heaven and the lost to be raised to judgment, condemnation and eternal punishment in hell. (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:22-23; John 5:24,28-29; 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:16-23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 1 John 5:11-13; Rev. 20)

Section Q - The Personality and Work of Satan

WE BELIEVE that Satan is a real and personal spiritual being and that, as the "prince of the power of the air," he is now working in the children of disobedience. He uses demons and humans as agents in the execution of his ungodly purposes, and his final defeat is assured. (Isa. 14:12-27; Matt. 4:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3-4,13-15; Eph. 2:2; 2 Peter 2:4; Rev. 12:9; 20:10)

ARTICLE III. GOVERNMENT AND POWERS

The government of this church is vested in its Board of Elders by the voting members under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Membership admissions, dismissals, discipline decisions, and any other authority not granted to the Board of Elders by this Constitution or its Bylaws is vested in this Church's voting membership. This Church is subject to no other ecclesiastical body, but willingly cooperates as God gives opportunity with all those of like faith and purpose. (Col. 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-10)

ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP

Section A - To become a member of this Church a person must have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Membership involves a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and draws us into a personal relationship and commitment to fellow believers. To become a member of this Church, one must also meet the qualifications and be voted into membership as set forth in the BY-LAWS of this constitution.

Section B - Membership is a privilege of commitment to the other members of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship. A person's commitment to membership includes his (or her) desire to support the church with his (or her) time, energy, spiritual and material gifts, and prayers.

Section C - Membership includes a commitment to give and receive ministry, admonition, and church discipline.

ARTICLE V. OFFICERS

The Officers, their qualifications and terms of office are specified in the BY-LAWS.

ARTICLE VI. MEETINGS

The requirements for meetings are specified in the BY-LAWS.

ARTICLE VII. PROCEDURES FOR AMENDMENT

Section A - This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of voting members present at any properly called regular or special business meeting of the Congregation, but not less than twenty-four voting members.

Section B - The Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of voting members present at any properly called regular or special business meeting of the Congregation, but not less than twenty-four voting members.

Section C - No amendment to the Constitution or Bylaws may be adopted unless it has been announced to the Congregation at each regular church service for two Sunday mornings preceding the regular or specially called business meeting, and a copy of the proposed amendment prominently posted in the Church for the two Sunday mornings preceding the meeting. A copy of the proposed amendment will be made available when requested.

ARTICLE VIII. SUPERIORITY OF CONSTITUTION

Upon adoption by the voting membership, this Constitution and its Bylaws shall replace and supersede all prior Constitutions and Bylaws. In any apparent conflict between the Constitution and the Bylaws, the Constitution shall prevail.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I. (Reserved: No By-Laws pertain to Article I of the Constitution)

ARTICLE II. (: No By-Laws pertain to Article II of the Constitution)

ARTICLE III. GOVERNMENT & POWERS

Section A - Congregation (see the Constitution)

Section B - Elders (see the Constitution)

ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP

Section A - Biblical Reasons for Church Membership

1. Church membership is the formal context in which Jesus intends the "Keys of the Kingdom" to be exercised, namely, that the admission, dismissal, and discipline of members belongs to the membership under the leadership of the elders [Matthew 16:13–19 [c.f. John 20:23]; 18:15–20; 26:26–28; 28:18–20].
2. Church membership is further seen in biblical accounts of: [a] counting people (Acts 1:17, 26) [b] writing names down (Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5) [c] group decision making, i.e. voting (cf. Acts 6:1–7; 2 Cor 2:6; 8:19) [d] enrolling widows on a roster (1 Tim 5:9–11).
3. Church membership affirms formal commitment on the part of each member to this particular local assembly of believers.
4. Church membership enables the elders to know those for whom they must give an account to the Lord (Hebrews 13:17).
5. Church membership signifies a voluntary submission on the part of the member to the shepherding of the elders of this Church (Hebrews 13:17).
6. Church membership demonstrates the willingness on the part of the member to be more accountable, not only to the elders, but also to each other in the living out of the "one anothers" of Scripture [e.g. John 13:14, 35; Acts 2:42ff; 1 Cor 12:25; Eph 4:32; Heb 3:13; 10:24–25].

Section B - Church Covenant

Preamble

1. As those who have been brought by the grace of God to receive and rest in Jesus Christ by faith, being united to Him by His Spirit, remembering our baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we now solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with one another, according to the Word of God, bound together by the gospel in the praise of God's glorious grace.

- Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10; Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 6:5

The Central Call of Unity

2. By God's grace, we will work and pray for our unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and His fruit among us, seeking to maintain the peace and purity of this church, abiding in Christ.

- Ephesians 4:1–3; Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 1:10; John 15:1–11

Sustaining the Church

3. By God's grace, we will work together to promote faithful gospel ministry in this church, as we sustain and cherish its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines, supporting and submitting ourselves to godly authority, serving one another in the love of Christ.

- Matthew 16:13–20; 18:15–20; Galatians 1:6–12; 5:13; 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; Hebrews 13:7, 17

Gathering as the Church

4. By God's grace, we will regularly gather together as Christ's church for worship and service, engaging in the word and work of gospel ministry, seeking to bless and build this Body of Christ.

- Hebrews 10:24–25; Ephesians 4:7–16

Supporting the Church

5. By God's grace, we will contribute willingly and regularly to our shared responsibility for the support of the ministers, ministries, and expenses of this church and for the spread of the gospel through all nations for God loves a cheerful giver.

- 1 Corinthians 9:14; 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Matthew 28:18–17

Life Together as the Church, Part 1 - "One Another"

6. By God's grace, we will walk together in brotherly love; honoring one another's conscience**;** exercising affectionate care and watchfulness over one another to build one another up; guarding one another from the deceitfulness of sin; giving and receiving encouragement and admonition in humility and love, all by the example of Christ.

- 1 Peter 2:21; 3:8; Romans 1:12; 16:16; Hebrews 3:13

Life Together as the Church, Part 2 – Forgiveness and Reconciliation

7. By God's grace, we will bear patiently with one another in love, diligently pursue biblical reconciliation, forgive one another, and let love cover a multitude of sins as God has done for us in Christ.

- Ephesians 4:26–5:2; 1 Peter 4:8

Household Life

8. By God's grace, we will endeavor to follow and grow in Jesus by the ordinary means of grace and bring up those under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and, by a pure and loving word and example, seek the salvation and support of our family and friends for the sake of Christ.

- Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 5:8; Note: "Means of Grace" refers to what God has ordained in His Word by which we grow in Sanctification. These include the ministry of the Word through: Preaching & Teaching; Praying; Singing; Fellowship; Fasting; Baptism; Lord's Supper.

Life in the World

9. By God's grace, we will live carefully and honorably before the world, forsaking sin, seeking to make disciples of Jesus Christ, as His ambassadors. And through life amidst evil report and good report seek to live to the glory of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

- Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 2:9–12; Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Corinthians 5:20–21

Leaving the Church

10. By God's grace, should we leave this church, we will unite, as soon as possible, with some other gospel preaching church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Hebrews 10:23–25

Benediction

11. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

- 2 Corinthians 13:14

Section C - Membership Qualifications & Procedures

1. Members will have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. Members will have been baptized or be willing to be baptized at the earliest opportunity.
3. Members will strive to live according to the will of God as revealed in Scripture.
4. Members will have been interviewed by an elder or an elder-appointed representative and will have given personal testimony to their faith.
5. Members will have completed the membership application.
6. Members will have completed the New Members Class or an elder-supervised personal study, which will include a survey of the Church Constitution, By-laws, and Doctrinal Statement, and be in agreement with them.
7. Upon Elder recommendation, new members will have been approved by a majority vote of the members present at a properly called business meeting.

Section D - To Have the Privilege of Voting, Teaching, Leading, or Holding Office

1. A member will meet all the "Membership Qualifications."
2. A member will have attended one regular weekly worship service seventy-five percent of the time during the previous six months. Members will be personally responsible for affirming their attendance. The intent is that church business will be run by currently active members.
3. A member will be at least eighteen years of age.
4. Employees or volunteers at an officially sanctioned ministry of the church need not be members but shall affirm their agreement with the Doctrinal Statement and conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.

Section E - Exceptions to Membership Requirements for Voting, Teaching and Leadership

Exceptions to membership qualifications for teaching and leadership may be made at the discretion of the Board of Elders. (Examples: missionaries, visiting pastors, visiting speakers, visiting music groups, visiting teachers, teacher helpers, children's workers, temporary teachers, a person in the process of applying for membership, new pastors or staff, and past members)

Section F - Discipline of Members

1. Members who persist in open unrepentant sin, or those who deny the authority of Scripture, are subject to discipline. The purpose of discipline is to correct, to restore broken fellowship, to preserve the purity of the church and its testimony, and to provide an example to all. (Matt.18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20, 22; Titus 3:10-11)

2. It shall be the duty of any member of this Church who has knowledge of a sinning member's misconduct to go privately to that member in an effort to restore him or her to the Lord (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1). If the sinning member does not heed this attempt at restoration, then the member shall again go to the sinning member accompanied by one or two witnesses to attempt to restore him or her. If the sinning member still refuses to repent, those who have sought to restore him/her shall bring it to the Elders. The Elders shall then seek to bring the sinning member to repentance. If, after further exhortation, the sinning member still refuses to repent, the Elders shall inform the church body (Matt. 18:17) so that the sin will not spread and so the church may pray for and exhort the sinning member to repent. After this step has been given due time, if the sinning member refuses to listen to the church, upon recommendation of the elders, the membership shall vote on whether to remove the unrepentant person. Removal includes removal from membership, the Lord's Table, and at elder discretion, from attendance at church functions.

3. The Elders shall have the authority to reject a request for membership withdrawal and present it to the congregation, as appropriate to the steps of Matthew 18, if the request for withdrawal occurs while the member is in the process of church discipline, or for any other biblical reason (c.f. Acts 20:28-32; 1 Tim

1:3-7, 18-20; 4:11; 6:2-5; 2 Tim 3:5; 3 John 9-11). The purpose for such a rejection for withdrawal would be, in obedience to Christ and for the sake of the purity and protection of His Body, to ensure that the Church has done all it can to fulfill the Biblical goal of church discipline, which is to seek the repentance, restitution, reconciliation, and restoration of the wayward member (c.f. Matt 5:23-26; 2 Cor 7:8-13; 2 Thess 3:13-15), or to expose them as a possible false convert or wolf (c.f. Matt 7:15-23; Acts 20:29; 1 John 2:18-27; 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude 3-23). A member who would seek to remove himself or herself from the body to avoid an ongoing or forthcoming disciplinary process may thereby miss the God-given mercy and opportunity to be served by a gracious and biblical approach to church discipline, which is intended for his or her own soul's good, for the preservation of the Church, and our gospel witness in the world (c.f. Matt 18:10-35; Rom 12:18, 21; 1 Cor 5:1-3; 1 Tim 5:19-21).

4. Discipline from membership shall occur upon recommendation of the elders and a majority vote of the members present at a properly called business meeting.

Section G - Removal from Roll

1. Members who absent themselves from the worship services and other meetings of this church for a period of one year without plausible reason shall be removed as a member upon recommendation of the elders and a majority vote by the members present at a properly called business meeting. Before removal, reasonable efforts will be made by the membership and/or elders to restore him or her to fellowship.
2. A member may withdraw from membership in this Church by a letter of resignation, a verbal request to one of our elders, or a request for transfer of membership.
3. A letter of Christian character may be granted at the discretion of the Board of Elders on behalf of any member. Such a letter should be addressed to a specific church and sent by one of our pastors or elders to a pastor or elder of the church requesting the letter.
4. Dismissals of membership shall be made by recommendation of the elders and a majority vote of the members present at a properly called business meeting.

ARTICLE V. OFFICERS

Section A – Staff Pastors-Elders

1. Candidates for Staff Pastor-Elder rolls shall be screened and presented individually to the congregation by a Call Committee appointed by the Board of Elders and Deacons. A call shall be extended by a two-thirds vote of those voting members present at a properly called Business Meeting.
2. A Pastoral Call to this Church may end by resignation of a Staff Pastor-Elder or a Call may be revoked by two-thirds of those voting members present at a properly called Business Meeting.
3. Staff Pastor-Elders shall be financially supported by the Church. (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

4. Staff Pastor-Elders shall be in agreement with the Doctrinal Statement and meet the qualifications for membership set forth in the Constitution.
5. The Senior and Staff Pastor-Elders shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Elders and meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.
6. Any women in ministry, whether on staff or in a volunteer capacity, may not serve as Pastor-Elders or take any role in which they would teach men or exercise authority over them (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 3:1-7). Examples of service that women may perform may include (but are not limited to) praying, reading Scripture, singing, and/or giving missionary reports in worship services (1 Cor. 11:1-16).

Section B – Lay Pastor-Elders

1. The Board of Elders shall consist of men only (1 Tim. 3:1-7). There must be a minimum of three unsalaried Lay Pastor-Elders in addition to the salaried Staff-Pastor Elders.
2. The Board of Elders shall constitute the Governing Board of this Congregation.
3. The unsalaried members of the Board of Elders shall constitute the Board of Directors for the Corporation.
4. Each Lay Pastor-Elder shall have been an active, voting member of this Congregation for at least two years prior to taking office, and possess the qualifications described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. At the discretion of the Board of Elders, a new Lay-Pastor Elder may be exempted from the two year voting membership requirement where the Lay Pastor-Elder has demonstrated, through prior ministry, the qualifications of an elder. This also applies to a former Pastor-Elder who moved away but has returned to the community and church.
5. The Board of Elders is responsible for spiritual and business oversight of the Congregation and such other specific duties as set forth in the Bylaws. In case of a dispute that is not specifically covered by the doctrinal statement or another part of this Constitution and By-laws, the Board of Elders shall be the final authority in interpreting the Scriptures to determine the beliefs of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship.
6. The Board of Elders shall annually elect a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary.

Section C - Deacons

1. There shall be a minimum of five deacons.
2. Each deacon shall have been an active voting member of this Congregation for at least six months prior to taking office and exhibit the qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:8-12.
3. Under the authority and direction of the Board of Elders, the deacons shall assist in the ministries of the Church and its properties.

Section D - Other Officers

1. **Moderator**: The Chairman of the Board of Elders, or a designated Pastor-Elder, shall be Moderator and shall preside at all regularly called business meetings of the Congregation.

2. **Treasurer**: The Treasurer shall be a qualified voting member of the Congregation and shall be responsible for maintaining the financial records of the Congregation, shall make monthly reports to the Governing Board, and report annually to the Congregation. The Treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders and may be paid at the discretion of the Board of Elders.
3. The Board of Elders shall seek to have an audit or formal internal review of the church books at least every three years performed by a qualified person other than the Treasurer or Financial Secretary.
4. **Financial Secretary**: The Financial Secretary shall be a qualified voting member of the Congregation and shall be responsible for counting and depositing all moneys received by the Church and paying bills. The Financial Secretary shall be appointed by the Board of Elders, and may be paid at the discretion of the Board of Elders.

Section E - Terms of Office

1. All terms of office for Lay Pastor-Elders and Deacons shall be one year and they may be re-elected.

Section F - Nomination & Election

1. The Nominating Committee shall consist of the Board of Elders and Deacons.
2. Qualified candidates for the office of Lay Pastor-Elder or Deacon may be nominated at any time by the Nominating Committee and must consent to the nomination.
3. Candidates for office of Lay Pastor-Elder or Deacon may also be nominated by written petition of five or more voting members of the congregation prior to the election meeting. Candidates must consent to the nomination.
4. The Nominating Committee shall ensure that all candidates meet biblical and constitutional requirements for the office to which they have been nominated. Candidates, whether nominated by committee or petition, shall submit to the screening process prescribed by the Nominating Committee. The screening process shall be established and announced prior to the nomination of candidates. No nomination for Lay Pastor-Elder or Deacon shall be put before the congregation without approval of the existing Board of Elders and assurance that the nominees are in full agreement with the Doctrinal Statement and the Covenant and Duties.
5. The nominating committee shall publish the list of nominees four or more weeks prior to the election.
6. Candidates shall be elected upon the receipt of a two-thirds vote of those voting members present at a properly called Business Meeting, and assume office at end of that business meeting.

Section G - Expiration of Office

1. Expiration of term: Terms of office for Lay-Pastor Elders and Deacons expire at the end of the business meeting at which elections take place. Officers completing their terms shall serve until new candidates are elected and assume office.
2. Resignations: Resignations shall occur only upon receipt of a written notice of resignation signed by the resigning officer or upon a verbal communication of the resignation to any elder.

3. Involuntary Removal: Officers may be removed from office involuntarily if they commit a willful act of misconduct, commit repeated acts of misconduct inappropriate to their office, or no longer meet the constitutional or biblical qualifications for their office. The removal process may be initiated by two or more members in good standing, who meet with the Board of Elders and report why the officer should be removed (1 Tim. 5:19).
4. The Board of Elders shall set a course of action appropriate to the circumstances. The course of action developed by the Board of Elders shall be in accordance with the guidelines prescribed in the Bylaws, Article IV, Section F. If the Board of Elders fails to act on the dismissal of an officer, the officer may alternatively be dismissed by a two-thirds majority vote at a properly called business meeting.

ARTICLE VI. MEETINGS

Section A - Worship, Instruction and Fellowship

The Church shall meet for public worship, instruction and fellowship every Sunday morning and at any other times designated by the Board of Elders.

Section B - Annual Business Meeting

The annual business meeting shall be held in April or May. The church fiscal year shall run from June 1st to May 31st. At the annual business meeting officers shall be elected, the budget adopted, and other business conducted as it appears on the agenda. The exact date, time, place, names of candidates for office, and other agenda items as determined by the Board of Elders shall be published in the Church bulletin and the meeting announced from the pulpit on the two Sunday mornings immediately preceding the business meeting.

Section C - Other Business Meetings

Other business meetings may be called by the Board of Elders or by a written petition containing the stated purpose of the meeting submitted to the elders and signed by at least one-fourth of all the active voting Church members. The exact date, time, place and purpose of the meeting shall be published in the church bulletin and the meeting announced from the pulpit on the two Sunday mornings preceding the meeting.

Section D - Quorum

A minimum of 15% of the voting members shall constitute a quorum at any properly called business meeting.

Section E - Rules

All business meetings shall be conducted by the moderator in a spiritually mature, orderly and peaceable manner. In any dispute over procedures, *Robert's Rules of Order* shall take precedence.

ARTICLE VII: (Reserved: No By-Laws pertain to Article VII of the Constitution)

ARTICLE VIII: (Reserved: No By-Laws pertain to Article VIII of the Constitution)

APPENDIX 2: HEALTHY CHURCH (MEMBERS)

12 MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH / MEMBER WE UNDERSTAND THE MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH (MEMBER) TO INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING 12 AREAS:[117]

(1) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Gospel
(2) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Bible
(3) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Biblical Storyline
(4) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Prayer
(5) A Biblical Perspective on Consecutive Expositional Preaching
(6) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Evangelism and Conversion
(7) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Mission and Discipleship
(8) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Membership
(9) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Government
(10) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Generosity
(11) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Service
(12) A Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Discipline / Excommunication

By "biblical understanding," we intend to convey that the Bible informs and shapes our understanding and beliefs.

By "embracing," we intend to convey the heart, attitude, and lifestyle embodied by a member who believes what the Bible says, seeking to live out these truths in covenant with other believers.

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[117] No doubt more marks can be highlighted, but we understand these to be central, especially to our hyper-individualized, hyper-therapeutic, transient, non-committal, biblically illiterate culture. These marks of a healthy church are adapted from "9 Marks of a Healthy Church" by Mark Dever and the ministry associated with that name. FCF is gladly associated with this ministry. One area we diverge is "congregationalism." FCF is "elder-led, deacon served, congregationally affirmed." If there is a line between "elder rule" and "congregationalism," FCF would fall just on the "elder rule" side, hence, "elder-led." For example, our constitution places the government of FCF in the elders (Const. Art III) and establishes that, "The Elders are responsible for spiritual and business oversight of the Congregation and such other specific duties as set forth in the Bylaws. In case of a dispute that is not specifically covered by the doctrinal statement or another part of this Constitution and Bylaws, the elders shall be the final authority in interpreting the Scriptures to determine the beliefs of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship" (Bylaws, Art V. Sec B.5).

(1) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Gospel.[118]

This is the first and foremost point. As mentioned previously, the gospel, centered on Jesus' substitutionary death for our sins and resurrection for our justification, is meant to make and shape the life of the local church. If there is no gospel, there are no Christians, and there is no Church.

A healthy church member is one who places the gospel of grace as the central defining factor of their lives and the life of the church and encourages others to do the same.

(2) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Bible.

This might sound strange, but we ought to think about the way the Bible thinks about the Bible. In other words, we embrace what the Bible says about itself, namely, that it is inspired (God's very Word through men), inerrant (without error in the autographs), infallible (true in all it affirms and will never lead astray), authoritative (to be obeyed), true (reality as it really is as God defines it), knowable (God has spoken to be known), and must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit (only the Spirit of God can cause the heart to believe and embrace the Word).[119] To deny or distort any of these Biblical truths is to introduce error and misunderstanding of the Word.

The Word of God is objective, historical, and factual rather than a ball of wax to be shaped to say whatever one wants it to say. Scripture rejects the (post)modern notions that truth is relative and subjective. The truth and interpretation of what the Bible says are not determined by one's gender, economic status, political views, ethnicity, or any other possible factor a person might come up with.[120] Instead, by the Holy Spirit, any believer can ascertain the meaning of Scripture through the normal conventions of speech (i.e., studying context, grammar, definitions, etc.). The Bible knows of no such thing as "my truth and your truth." Rather, Jesus Christ Himself is the Truth (John 14:6). Truth is reality as defined and described by God.

When it comes to the human condition, why we exist, what we are, what is wrong with us and the world, what will make it right, and where it is all going is exclusively

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[118] See 1 Corinthians 15 discussion above.

[119] Psalm 19; 119; Romans 1:16; 10:14–17; 1 Corinthians 2:1–16; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5.

[120] Contrary to "stand point epistemology" and "intersectionality."

revealed in the Bible. Insofar as any other belief system accords with what the Bible says as the Bible defines it, it is true (and is smuggling in biblical truth). Insofar as a system does not, it is false.[121]

As interpreters, we approach the Bible with humility, self-aware of preferences or pre-understandings that may skew our reading of the text. As interpreters, our aim is to understand what God has said on His own terms, in His own categories, to understand His authorial intent, and then apply the truth to our hearts, minds, and one another. Central to the interpretive task is to compare Scripture with Scripture with respect to its literary context and to listen to how the church has understood the text down through the ages.[122]

The Bible is the true story of the world, of greater worth than all the riches, sweeter than honey, and sharper than any two-edged sword.[123] It is able to make wise the simple, delight the heart, and satisfy the famished.

A healthy church member is one who believes and treasures what the Bible is and says about itself on its own terms.

(3) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of the Biblical Storyline.

Redemptive History is another way of referring to the whole biblical storyline fitted together in Christ (this is also referred to as "biblical history" or the "metanarrative"). The

[121] Only the Bible is the true story of the world. Other systems however, such as philosophy, politics, and science are untrue in so far as they contradict or distort Scripture. And of course, none replace or rival Scripture since Scripture alone is able to make one wise for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). If another system tells the truth, it is merely smuggling in Biblical content. All systems ultimately fail because they fall short of the comprehensive perfection of the inspired Word of God.

[122] A good Bible Commentary or Study Bible will help expose the reader to various views and will provide accurate understanding of the text.

[123] Psalm 19; 119.

discipline of Biblical Theology[124] pursues an integrated, "whole Bible" understanding of the teachings of Scripture centered on God in Christ (Luke 24:27, 44–45).

The Bible is not a disparate library whose books have little to no connection with one another other than being authored by God. It is, rather, an integrated whole that comes to us as a narrative explaining God's true gospel story of the world and the world to come.

The Bible is progressive revelation in that the storyline unfolds across time rather than happening all at once. The storyline expands and escalates the gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, much like an acorn grows into an oak tree.

The literary framework, or backbone, of Scripture unfolds across the six Divine Covenants (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants).[125] This is evidenced not only by the central role each Covenant Head plays in the biblical storyline but also by the unique clustering of themes and topics that are repeated, expanded, and developed at the inauguration of each successive covenant. Jesus Christ and His New Covenant are the end, goal, and fulfillment of all the previous covenants. In this sense, the Old Testament can be understood as "promise" and the New Testament as "fulfillment and completion."[126]

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[124] This is not to be misunderstood as saying, "my theology is more Biblical than yours" (although that might be the case!). Rather, "biblical theology" is an interpretive discipline that seeks to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the Biblical authors centered on Christ as they unfold and expand across progressive revelation. It is to read the whole Bible as God presents it according to Scripture's own categories, patterns, terms, and explanations. Biblical theology, as an interpretive discipline, safeguards the church from error by discerning how the Bible fits itself together and tells its own meta-narrative. It is to read all of Scripture as an integrated whole focused on Jesus. By contrast, "Exegetical Theology" is primarily concerned with the right understanding of words, phrases, sentences of a given text. "Historical Theology" is the discipline of tracing the development of the church's understanding of doctrine across the centuries. "Systematic theology" is the discipline of organizing the teaching of Scripture into timely, coherent categories (similar to an encyclopedia). Whereas Systematic Theology reads *across* the grain of Scripture, Biblical theology reads *along* the grain of Scripture. Biblical theology safeguards a right Systematic Theology. All work in sweet harmony to grasp Christ in His Word all the more.

[125] A Divine Covenant, always initiated by God, is an oath-bound relationship with promised blessings and curses that God makes with His creatures through the mediation of a man depicted as an obedient son. Every covenant is conditional on the obedience of the "son" through whom the covenant is made. Yet at the same time, unconditional in that God will ensure His gospel promises prevail, despite the disobedience and covenant-breaking of the "son" and subsequent need for another covenant. The covenants themselves is that they point to, promise, and are fulfilled by Jesus. No covenant, then no relationship with God.

[126] The word "testament" simply means "covenant" and is a carryover from the old Latin translation of the Bible. In other words, are Bibles are divided into the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Jesus' New Covenant is not merely another succession in a long line of covenants, but His covenant is categorically and qualitatively different and greater than all the other covenants in that everything prior prophetically pointed to, and is fulfilled by, the New Covenant in Christ.

Every word has the context of a sentence, paragraph, and book. Each book is situated in a specific covenantal context that is organically related to all that has come before it. And ultimately, a whole-Bible ("canonical") context since Jesus and His New Covenant are the fulfillment of what preceded and fountain of what follows in Acts and the Epistles. In this way, no text of Scripture is fully understood until it is finally read in light of Christ. This reality demands that each passage be read with "tri-focal" lenses for the "near-sighted context," the "middle distance" of what has transpired up to the text, and "far-sighted distance" viewing the Bible as a whole in light of Christ.

Biblical Theology, then, is the interpretive discipline that seeks to safeguard a church's proper reading, interpretation, and application of the Word of Christ.

A healthy church member is one who strives to understand how the whole Bible "fits together" in Christ on its own terms and then to faithfully live out of this understanding as a church.

(4) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Prayer.[127]

Prayer doesn't change things; God does. As God speaks to us in His Word, we speak His Word back to Him in prayer. Prayer expresses our need and demonstrates our desire to commune with God. God works mysteriously in prayer to conform our own hearts to His. Praying Scripture back to God should be a central staple of a healthy prayer life, as well as praying through the membership directory. An emphasis in a healthy church is corporate prayer. Jesus is uniquely present, and God is uniquely pleased when the saints gather to worship through dependent prayer.

A healthy church member is one who prays diligently both in private and corporately.

(5) Biblical Perspective on Consecutive Expositional Preaching.

We believe the main preaching diet of the church should be working through books of the Bible section by section where the main point(s) of the text are the main point(s) of

[127] Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18; 1 Timothy 2:8.

the sermon centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Expositional preaching "exposes" what God says. This safeguards that Scripture is understood in context. Also, because "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Matthew 4:4), working consecutively through books of the Bible in expositional preaching ensures a church is well-fed by the whole counsel of God in Christ (Acts 20:18–27). Topical preaching has a helpful place insofar as it is done expositionally. At FCF, we periodically include topical preaching in our diet, but consecutive expositional preaching is the norm.

A healthy church member is one who hungers for the whole counsel of God, prays for the preaching, and prioritizes sitting under the proclaimed Word of God.

(6) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Evangelism and Conversion.

Conversion is a work of the Spirit of God[128] through the proclamation of the Gospel of God[129] to make a child of God[130] by grace through faith[131] in the Son of God. This is in contrast to "decision-ism," which seeks to bring a person to a point of commitment, often through emotional manipulation, hand raising, aisle walking, and the like. This is certainly not to say that a person should not be challenged to repent and believe the gospel. They absolutely should! It is to say that many people have falsely professed faith in Christ and been assured they are saved because of their one-time profession, even though they bear no fruit in keeping with repentance and exhibit no evidence of the Spirit in their lives. A person who has experienced conversion or new birth by the Spirit will evidence the work of God in their lives, although still hampered by sin. Biblical evangelism forsakes man-made efforts to manipulate a person into a decision for Christ. Biblical evangelism will consistently call for genuine faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, repentance from sin, and participation in the local body of Christ.

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[128] John 3:1–21.

[129] Romans 1:16; 10:9–17.

[130] Ephesians 1:4–10.

[131] Ephesians 2:8–10. Grammatically, when v8 reads, "this is not your own doing," it is referring to the entire previous clause, "For you have been saved by grace through faith." Salvation, grace, and faith are not sourced in ourselves as if God brings the grace, and we bring the faith. That's why it concludes "it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." When Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ," it includes that the gift of faith is transmitted through the preaching of the gospel. When the Spirit causes someone to be born again (John 3), a person's "first breath" is to exercise the faith given them by the Spirit. God does not believe for us. We are not robots. But neither do we generate faith of our own accord since outside of Christ we are unable and unwilling to come to Christ (Romans 8:7).

A healthy church member is one who prayerfully and purposefully sows the seeds of the gospel while trusting the Lord to redeem and save individuals.

(7) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Mission and Discipleship.[132]
Making disciples is the mission of the church (Matthew 28:18–20). Jesus has given a mission to the church that no other individual or organization can fully accomplish, to make, mature, and multiply disciples of Christ for the glory of God. There may be any number of good endeavors a church may choose to participate in, but they should always be in service to, rather than supplant or suppress, the mission of the church.

Jesus regionally prioritized mission and discipleship in Acts through the concentric circles of "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus, in a sense, makes each local church the center of the world from which His gospel would expand to the ends of the earth.[133] We apply this as "Flagstaff, Tribal Nations, Arizona, the ends of the earth." Jesus has put us in Flagstaff to primarily reach Flagstaff. By God's grace, we cannot abdicate our mission such that one day other churches will need to send missionaries here because we were not faithful to our local mission.[134]

Discipleship is very similar to apprenticeship. The word itself, "disciple," means learner or follower and is what a Christian is in relation to Jesus. The command to make disciples is given to every believer (Matthew 28:18–20). Consider how Jesus discipled through both teaching and modeling while living among His disciples.[135] Discipleship involves the transformation of the whole person: head (biblical theology), heart (Christ-likeness), and hands ("love others as yourself"). It is both the "body parts" (members) and various ministries of the local church that are the primary tools in forming disciples. It takes a whole church to make a whole disciple.

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[132] Matthew 28:18–20.

[133] Just like God's intention for Adam in the Garden to expand the boarders of the Eden until it filled all the earth.

[134] Our responsibility is to be faithful, God is the one who makes us fruitful.

[135] We tend to view discipleship as either taking a class or sitting down one-on-one over coffee. But Jesus, as our model, had varying degrees of discipleship relationships: the multitudes, the 120; the 70; the 12; the 3; and the 1. For Jesus, life-on-life relationship was the context for word-based relationships, Biblical instruction, and modeling a godly life. Classes are very helpful, and one-on-one is very helpful, but it takes the whole church and her many ministries, especially Sunday worship. Ideally, a mature and experienced saint would walk with a smaller group of younger and newer saints through the life and ministries of the church (i.e., attend classes and events together, spend time together outside a "church" context, as the mature saint disciples along the way).

A healthy church member is one who pursues and provides discipleship through interpersonal relationships and the ministries of the church.

(8) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Membership.

Church membership is central to Jesus' plan of discipleship. The Bible teaches the principle of a relational mechanism being in place at a local church by which the saints know who they are (and aren't) responsible for (discussed above). The Bible provides flexibility and latitude as to "how" this principle of mutual belonging is expressed. In short, the Bible teaches that a local church is to know who belongs to that church and who does not.

A healthy church member is one who can articulate the basic principles of membership and attentively watches over his or her fellow saints.

(9) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Government.[136]

The New Testament describes only two local church offices that endure once the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets was laid, and they passed from the scene: Elders and Deacons.[137] Elders are synonymously called Overseers and Pastor/Shepherds. Elders exist in a plurality and possess the Christ-given authority to oversee, administrate, and shepherd the affairs and people of the local church, primarily through prayer and the Word of God. The central task of elders is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." The work of ministry is, at heart, "speaking the truth in love" to the end that the Body of Christ builds itself up (Ephesians 4:12-16). This means pastor-elders work hard in equipping the church with the Word so that believers can do the work Jesus expects the church to do. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Christians are born to speak the truth in love to fellow saints to build and bless the church. Pastor-elders are to equip Christians to that end.

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[136] Acts 14:23; 20:17–38; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:1–4.

[137] See Philippians 1:1 (cf.Ephesians 2:20). "Evangelists" still play a critical role in the church but Scripture never presents the gift as an office in the local assembly. Pastor-elders are to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5) as are all believers (Matthew 28:16–20). At FCF we have do have the office of "Deacon of Evangelism."

Deacons serve under the authority and direction of the elders to unify and administer the affairs of the church so as to free up the elders to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer.

A healthy church member is one who regularly prays for their elders and deacons while supporting and participating in the ministries of the church with the aim of building up fellow members in Christ.

(10) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Generosity.[138]

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The giving of one's personal resources to the local church is not an optional add-on to the Christian life. Scripture provides several reasons why God commands us to give, including (a) meeting the needs of others, especially fellow saints, near and far (2 Corinthians 8:4) (b) providing the livelihood of the pastor(s) (1 Corinthians 9:4–11; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17–18) (c) advancing the gospel through missionary-type work (2 Corinthians 11:8) (d) and by implication, to show that God, not money, is the king of our hearts and our sovereign trust (Luke 16:1–15). While the NT emphasizes that giving is to be cheerful, generous, and frequent, it does not specify a required amount.

A healthy church member is one who joyfully and faithfully gives as they are able to so as to pool their resources with fellow saints to advance the gospel in and through the church while meeting tangible needs and supporting staff.

(11) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Service.

The Christian life comes to us with a towel around its waist (John 13:1–20). A Christian is not a volunteer who serves on their own terms, as they feel like it, if it interests them, or if they get around to it. The Bible teaches that a Christian is an other-oriented slave of Christ, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," and that we are each vital body parts of one another (Acts 20:35; Romans 6:22; 1 Corinthians 12:12–31). We should be using our time, skills/talents/gifting, and resources to serve and bless others as we are able. "Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14). Our servanthood is an act of worship.

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[138] 1 Corinthians 9:4–14; 2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:1–15; Galatians 6:6–10; 1 Timothy 6:18 (see also Luke 10:25–37).

A healthy church member is one who has the happy attitude of a servant to their church, seeks to meet needs as they are able, and is even willing to do things outside their comfort zone. They know it is more blessed to give than receive.

(12) Biblical Understanding and Embracing of Church Discipline / Excommunication.[139]

Scripture requires local churches, as a last step, to remove members who continually and willfully live in sin despite numerous and prolonged gracious attempts by fellow members to call that person back to Christ. Whereas baptism is the corporate stamp of approval of the local church that a person is "one of us now," excommunication is the corporate removal of that affirmation. Church discipline says, "We can no longer affirm your profession of faith because you habitually refuse to bear fruit in keeping with repentance." The goals of excommunication are to see a wayward Christian brought to their senses or a false convert saved, the church protected from sin, and most importantly, the witness of Christ protected through His church to a lost and unbelieving world. Churches that do not practice excommunication when they should undermine the gospel, show that they believe Scripture is not true and authoritative, suggest grace is ineffective and cheap, imply love is weak, and demonstrate that the glory of Christ is not paramount. Far from being punitive and judgmental, all the steps of discipline are best viewed as errands of grace and acts of love.

A healthy church member is one who desires and prays for the faithfulness and fruitfulness of fellow covenant members; watches over, fervently prays, admonishes, and pursues others in grace.

[139] Matthew 18:15–35; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 1 Timothy 5:19–22.

APPENDIX 3: EKKLESIA SERMON SERIES

This series is a great place to start as an overview of life in the church.

Sermon 1. **The New Covenant Church** is the point and purpose of Biblical history. January 23, 2022

Sermon 2. **Built and Bound by the Gospel**: The local church is blessed, built together, and bound by the gospel. The purpose of the gospel is to make and shape disciples of Christ in the local church. January 30, 2022

Sermon 3. **Keys of the Kingdom - Overview**: Jesus places the Keys in the hands of each local church, who together are responsible for exercising those Keys. Jesus expects every Christian to be in a place where they can participate in exercising the keys (both receiving and performing the ministry of the keys). February 6, 2022

Sermon 4. **Keys of the Kingdom - Baptism**: The local church is collectively responsible for vetting and affirming professions of faith (same Jesus, same gospel, same doctrine) and then baptizing (or hearing the testimony of baptism), welcoming a new member of the church who can now, in turn, exercise the keys with the church. The key of baptism "opens the door to membership in the New Covenant community, the local church." February 13, 2022

Sermon 5. **Keys of the Kingdom - Communion (Part 1)**: The Key of baptism admits to the Lord's Table, which is the external, objective, corporate sign of the New Covenant that makes the invisible people of God visible. The Table is not a privatized, subjective option as we feel like it. We are not given the authority to self-excommunicate. It is a family meal customarily taken when the church gathers together. February 27, 2022

Sermon 6. **Keys of the Kingdom - Communion (Part 2)**: The Table proclaims the gospel, unifies the church, and is a dress rehearsal for our future feast with God. March 6, 2022

Sermon 7. **Keys of the Kingdom - Ex-Communion**: The Key of Discipline bars from the Lord's Table a member who willfully refuses to repent from sin and no longer lives life in keeping with their baptismal testimony. The key of discipline is the church's responsibility and authority from Christ to remove their affirmation given through the key of baptism and ongoing at the Lord's Table. In baptism, the church says, “You're one of us now." In excommunication, the church says, "We are no longer confident you are one of us now." The key of discipline "closes the door to the New Covenant Community, the local church." March 13, 2022

Sermon 8. **Preaching All of Christ From All of Scripture (Part 1)** is the central feature of a faithful gospel church. All else hangs on this. March 20, 2022

Sermon 9. **Preaching All of Christ From All of Scripture (Part 2)** is the central feature of a faithful gospel church. All else hangs on this. March 27, 2022

Sermon 10. **Hearing & Receiving All of Christ from All of Scripture (part 3)**. We are responsible and accountable to Christ for how we sit under His preached Word. We must guard against growing dull of hearing. April 3, 2022

Sermon 11. **Hearing & Receiving All of Christ from All of Scripture (part 4)**. We must guard against "digital creepers" who seduce us away from the Word of Christ. We must saturate ourselves with the Word of God, especially as it is preached. April 10, 2022

Sermon 12. **Biblical Elders (Part 1)**. Faithful Churches Appoint and Affirm Faithful, Qualified, Pastor-Elder-Overseers. May 1, 2022

Sermon 13. **Biblical Elders (Part 2)**. Faithful Pastor-Elders pay attention to the flock, guard against wolves, and equip the church with all of Christ from all of Scripture so that the church may minister to one another. May 15, 2022

Sermon 14. **Biblical Deacons.** Deacons serve under the eldership and facilitate ministry for the church. They are needed anytime the elders' ministry of the Word and prayer is threatened by other matters. Deacons protect against problems, unify where there might be cause for division, and mobilize the church for service and good deeds. Pastor-elders lead the ministry, deacons facilitate the ministry, and the members do the ministry. May 29, 2022

Sermon 15. **Servant Slaves of Christ**. Christians are not volunteers who serve on their own terms as they feel like it. They are slaves of Christ with towels around their waist, bearing their crosses, denying themselves, and eagerly meeting any needs presented, especially in the life of their local church. June 5, 2022

Sermon 16. **Generous Giving** advances the gospel in and through the church. June 12, 2022

Sermon 17. **Living Life Devoted Together In Christ**. The church is the body of Christ living together with one another in gathering, prayer, and fellowship. June 19, 2022

Sermon 18. **Faithful Churches are Faithful to Jesus' Mission**. Christians are to make disciples and share the good news of Christ's Gospel with the world, faithful to Jesus, His mission, and His churches. July 24, 2022

APPENDIX 4: THEOLOGICAL TRIAGE SERMON SERIES[140]

Sermon 1. **Gospel, Unity, and Conscience**. This sermon introduces the series and establishes from Scripture that there are doctrines which would be sinful to fight for and others that would be sinful not to fight for. Since Jesus ranks the weightiness of doctrine, so should we for the sake of church unity and partnerships.

Sermon 2. **Gospel Matters, Part 1**. This message explores the heart of the gospel, beginning with the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Sermon 3. **Gospel Matters, Part 2**. This message explores the heart of the gospel, focused on having the right Person and Work of Jesus.

Sermon 4. **Gospel Matters, Part 3**. This message explores the heart of the gospel, focused on having the right way of salvation.

Sermon 5. **Church Matters**. This message explores why denominations exist, why we must agree on what makes us a church doctrinally, and ways to partner with other churches.

Sermon 6. **Conscience Matters, Part 1**. This message explores what the conscience is and what it is for; how it changes; and what to do with a dirty conscience.

Sermon 7. **Conscience Matters, Part 2**. This message explores how the gospel impacts our consciences; how to handle different consciences in the church; and core issues with conscience matters.

Sermon 8. **Conscience Matters, Part 3**. This message explores what it means to be a "stronger brother" in Christ.

Sermon 9. **Conscience Matters, Part 4**. This message explores what it means to be a "weaker brother" in Christ.

Sermon 10. **Conscience Matters, Part 5**. This message explores how to welcome one another and live in harmony together.

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[140] https://fcfonline.org/media/series/fmb2d8f/theological-triage

APPENDIX 5: WHAT IS A BAPTIST?

Traditionally, Baptists have embraced the following core distinctives, some of which overlap with other Denominations:[141]

1. **Reformed Soteriology** - A number of harmonious doctrines from Scripture showing that God is sovereign in the salvation of sinners.

2. **Covenant Theology** - A view that the Bible is organized and unfolds across a series of interconnected Divine Covenants.[142]

3. **Believer's Baptism** - Since the New Testament never explicitly commands baptism of unbelievers (infants); never explicitly demonstrates that baptism of infants occurred; whereas it explicitly commands believers to be baptized[143] and demonstrates believers baptism at all points; and the various meanings assigned to baptism such as union with Christ[144], passing from death to life in Christ[145], dead to sin[146], no longer enslaved to sin[147], walking in the newness of life[148], our crucifixion with Christ[149], our

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[141] It should be pointed out that there arose Baptist churches in the 1600's that embraced Arminianism (man's self-sovereignty in salvation) creating two distinct groups: General Baptists (Arminian) and Particular Baptists (Reformed Soteriology.)

[142] Baptists and Presbyterians agree on the covenantal structure but differ on the relationship between the covenants and what makes the New Covenant "new."

[143] For example, in Matt 28:18–20, the steps of the Great Commission is to "Go" and preach the gospel; "baptize" those who repent; "teach them to observe all Jesus commanded" where teaching occurs in the local church.

[144] Romans 6:5

[145] Romans 6:1–4

[146] Romans 6:6–8

[147] Romans 6:6

[148] Romans 6:4

[149] Romans 6:6

promised resurrection with Christ,[150] not being under law but under grace[151], justification by faith[152], sonship to God[153], etc; As such, Baptist believe Scripture overwhelmingly teaches that only confessing believers are to be baptized.

4. **Regulative Principle** - God in His Word tells how (and how not) to worship Him. The Bible "regulates" what is permissible worship which can be summarized as to "preach, pray, sing, and see the Word of God." We are not free to worship God with whatever is right in our eyes no matter how sincere, especially when we gather as a church.

5. **Regenerate Church Membership** - The promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:34 was that, unlike the Old Covenant, evangelism of those within the covenant community would not be necessary because all would be believers; and when Jesus teaches us to pray, "Father, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" wherein heaven only has believers in it; and given the New Testament realities of baptism, only believers can be members of the New Covenant Community, the local church.

6. **Confessional Identity** - Baptists are a confessional people and while a number of Baptist confessions exist, (nearly) all trace back to the "1689.[154]" Historic Creeds and confessions have historically been a staple of Baptist life and teaching

7. **Elder-led Congregationalism, served by Deacons** - The New Testament is not just descriptive on how churches were governed, it is prescriptive telling us what to do. In other words, Baptists do not believe we are free to change the structure of the church as depicted in the New Testament. A local church is autonomous with no higher authority outside itself since the members hold the "Keys of the Kingdom" together. Yet a local church should be in fellowship / association with other like-minded

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[150] Romans 6:5

[151] Romans 6:14

[152] Galatians 3:3–29

[153] Galatians 3:26

[154] Some Baptists will say, "No Creed but the Bible" thereby rejecting historic Creeds. On the surface, it may sound right but on inspection, it is not. "No Creed but the Bible," in practice turns into, "No Creed but my private interpretation of the Bible." Further, Creeds seek to faithfully represent and summarize what the Bible teaches and were hammered out in a community of Pastors seeking to serve and protect their flocks.

churches. Jesus distributes some of His authority to pastor-elders and some of His authority to the entire congregation. Congregationalism is a display of the "Priesthood of all believers."

8. **Separation of (not "from"!) Church and State** - The state is to protect the church keeping it free to gather, worship, and evangelize. The state is not to favor one denomination, nor establish it's own denomination, nor try to exercise the "Keys of the Kingdom" that belong to the local church. Conversely, the church does not hold the "Sword of the state" but does inform the state of the "good and the bad" by God's definition in keeping with Romans 13.

9. **Liberty of Conscience / Soul Liberty** - Every person will answer directly to God, and give an account of themselves on the day of judgment. No family member, government, church, or church official has the right or ability to force or coerce belief and practice at the heart level. There may be outward conformity, but true faith is a matter of the will / heart / conscience.

For more detail and history on Baptists, read on…

What is a Protestant?

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517 in Germany with Martin Luther.

Protestants were a group that "protested" the man-made teachings and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. The chief "protest" was that the gospel of "justification by faith" had been lost.

Protestantism was a recovery movement of the gospel and an attempt to reform the church back to it's Biblical New Testament roots and to purify the Church from traditions and teachings that overrode or outright contradicted the teachings of the Bible.

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy often attempt to disparage Protestants as something, "new." From a timeline perspective, yes, Protestantism is "new." But as a reform and recovery moment, it is as old as the Bible.

In fact, similar patterns can be found in the Old Testament itself. Think of all the reforms during the period of the Judges, or Josiah's reforms. After roughly 1,000 years of drift, neglect, and outright false teaching, the books of Ezra-Nehemiah sought to reform the

religious beliefs and practices of Israel back to the writings of Moses. Furthermore, 600 years after those reforms, Jesus would do something similar in the Gospel Accounts with the Pharisees.

As such, there is not only biblical warrant, but also expectation that recovery movements will be necessary until Christ returns. One battle cry of the Reformation was "*semper reformanda*" which means "always reforming." This humble cry indicated that neither an individual Christian or church would be prefect this side of glory and therefore always be in need of reform in doctrine and/or practice.

The point of unification for the Protestants was the gospel which became summarized in the "solas" of the Reformation: "We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to God's glory alone."

We are saved:
1. "By grace alone," and no merit or worth in and of ourselves, it's all of God's grace.
2. "Through faith alone," and no work or contribution on our part. Jesus did all the work for us.
3. "In Christ alone," as there is no other mediator or savior.
4. "According to Scripture alone," as opposed to man made teachings and traditions that come to override the Bible.
5. "To God's glory alone," and not to any other person or Church.

But on other doctrinal matters, Protestants ended up forming into denominations of like-mindedness.[155] Debated issues included the form of church government; the relationship between Church and state; and the meaning and proper subjects of baptism and communion.

The major early Protestant denominations in the first hundred years of the Reformation were:

1. Lutheranism (c. 1521) - Originated in Germany and named after Martin Luther
2. Reformed (c. 1530) - John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli in France and Switzerland
3. Anglicanism (c. 1534; Episcopalianism (1609; outside of England)) - The Church of England
4. Presbyterian (c. 1560) - The Church of Scotland founded by John Knox

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[155] See the sermon series, "Theological Triage."

5. Congregationalism (c.1582) - A type of Puritan church in England.
6. Baptist (c. 1609) - John Smyth fled England to Amsterdam due to religious persecution.

In the above list, only the Baptists engaged in "Believers Baptism" whereas the others baptized infants.

What is an Evangelical?

Evangelical essentially means, "gospel people."

All Evangelicals are Protestants but not all Protestants are Evangelical. All Baptist are Protestant and most are Evangelical.

Today, Evangelicals distance themselves from mainline protestant denominations that have moved liberal ("unorthodox") in their teachings.

Historians usually identify evangelicals around four principles:

1. Biblicism - a robust emphasis that the Bible alone is the supreme authority for the church and is to be interpreted with respect to the Author's intent and faithfully applied to life and doctrine.

2. Crucicentrism - A primary focus on Jesus Christ, His work on the Cross, and the cross-bearing life He calls His followers to.

3. Conversionism - An emphasis on personal conversion through being "born again" (c.f. John 3) that manifests itself in a new lifestyle, new desires, and new affections for God.

4. Activism and Evangelism - A strong emphasis on good works ("activism") and sharing the gospel with others ("evangelism"). Baked into these is a very strong missionary impulse.

What is a (reformed / particular) Baptist?

Baptist viewed themselves as continuing the Reformation ("*Semper Reformanda*") but were misunderstood and persecuted for two primary reasons.

First, there was a group called "Anabaptists" (c. 1525; which means "baptized again") who practiced believers baptism but also had other radical views, in some cases, such as violent theocracy and radical polygamy due to apocalyptic beliefs (c.f. The Munster Rebellion of 1534–35). Baptists, sadly, got mistakenly lumped in to this category for their views on believers baptism.

Second, to not baptize a child was a radical act at the time for a few reasons: some viewed baptism as necessary in some way for salvation; baptism was necessary for citizenship in most places; and some saw great continuity in the Old Covenant with circumcision of babies and baptism of babies. (It is important to note that while Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox all practice "paedobaptism" ("infant baptism") they do so for different theological reasons with different understandings from one another.)

In order to provide order and continuity among Baptist churches, to not be confused as Anabaptists, and to show the great doctrinal similarities with other Protestant churches, especially Presbyterians, a group of pastors drafted the "First London Baptist Confession" (1644/1646).

Later, in 1677, the "Second London Baptist Confession," or commonly, "The 1689" (the year it was adopted) became the Baptist statement of faith. "The 1689" largely followed the Presbyterian "Westminster Confession of Faith" (1647) and elements of the Puritan Congregational "Savoy Declaration" (1658). As a persecuted minority at the time, the Baptist aim was to demonstrate fellowship, continuity, and clarity on many agreed upon doctrines as well as a biblical defense for believers baptism.

A Bit of Interesting Baptist History?

Many Baptist churches today are not characterized by the mentioned above. Why is that?

The distinctives listed above largely characterized English, Continental Europe, and American Baptist churches for about 200 years up to the mid/late 1800's.

In America, during westward expansion of the 1800's, (negative) shifts began to take place in Baptist church government. These included:

1. A shift toward a "single pastor" model, it seems, due to rapid expansion and lack of elder qualified men. Sometimes a single pastor was the shepherd of multiple congregations. Whereas historic Baptist churches used "pastor / elder / bishop" interchangeably (as the New Testament does) they came to use "pastor" almost exclusively.

2. Dropping the title "elder." This occurred in large part to retain, ironically, a baptist "identity." This was done to distinguish Baptists from Presbyterians, Church of Christ Campbellites, and to a lesser extant Mormons, all of whom used the term, "elder."

3. Authoritative "Board of Deacons." In the absence of "the pastor" and/or lack of multiple pastor-elders, the "Board of Deacons" not only looked after the physical affairs and needs of the church but took on many "pastoring" duties as well. In many ways, the "Board of Deacons" took on "Board of Elder" type roles, but as was sometimes the case, did not meet the qualifications of an elder. A tension is that Ephesians 4:11 indicates the office of Elder is a spiritual gift of Christ to the local church. When men who are not spiritually gifted for the office are placed in that role problems can arise.

4. "Landmarkism" and "Democratic Individualism." These were theological shifts that steered away from Elder-led Congregationalism to a pure democratic congregational rule (e.g. the membership initiates and decides almost every decision).

While it is true that some Baptist churches retained most of their historic distinctives listed above, a majority did not for these reasons and more.[156]

Thus in the last 150 years or so, many Baptist churches drifted from their historic, biblical origins in both church government and Creedal stability. Generations arose not knowing their biblical and historic baptist legacy. The assumption was that these shifts were always the norm when in fact they were abnormal.

Thankfully, in the last 30 years or so, focused efforts have been made to teach and reform Baptist churches back to careful, faithful, biblical origins. FCF happily stands in that reforming stream.

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[156] One can see how modern day "non-denominational' churches are "baptistic" in nature.

APPENDIX 6: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT MEMBERSHIP, BAPTISM, & YOUNG PEOPLE IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Outline:
Please note there is a biblical and logical progression that builds across this Q&A.

Section 1 - On The Keys of the Kingdom

1. What are the Keys of the Kingdom?
2. How are the invisible Keys made visible?
3. What is the relationship between baptism, communion, and ex-communion?
4. Who holds the Keys of the Kingdom?
5. Why do you say, 'belong to the church?' Aren't baptism and communion personal?
6. How does the great commission summarize the use of the Keys Of The Kingdom?
7. Doesn't the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch contradict all of this, especially that the Keys belong to the local church?

Section 2 - On Baptism

8. Why do we baptize?
9. What does baptism signify or display?
10. Does baptism save, or is it necessary for salvation?
11. Who is baptism for?
12. Who can be baptized?
13. Should babies be baptized?
14. How should we perform baptism?
15. Who performs baptism?
16. Why do we use the language "on behalf of the local church" when baptizing?
17. Where should baptism take place?
18. Are we baptized more than once?
19. Should I get baptized again to rededicate my life to Christ?
20. What if I am unsure about my baptism?

Section 3 - On Baptism & Membership

21. Why is baptism (or a baptismal testimony) needed to join a church?
22. What commitment does a person make in their baptism?
23. What is the relationship between baptism and communion?

24. Should I take communion if I have not been baptized?

Section 4 - On Baptism, Children, & Membership

25. How should we think about young people, baptism, and membership, given all of the above?
26. What do you mean by 'treated with charity and credibility'?
27. What are some questions parents/family should think through before encouraging a child to be baptized?
28. Is there a minimum age for baptism?
29. What does membership look like for a young person?
30. What might a disciplinary process look like for a young person?

Section 5 - On the Process of Baptism & Membership at FCF

31. What is the process of pursuing baptism and/or membership at FCF?

Section 1 - On The Keys of the Kingdom

1. What are the Keys of the Kingdom? They symbolize and summarize the New Covenantal job description Jesus authorizes and expects of each local church to: [a] evangelize; [b] vet, affirm (or deny) professions of faith; and [c] welcome publicly into the membership of church via baptism (or a baptism testimony) to then receive Communion [d] and if need be, remove from membership the willfully unrepentant. The "Keys" symbolize being welcomed into or removed from Jesus' New Covenant community, the local church. The Keys demonstrate that the membership of a church has a formal basis, structure, and belongs to the membership. [See Matthew 16:15–19; 18:15–20; 26:26–28; 28:18–20]

2. How are the invisible Keys made visible? The Keys are made visible when the local church publicly acknowledges a person's credible profession of faith by baptizing them into membership, taking communion, and performing ex-communion (i.e., Church discipline; i.e., removal from membership). [See Matthew 16:18:15–20; 26:26–28; 28:18–20]

3. What is the relationship between baptism, communion, and ex-communion? These can be likened to keys on the key ring. They are inseparable from one another, like hitched train cars. To speak of one is to inevitably speak of them all. To rightly understand

baptism, one must understand its relationship to communion and ex-communion and vice versa. Each cannot be fully understood apart from each other. Baptism is the one-time public entry sign into Jesus' New Covenant, which then leads to taking communion (the Lord's Supper), which is the ongoing sign of the New Covenant. Ex-communion (i.e., church discipline) is the act of removing the designation "brother" (officially & publicly received at baptism) and from communion due to a willful and unrepentant life and/or doctrine that contradicts or denies one's profession of faith. Baptism is an implied promise to participate in the discipline of the church, both in giving and receiving, which is chiefly made visible in who is welcomed to the Communion Table. [See Matthew 16:15–19; 18:15–20; 26:26–28; 28:18–20]

4. Who holds the Keys of the Kingdom? Jesus gives and places the Keys of the Kingdom into the hands of each local church, not individuals, families, fathers, para-church ministries, elders, or anyone else. When a person joins a church, they join in holding and exercising the Keys with that church. The Keys belong to each local church. [See Matt 16:18–19; 18:17–20]

5. Why do you say, 'the Keys belong to the church'? Aren't baptism and communion personal? Yes, baptism and communion, the signs of the New Covenant, are personal but not private. We do not self-baptize, nor self-administer communion, nor self-excommunicate. Sadly, our day and age has changed the biblical meaning of these covenantal signs. Our age has uncoupled baptism and communion from each other, as if they were not connected or ordered with baptism before communion. Our age has assumed the Keys are held by any individual, not the local church. The local church is functionally viewed as an irrelevant and optional add-on to the Christian life. The biblical truth, however, is that the New Covenant signs are proclamatory (they "preach" the gospel), objective (they are not based on how I feel or what I think), interconnected, and belonging to the local church. The modern change of meaning and purpose is a grave error with downstream consequences on the meaning and understanding of the local church and Christian life. Jesus designed the covenant signs to be rightly administered by the local church, and to reveal our personal belonging to one another in the local church. We are not baptized and then released into the wild to be devoured by wolves. Rather, we are baptized into "sheep pens" called the local church. Baptism and communion are personal but not private. They do not belong to any individual Christian but to the local church. [See Romans 6:3–11; 1 Corinthians 11:17–34]

6. How does the Great Commission summarize the use of the Keys of the Kingdom? In Matthew 28:18–20 ("The Great Commission"), Jesus synthesizes much of His teaching in

Matthew by giving the essential three steps needed to "make disciples." These are: [1] Go and evangelize (i.e., "do what I did with Peter in Matthew 16"); [2] baptize credible gospel professors; [3] then bring them into the local church as baptized members to teach them to observe all Jesus commanded (including holding the Keys and observing communion, etc). This is how Jesus builds the church He promised in Matthew 16:15–19, by making, maturing, and multiplying His disciples, symbolized in the Keys of the Kingdom. And, as needed, how Jesus keeps His church and her witness pure through ex-communication [See Matthew 16:15–19; 18:15–20; 26:26–28; 28:18–20]

7. Doesn't the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch contradict all of this, especially that the Keys belong to the Local Church? No. The Eunuch is the only "exception" to the rule; that does not create the rule and is unique, even in biblical history, since the church was just born and there was no local church for the Eunuch to hold the Keys with. This story has been wrongly used to justify so-called spontaneous baptisms decoupled from any responsibility or relationship to the local church. In the Book of Acts, every baptism is uniquely "immediate" because both the preachers and responders to the gospel manifest supernatural signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit, leaving no doubt of true conversion and therefore not needing any delay in baptism. In the case of the Eunuch, the Holy Spirit supernaturally transported Philip to the Eunuch, such that there would be no question about his conversion. So does the story of the Eunuch normalize and encourage spontaneous baptisms, especially decoupled from both the local church and from communion and ex-communion? Certainly not. But it does seem to allow for some unique circumstances. For example, a person has a clear and credible profession of faith, but will enlist in the military in a few months. The church could baptize this person and bring them into membership for care, love, and support, especially during their training. And should the person ultimately move to another place, the church would happily transfer membership in due time. In such a case, the local church still exercises the Keys in vetting, baptizing, and caring for the individual, intending to see them well-established in a local church. [See Acts 8:26–40]

Section 2 - On Baptism

8. Why do we baptize? Jesus commands it as a public response of faith to the gospel. Baptism serves as the public entry sign into the New Covenant whereby a believer identifies with the gospel of Jesus Christ and is joined to a local church to hold the Keys of the Kingdom with them (Matt 16:13–19; 28:18–20). Baptism is also a public naming

ceremony in the Name of the Trinity (in the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) wherein a believer is officially received by God's family as a "brother/sister" in Christ.

9. What does baptism signify or display? The gospel and one's faith in it! The act of going under the water shows one's union with the death and burial of Jesus. Coming out of the water signifies the believer's new life in Christ now, resurrection to come, and cleansing from all sin: past, present, and future! [See Romans 6:3–11]

10. Does baptism save or is it necessary for salvation? No, salvation is by grace through faith alone, and no work or act of obedience of man! Baptism is a response to, and public display of, the faith one already has. It is how one goes public with their faith. To be sure, a person is saved the moment a person is born again and believes. In that moment they become a brother in Christ and member of the Universal Church. But in baptism this faith is vetted and affirmed as credibly true, and the believer is presented to God's people as a visible member of the family of God. [See Ephesians 2:8–9; 1 Corinthians 1:17]

11. Who is baptism for? Baptism is both for a person publicly professing their faith and for the church affirming that profession. It signifies a two-way relationship with rights and responsibilities, namely of joining and participating in the local church, to exercise the Keys of the Kingdom with them. [See Matthew 28:18–20]

12. Who can be baptized? Any person upon credible profession of faith. A credible profession of faith does not require a seminary degree but an age appropriate understanding of the gospel, including: God's triune nature; Jesus' identity as God the Son made flesh; Jesus' sinless life, death, and resurrection for our sins and our need to repent of sin; the fact that salvation is by grace through faith, not works; and that we are baptized into the membership of the church. [See Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 10:9–13]

13. Should babies be baptized? No, for at least four interrelated reasons: [1] there is no explicit biblical command to baptize an unbeliever, including a baby, and therefore would be a violation of the regulative principle that determines our practice of worship from Scripture; [2] Every instance of baptism in the New Testament is always of a believing person with a credible profession of faith, including the so-called "household baptisms," wherein those who believed manifested the Spirit and were baptized [Compare Acts 10:2 with 10:44–48 and 11:14–17; Acts 16:31 with 16:32–34; Acts 18:8. Because Scripture interprets Scripture, these three examples should be applied to Acts 16:14–15 which is ambiguous]. The other "household" passage, Acts 2:39, demands that

those who are baptized first "repent" after believing the Gospel (v. 38), something which a baby cannot do. Further, Acts 2:39 speaks of three groups: (a) "you," (b) "your children," (c) "all who are far off." If group "b" can be baptized apart from faith and without repentance, then that must hold true for groups "a" and "c." But Peter tells group "a" to repent; thus groups "b" and "c" must do the same. Baptism cannot mean or depict two contradictory realities: that repentance is needed (groups "a" and "c") and repentance is not needed (group "b") to be baptized. [3] Every passage that defines and/or explains what baptism symbolizes or means requires that the person is a professing believer. The meaning and symbolism of baptism include the following present realities: [a] baptized by the Holy Spirit; [b] the old self has died with Christ, is now walking in new life having been set free from sin; [c] has put on Christ; [d] is in union with Christ; [e] is no longer dead in sin but alive in Christ, with sins forgiven; [f] is an appeal to God for a good conscience by the one being baptized. Unless the Bible teaches that baptism saves us apart from faith [i.e., "baptismal regeneration"] which it does not! Then the conclusion based on these realities is that only people who have repented and believed are baptized. [See Acts 1:5; Romans 6:3–11; Colossians 2:11–14; 1 Peter 3:21]. [4] Old Covenant circumcision pointed to the need for New Covenant "heart" circumcision, not to baptism. Baptism reveals we have received that new heart [a new creation / born again], believe, and identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. In this way, these covenant signs are related but mean and signify different things [Galatians 3:27].

14. How should we perform baptism? In the Name of the Trinity and in nearly every case, by full submersion underwater, symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus while among the congregation. The Greek word behind "baptism" means to dip or submerge. In almost every case, the witnesses of the wedding is the church one is joining. [See Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36–39]

15. Who performs baptism? Typically a pastor-elder on behalf of the local church.

16. Why do we use the language "on behalf of the local church" when baptizing? Because when it comes to the Keys, the pastor-elder(s) work on behalf of the church. The authority of the Keys, and therefore to baptize, resides in the church, not the pastor alone.

17. Where should baptism take place? Ideally, among the people of the local church one is joining. Baptisms done apart from the people of the local church can still be valid but are considered irregular. [See Matthew 28:18–20]

18. Are we baptized more than once? No! Baptism is the one-time entry sign of the New Covenant.
19. But should I get baptized again to rededicate my life to Christ? No. The idea of "rededications," like raising hands, walking aisles, or getting baptized multiple times, is foreign to Scripture. We do not need to do that, especially multiple baptisms. Instead, that is what simple prayer is for. Among other things, the Christian life is meant to be shaped by daily prayer, confession of sin, and repentance. [See James 5:16; 1 John 1:9]

20. What if I am unsure about my baptism? A valid baptism is one in which the person being baptized had a gospel profession affirmed in a gospel context. If a person was not professing the gospel as a believer when they were baptized and/or they were baptized in a non-gospel context [e.g., in a cult], then their baptism would be considered invalid. They should be baptized for real for the first time. A valid baptismal testimony is sufficient to join a new church. A pastor-elder would be happy to talk with you.

Section 3 - On Baptism & Membership

21. Why is baptism (or a baptismal testimony) needed to join a church? One of the realities that makes Jesus' New Covenant "new" is that everyone in the Covenant is a Spirit-filled, born-again believer, unlike the Old Covenant, which was mixed with believers and unbelievers [See Jeremiah 31:31–34]. Unlike the Old Covenant, where members still had to be evangelized to be converted while in the Old Covenant, in the New Covenant, they are converted and enter in (Jeremiah 31:34). This invisible and universal reality of only true believers being part of the New Covenant is intended by Jesus, via the Keys of the Kingdom, to be matched by regenerate church membership. In other words, the local church is to do its best to guard against admitting unbelievers, of any age, to the membership of the church. The member roster of the church is meant to match the member roster of Heaven (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 20:15). Jesus expects every person's profession of faith to be vetted and affirmed just as He did first with Peter in Matthew 16. Upon Peter's credible profession, Jesus then welcomed him to hold the Keys. By Matthew 18, Jesus describes a whole local church holding the Keys together. That is the basis of church membership. Whether or not one uses the term "membership," Jesus expects some type of formal, official belonging to a particular group of believers. Typically this belonging happens in an order: a person's faith is vetted by a local church, baptism is administered, and then the person is welcomed into that church to join them in using the Keys with one another. To baptize a person and NOT

formally bring them into the local church goes against the pattern of Jesus' teaching, uncoupling baptism from communion and ex-communion.

22. What commitment does a person make in their baptism? Not only does a person show their faith and commitment to Christ, but also to Christ's people. Baptism is an implied commitment to join in the family work of God's people, namely, exercising the Keys of the Kingdom with that church. This means the person will take personal and prayerful responsibility for the life of the members of the church in knowing and following Jesus. Should a fellow member become entangled in sin, the newly baptized brother/sister will join the members in graciously and lovingly seeking the return and restoration of the wandering member. Baptism is a commitment to participate in the discipline of the church, both in giving and receiving [See Matthew 18:15–20].

23. What is the relationship between baptism and communion? Baptism is the one-time public entry sign into Jesus' New Covenant. Baptism leads to the ongoing New Covenant sign of communion. This is similar to the Old Covenant, where an Israelite baby boy was circumcised once yet kept the Sabbath on a weekly basis. In the New Covenant, those who have received the one-time sign of baptism regularly take the ongoing sign of communion together as a covenant family [See 1 Corinthians 11:17ff].

24. Should I take communion if I have not been baptized? Ideally, you should not take the Lord's Supper until you are baptized. Is it sin to take the Supper without having been baptized? We would say that it is not sin, but it is irregular and does not follow Jesus' intended pattern. We would counsel a person to stop taking the Supper and pursue baptism.

Section 4 - On Baptism, Children, and Membership

25. How should we think about young people, baptism, and membership, given all of the above? We hold the following in tension knowing that baptism of any age leads to church membership: [1] We recognize Jesus often gifts faith and saves people at a young age; [2] We recognize salvation is not merely a verbal statement or decision but a new heart from the Spirit that reveals itself in an age appropriate changed life, especially one that struggles against sin; [3] We recognize that children are highly impressionable, want to please their parents, and can easily be made to make a false profession of faith; [4] We recognize that in the Parable of the Soils (Matthew 13:18–23), Jesus indicates that there can be four types of responses to the gospel, two of which can seem true but are false

and only one that proves true and fruitful overtime. Similarly, we recognize the danger of false converts (1 John 2:19). Time will tell; [5] We recognize that the teen years can be especially tumultuous as the child grows into a young adult; [6] Finally, we recognize that all historical Christian traditions and denominations require some measure of delay and testing of children's profession of faith and that those who do profess should be treated with charity even as credibility is being discerned. The tension is to fit all these together, which is almost always a case-by-case matter of wisdom.

26. What do you mean by "treated with charity and credibility?" It means we hold in balance Christian love (charity), such that if a young person claims to be a Christian, we talk and treat them as such. Credibility means that we do not rush to baptize, but instead, in keeping with Jesus' Parable of the Soils (Matthew 13:18–23), look for credibility of regeneration, especially in repentance from sin and fruit of the Spirit. On the one hand, we do not want to unnecessarily delay baptism and exacerbate a young person, but on the other, we do not want to rush, pressure, or give false assurance, especially if a parent has concerns, cautions, or hesitations presently or for their future.

27. What are some questions parents/family should think through before encouraging a child to be baptized?

- **a.** Who or what is my child trusting in? Can they articulate the basics of the gospel? (If not, this can serve as an excellent teaching tool)
- **b.** Can I as a parent affirm credibility to my child's profession of faith? Do I see conviction over sin, repentance, and growing fruit of the Spirit? Do other mature Christians agree with this assessment, such as siblings, family, pastors, Sunday school teachers, etc? Would my child want to go and participate in the life of the church?
- **c.** Has my child persevered in their faith through a difficulty/suffering/trial that might be a temptation to doubt Jesus and/or been challenged to defend their faith?
- **d.** Am I and my child ready to participate in the discipline of the church such that my child and I are willing to have him/her disciplined by the church? Do I as a parent recognize the care and discipline of the church as one of Jesus' central plans for my child's soul? Does my child recognize the same?
- **e.** Does my child understand and desire to participate in the life of the church (in age-appropriate ways) or just to experience baptism for baptism's sake and not what baptism signifies? Do they just want to be baptized so they can take communion and have a snack at church?

f. Do I, as a parent, understand and embrace what is taught in this FAQ such that I can teach and guide my child over time through it?

28. Is there a minimum age for baptism? It is not uncommon to hear people profess that they truly believed as young as 4 or 5 years old. All things being equal, confidence in a credible profession of faith increases with age. And recall that the membership needs to have some measure of confidence in the young person's profession of faith since baptism is as much for the church as it is for the person being baptized. As such, we are increasingly hesitant to baptize under the age of 12.

29. What does membership look like for a young person? In short, they possess all the rights, privileges, and expectations of a member [age-appropriate], such as attending member meetings and mutual care and encouragement. Holding office and voting is currently reserved for members 18 and older. We recognize this is a matter of prudence and not a specific requirement of Scripture.

30. What might a disciplinary process look like for a young person? Every disciplinary process is to be approached in overflowing prayer, love [see 1 Corinthians 13], patience, mercy, humility, grace, even tears. This work is never to be retributive, harsh, mean, or vindictive. Far from being a bad thing, a disciplinary process is Jesus' prescribed means to pursue a wayward sinner for their good and the good of the church. Every disciplinary process is case-specific and a matter of wisdom in terms of pacing and procedure. When it comes to a minor, youthful folly and adolescence considered, generally speaking, those involved in the process would work alongside the parents in whatever ways are best for the minor, family, and church [presuming nothing illegal has occurred]. Families do not exercise church discipline [ex-communication]; churches do, since it is an exercise of the Keys of the Kingdom. The goal is always repentance and restoration of a wayward person. The Father always welcomes the Prodigal home. Unless a unique harm or crime has been committed, in nearly all cases, the minor would be encouraged to continue to attend church [likely even youth group] since what they need most is Jesus and His gospel. They, however, would no longer be affirmed as a member or welcomed to take communion, but would be considered and pursued as an unbeliever for the sake of their soul and the church's purity. There is a story of one church where the parents of a 15-year-old daughter (a member since the age of 12) were at the end of themselves with her disrespect and disobedience. So the parents reached out to the elders as the next stage of church discipline. The elders pursued the young woman with firm grace, called her to repentance, explaining their concern for her soul as well as the nature of church

discipline. This accomplished Jesus' intended effect, and the young woman feared God, repented, and was restored to her parents, and the disciplinary process stopped.

Section 5 - On The Process Of Baptism And Membership at FCF

31. What is the process of pursuing baptism and/or membership at FCF?

Step 1 - Attend the Covenant-Membership seminar. Also speak with a pastor-elder ASAP about baptism. If the person is a minor, upon elder recommendation, a separate, age-appropriate class will be offered with parents encouraged to attend.

Step 2 - Following the seminar (or class), fill out membership application; for those pursuing baptism, also do assigned homework, which may include further reading, watching videos, and/or additional meetings.

Step 3 - Meet with a pastor-elder to discuss application, testimony, general questions, and baptism.

Step 4 - Upon pastor-elder approval, about two weeks in advance of a member meeting, the prospective member's testimony is sent to the membership for review prior to their vote. Some members may reach out to get to know you and encourage you prior to the membership vote.

Step 5 - The Membership votes at a meeting; upon a positive vote, those needing to be baptized will be voted in as "member pending baptism," which usually occurs the following Sunday.

Step 6 - Join the members at the next member meeting and begin to exercise the Keys together in mutual love and care!

APPENDIX 7: PROCESS OF BECOMING A PASTOR–ELDER

In addition to what is established in the constitution, the following is a rough template of the process of becoming a pastor-elder at FCF:

Step 1 - Gospel Leadership Cohort. A man makes known his aspiration to the office of elder to the elders and/or is invited by the elders to participate in the "Gospel Leadership Cohort" (GLC).

The GLC is a small group of men who temporarily join elder meetings twice a month from September through May. We rotate through men on a yearly basis. They do specialized reading and discuss it with the elders; they observe and minimally contribute to elder meetings.

Participation in the GLC is not an offer to become an elder, nor does a man have to aspire to go through it. That said, GLC is the first step in the eldership process.

Step 2 - Elder Apprenticeship. Should a man (still) aspire following GLC, and the elders agree to take the next step with him, when the time is right, he enters the elder apprenticeship process. This process is intended to be roughly a year+ long and includes three broad areas:

First, a deep study and discussion on the doctrine of the church through reading a number of books. Other topics are explored as well.

Second, ongoing attendance at elder meetings with increased participation.

Third, exposure to the work of an elder, including but not limited to: service lead; home fellowship; adult Sunday school; prayer meeting devotional; shadowing elder counseling/member interviews/member seminars / etc.

At some point along the way, the church will be told that man aspires to and is pursuing elder ministry. Generally speaking, a man in the elder apprenticeship process aspires to become an elder following the process

Step 3 - Following feedback from the congregation, the elders make a recommendation to the church to vote the man as an elder.

APPENDIX 8: DIFFERENT TYPES OF PASTORAL ROLES

What follows is how we think through pastoral training and staffing for a number of reasons: (1) pastors are made by churches not seminaries[157] and we want to steward that responsibility with our time, talent, and treasure to test and train future pastors/ missionaries for the good of other churches [2 Tim 2:2]; (2) given our unique location in Northern Arizona, and being near a university, we desire to be a resource to bless and benefit other churches sending out many we train; (3) practically, Flagstaff is expensive to live in and a graded staffing structure allows us to compensate appropriately and in creative ways.

Pastoral Intern (9 months) - Purpose: expose men to healthy ecclesiology & inner life of the church. Deep study & writing; shadowing elders. Geared toward men looking towards bible college/seminary or a pastoral type role. Stipend to enable a man not to work/work less and focus on study & church life. Intern office in the Bethany House. An intern may be invited to a pastoral assistant role. ***Non-elder role***.

Pastoral Assistant ("PA" 2-3yrs) - Paid position. Purpose: to further test and train men for the work of ministry. *Geared toward men looking toward seminary or pastoral staff*. This role works closely with and for the pastor-elders. *Also for staff who have not yet been voted as pastor-elders but do pastoral-type work.* May move into assistant pastor role at FCF upon congregational vote. ***This is a staff position, non-elder role***.

Assistant pastor (3-8 years). Paid position. Purpose: longer term, full pastor-elder role. *Geared toward men looking to be senior pastoral staff, likely elsewhere, that we are investing in* or who are bi-vocational. This man is typically hired knowing we will send him off one day. ***This is a staff position, an elder role.***

Senior / Associate pastor (long-term). Paid position. Senior pastoral staff. Full, long-term pastoral role, aiming toward retirement from FCF. ***This is a staff position, an elder role.***

[157] Seminaries are excellent for theological education and we strongly support them.

APPENDIX 9: OUTLINE OF BECOMING A DEACON[158]

At FCF, we have support positions such as paid staff, ministry leaders, and deacons, all of whom should meet deacon qualification (1 Timothy 3:8–13).

Each of these roles exist so that the pastor-elders may focus on their duties of prayer and the ministry of the Word on the one hand and that the church's needs might be facilitated and met on the other (c.f. Acts 6:1–7).

All these support roles serve under the leadership and direction of the pastor-elders. Because the office of deacon requires first being tested (1 Timothy 3:10), we also use the language of "ministry leader" for those who have not been installed to the office.

Ministries typically start in one of two ways:

(1) the elders present a need to a particular person or to the church;
(2) A person sees a need and approaches the elders, who then evaluate if the ministry idea advances the mission of the church, then approve or not.

Ministries, including the role of Deacon, can either be permanent and ongoing (weekly; monthly; etc) or temporary and time-bound and need-based, such as a finance committee, a pastoral search committee, etc.

In nearly all cases, a ministry and ministry leader will have an overseeing elder or elder delegate.

Given the pattern of the New Testament, ministries almost always work best in a team context with at least one point person or team leader. Elders help the leader lead the team.

Should the elders think the time is right to install a person as a deacon, they will present the person to the church for feedback and ultimately a vote.

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[158] To learn more, see "Deacons" by Matt Smethurst.

APPENDIX 10: WHY FEMALE DEACONS?

1 Timothy 2:11–14 (ESV)

"[11] Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. [12] ***I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man;*** *rather, she is to remain quiet. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve; [14] and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."*

1 Timothy 3:1–13 (ESV)

"[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of ***overseer****, he desires a noble task. [2] Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable,* ***able to teach****, [3] not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, [5] for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? [6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. [7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

[8] Deacons ***likewise*** *must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. [9] They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. [10] And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.*

[11] Their wives ***likewise*** *must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. [12] Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. [13] For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."*

The office of female deacon is a debated topic among faithful, bible believing Christians, even among those who hold to a complementarian position such as our church. FCF has female deacons.

Why?

Point 1 - Biblical Reasons

First:

First Timothy 2:12 [see above] is clear that a woman can neither "teach," that is, give biblical instruction nor "exercise authority" over a man, that is, provide spiritual oversight and direction of a man.

These two prohibitions are the very essence of the office of Pastor-Elder-Overseer. Overseers are required to be "able to teach" [3:2] and, inherent in the office title itself, "overseer," is the exercise of authority in the church.

The role of deacon, however, is neither a teaching nor ruling office as described in the passages above [c.f. 1 Tim 5:17–18]. Deacons are not authoritative, they are administrative. The term itself means "servant" such as one who waits on tables. Deacons are not a board adjacent to or over the elders, rather they serve under the oversight and direction of the elders. We do not believe deacons are a board at all but are task-specific and time-bound servants in the church meeting practical needs and/or serving as "elder-assistants."

Among other duties, elders equip, preach, teach and oversee the church. Deacons administrate, organize, and implement the elders' vision. The members do the work of ministry.

We do not view a female deacon organizing a meal ministry and telling a man when and where to drop food off as an "exercise of authority." The same can be said for a deaconess who organizes a pine needle clean up and directs a man to lead a group in the backyard. These are examples of administration, not spiritual oversight. Administration and acts of service are not telling a man what to believe from Scripture or how to live in light of that belief. That is what elders do.

Our understanding of the office of deacon compared to elder is critical. Other churches and traditions do view deacons as a spiritually authoritative office. We think this is incorrect according to Scripture and more akin to an elder, but by a different name.

Second:

The grammar of the text introduces three groups: "overseers…" [v1]; "deacons likewise…" [v8]; "women / wives likewise…"

When v11 in the ESV reads, "their wives," it is critical to note that the possessive pronoun, "their" is not in the text. It is an interpretive insertion by the translators. The text simply reads, "gunaikas" which is a Greek word that can either be translated as "women / wives" depending upon context.

Since v11 introduces a third group, "likewise," with another set of qualifications, this can mean either [a] a male deacon's wife must also meet qualifications for him to hold office or [b] this simply refers to female deacons. Given the lack of the possessive pronoun, "their," and that there are not qualifications for an elder's wife, it is most natural to read the text as referring to female deacons.

Third:

On the previous point, there is nothing self-evident in 1 Timothy that would prohibit a woman serving as a deacon. But many (rightly!) view Acts 6 as the beginning of the office of deacon. In Acts 6 only men are chosen to serve. Doesn't that prove only men can be deacons? No. The Book of Acts, as a narrative, describes what happened. The events that are described do not necessarily prescribe what we should do.

Counter to the Acts 6 example, Romans 16:1 lists Phoebe as a "deacon" of the church in Cenchreae. While this could simply mean she was a servant rather than an office holder, her role and official capacity, "of the church in…" described in the passage seem to best be understood as the office of deacon. FCF believes Phoebe was a female deacon.

Fourth:

The term, "deaconness," was not used in biblical times and only came into common use in later centuries. This would explain why Paul used "gunaikas" as a distinct third group embedded in-between "male deacon" qualifications [see 1 Tim 3:12–13 following v11]. To this point, that the term "deacon" is in masculine form does not, in itself, "prove" only men can be deacons. As in other languages that have masculine, feminine, and neuter forms of words (e.g. Spanish). The "gender" of a word does not necessarily restrict it to a biological gender. For example, the Greek terms "brothers (*adelphoi)*, children (*tekna*),

man (*anthropos*), anyone (*tis*)" are all masculine in form but can include women depending on context. The point here is that grammatical gender does not automatically preclude women from being Deacons.

Point 2 - Historical Examples:

1. Church persecutor, Pliny the Younger (c. AD 111–113), who wrote to Emperor Trajan (Epistle 10.96) referred to female deacons.

2. *Didascalia Apostolorum* (c. 200's) explicitly calls for appointing women deacons.

3. Apostolic Constitutions (c. AD 380) details the duties of a deaconess.

4. A tombstone on the Mount of Olives (c. 300's) refers to and reads: "Sophia the Deacon, a second Phoebe."

5. Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) regulates the "laying on of hands" of deaconesses and sets the minimum age at 40 from 60.

6. Early church fathers such as Basil (AD 330–379), Epiphanius (AD 310/315–403), and John Crysostum (AD 347–407) refer to female deacons.

Church history is not a "slam dunk" per se on settling a biblical debate. Yet in light of the above biblical discussion and seeing the practice of female deacons immediately following the apostolic era, we are persuaded that women can serve as deacons.

Conclusion:

While debated, we see nothing from Scripture (or church history) that clearly and explicitly prohibits a woman from the office of deacon. Rather, we encourage it! What is clear is that the service of a deacon should not blur or be confused with that of an elder.

As the stated position of FCF, should a person join who disagrees, that person does agree to:

[a] not cause problems or division around this topic. It is not open for debate.

[b] agrees to support and respect our female deacons and

[c] agrees this is not an occasion to vote “no” based on theological difference and/ or as a show of protest. A “no” vote should be based on FCF’s understanding of the office and a belief that the person does not meet character or testing qualifications per 1 Timothy.

APPENDIX 11: THE ESSENCE OF CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS: "ONE ANOTHERS"[159]

What We Are Because of Christ

- We are members ["body parts"] of *one another* (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25)

How We Think of and Treat One Another

- Love *one another* (Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 3:12, 4:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22, 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 4:12; 2 John 5)
- Outdo *one another* in showing honor (Rom 12:10 cf. Eph 5:21, Phil 2:3)
- Live in harmony with *one another* (Rom 12:16; 15:5)
- Welcome *one another* (Rom 15:7)
- Have the same care for *one another* (1 Cor 12:25)
- Greet *one another* [affectionately] (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14)
- Rejoice, aim for restoration, comfort *one another* (2 Cor 13:11)
- Agree with *one another,* live in peace (2 Cor 13:11)
- Through love serve *one another* (Gal 5:13)
- Always seek to do good to *one another* and to everyone (1 Thess 5:15)
- Let us consider how to stir up *one another* to love and good works (Heb 10:24)
- Show hospitality to *one another* without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9)
- As each has received a gift, use it to serve *one another,* as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10)

Ministry of the Word

- Be able to instruct *one another* (Rom 15:14)

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[159] There is certainly more than can be said regarding living the Christian life, but the "one anothers" provide a clear and comprehensive summary to follow.

- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing *one another* in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19)

- Encourage *one another [with Scripture]* and build *one another* up (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11)

What We Are Not To do

- Do not pass judgment on *one another* (Rom 14:13)

- If you bite and devour *one another*, watch out that you are not consumed by *one another* (Gal 5:15)

- Do not lie to *one another* (Col 3:9)

- [Don't] neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10:25)

- Do not speak evil against *one another* (James 4:11)

- Do not grumble against *one another* (James 5:9)

Sin and Relationships

- With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with *one another* in love (Eph 4:2)

- Be kind to *one another*, tenderhearted, forgiving *one another* as God in Christ forgave you (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)

- Confess your sins to *one another* (James 5:9)

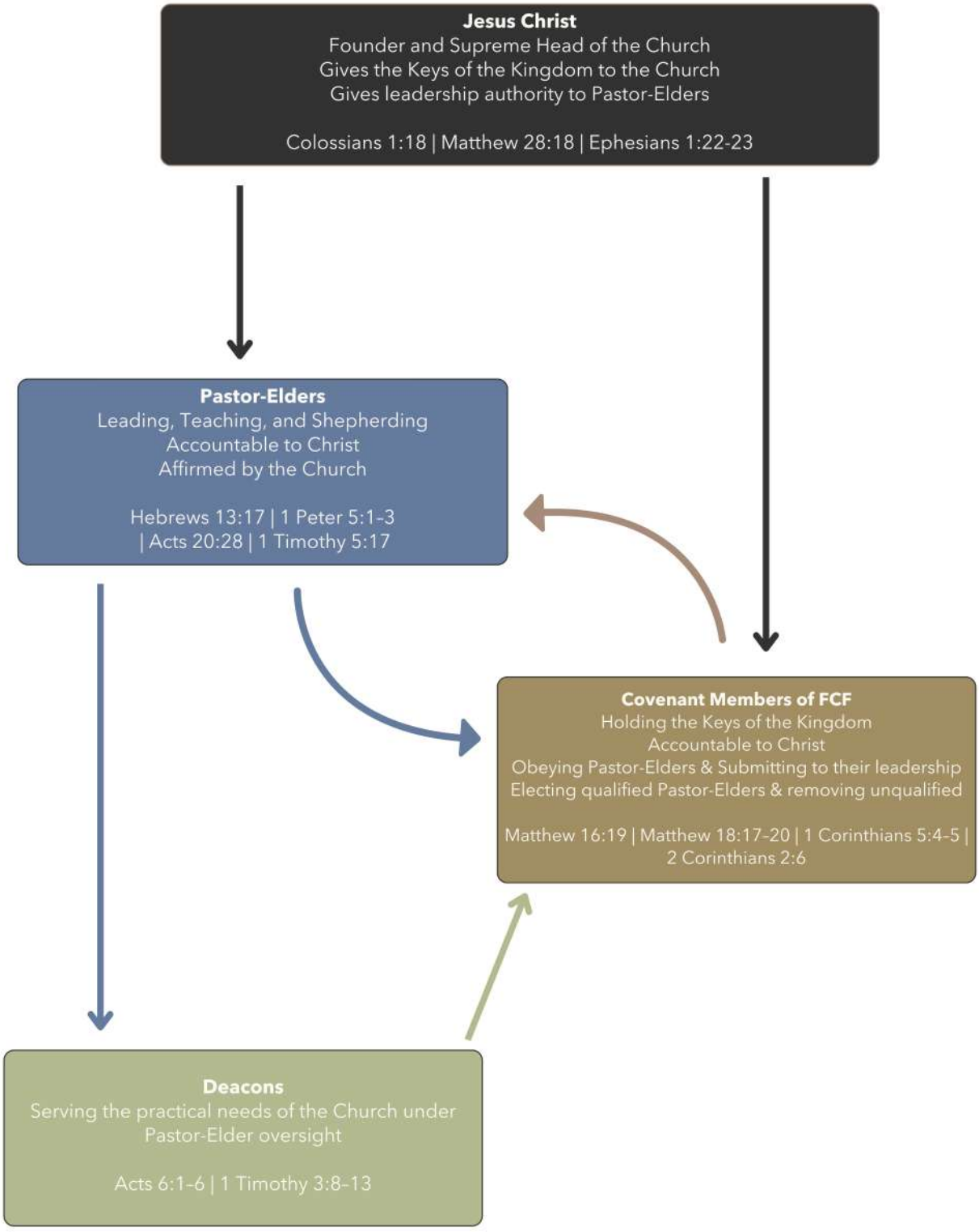
- But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with *one another*, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7)

Difficulties of Life

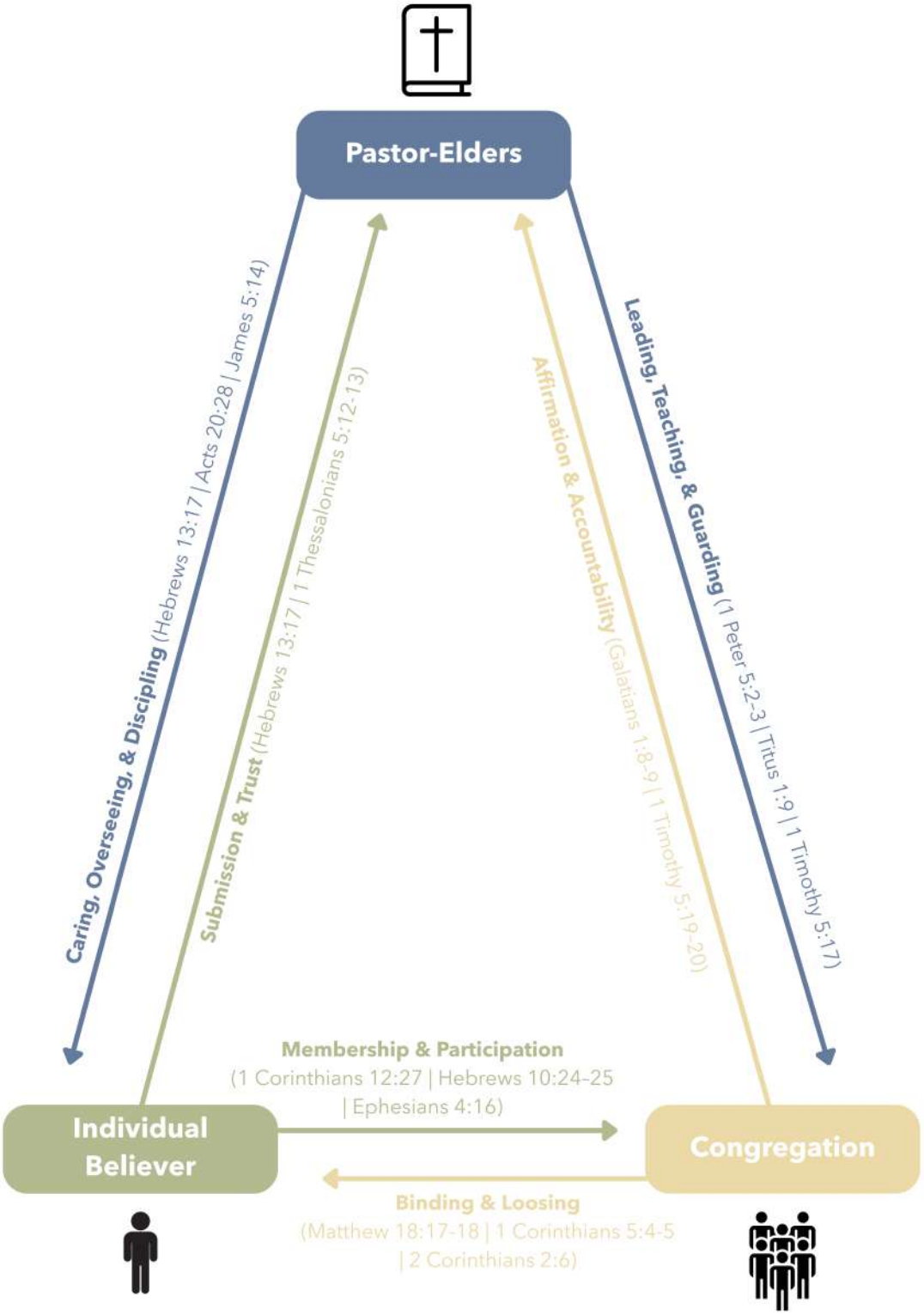
- Bear *one another's* burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2)

- Exhort *one another* every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:13)

APPENDIX 12: FCF ORGANIZATION CHART



APPENDIX 13: CHURCH ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



APPENDIX 14: GENEROUS GIVERS

Eight Spiritual Benefits Tied To Generosity in the Church	Scripture
To show that you treasure God, not money	Matt 6:19–34
To store treasure in heaven	Matt 6:20
"It is more *blessed* to give than receive"	Acts 20:35
Spiritual fruit/maturity	Phil 4:14–20
Evidence of God working in and through us	2 Cor 9:8
Evidence of the fruit of the gospel in your life	2 Cor 9:13
Creates unity, prayer, fellowship in the church and among churches	2 Cor 9:14
Leads others to thanksgiving & worship of God	2 Cor 9:12

Biblical Principles to Guide Generous Giving	Scripture
Give willingly, not forced	2 Cor 9:5
Give cheerfully, not begrudginly	2 Cor 9:7
Give regularly, not unplanned	Cf. 1 Cor 16:2
Give from first-fruits, not after Caesar & Self	Prov 3:9
Give generously, not stingily	2 Cor 8:2, 14

Six Tangible Benefits Tied To Generosity in the Church	Scripture
Shared responsibility for the physical & administrative realities of our shared possessions (buildings & upkeep; equipment; land; tax; gas; water; power; software; internet, etc)	(Cf. Exod 25; Acts 28:30; 1 Cor 9:13; 11:33–34)
Shared responsibility to pay our Pastors	Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:3–14; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17–18
Shared responsibility to meet one another's needs within the church	Acts 2:44–45; Gal 6:10; Eph 4:28; Titus 3:14; 1 John 3:17
Shared responsibility to meet needs of other gospel churches (eg. Just getting started; hardship)	Acts 11:27–30; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:25–33
Shared responsibility to meet needs / good works in local community	Luke 10:25–37; Gal 6:10;
Shared responsibility to support church planting/ strengthening efforts (missions)	2 Cor 11:7–9; 3 John 5–8;