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The basis for our joining together as members of Hope Chapel is our relationship with God the Father through the atoning work of His Son Jesus Christ communicated to us by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures.

As members of Hope Chapel, we recognize and agree that God, by His Word, as revealed in Scripture, has exhorted us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to live our lives together in a manner worthy of the Gospel<sup>1</sup> by:

- Rejoicing in the grace of God, privately and corporately, giving thanks to the heavenly Father for the sacrifice of His son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to believe and to live for the glory of God
- Living our lives together with our brothers and sisters in love, just as God has loved us, seeking their good through relationships that promote holiness, discipleship, worship, and sound doctrine.
- Caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ in distress, sickness, and poverty as the Holy Spirit leads.
- Regularly gathering together in corporate worship and in small group fellowship.
- Devoting ourselves to the study of Scripture and to prayer both privately and through group contexts.
- Seeking to advance the proclamation of the Gospel locally and globally through contexts of family, workplace, and community as God provides.
- Cheerfully serving the church's ministries through the regular giving of our time, effort, and financial resources.
- Pursuing reconciliation when offense occurs with another, and rejecting opportunities to speak or to hear gossip or slander.
- Watching out for church members and gently admonishing those members whose practice of sin requires it.
- Supporting the efforts and direction of the church, as led by its pastors, to call members requiring church discipline to repent of their sins.
- Upholding marriage as a reflection of Christ's relationship with His church; bringing up any children God graciously provides in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> 2Pet. 3:18; Phi. 1:27; Eph. 4:1



**Inerrancy of Scripture** - We accept the Bible as the recorded Word of God. It is without error in its original autographs and consists of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible is the record of God's revelation of Himself in human history. Its unique truth leads us to an understanding that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. The Scriptures are fully and verbally inspired by God as the prophets were moved by His Spirit. It is living and powerful, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.

**Scriptural Interpretation** - Each book of the Bible is to be interpreted according to its grammatical context and historical purpose as believers are illumined by the Spirit of God. The Lord speaks through the Bible in living power. All believers are exhorted to diligently study the Scriptures and apply them to the conduct of their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and governing rule of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are completely sufficient, neither to be added to nor taken away from. Being sufficient, the canon of Scripture is self-contained; it is therefore closed. Every man-made creed, confession, or theology must be tested against the full counsel of God's Word to ensure they conform to it. It is the final arbiter of truth.

**The Trinity** – God is One. He is infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. There are three persons in the one substance of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These persons are distinct with regard to one another, and yet they are co-existent, co-equal, and co-eternal. Each is truly God. There is One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of Christian faith and life. To deny the Trinity is to deny the central truth of the Christian faith.

- **God The Father** - God is the Creator of heaven and earth. By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created the world out of nothing. Through His Word He daily sustains all creation. He rules over it all, being sufficient in and of Himself. He is the Only God. Besides Him, there is no other. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He fulfills every promise, and He works all things together for good to those who love Him. In His unfathomable grace, He sent His only Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice to redeem mankind from the penalty of sin, which is death. He made man for fellowship with Himself – even so, being all-sufficient in Himself, God needs nothing outside Himself. He has made all of creation for the praise of His own glory.
- **Jesus Christ** - Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is the eternal Word made flesh that He might reveal God to men, and that God might provide for man's salvation. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is perfect in nature, teaching and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was with God in the beginning and He is God. Through Him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in Him all things hold together by the word of His power. He is the exact representation of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. He is the only Savior for the sins

## Statement of Beliefs

of the world, having atoned for them by His blood and having died a substitutionary death on the cross. By dying in our place, He revealed God's divine love and upheld God's divine justice. He permanently removed our guilt and completely reconciled us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, He bodily rose from the grave on the third day following His crucifixion. He was victorious over death and the powers of darkness. For a period of forty days, He appeared to over five hundred disciples, performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection. He ascended into heaven where He now sits at God's right hand to intercede for His people and to rule as Lord over all. He is the Head of His Body, the Church. As such, He is to be worshipped, adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all believers. At the Last Day, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- **The Holy Spirit** - The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel, He summons men to repent of their sins and to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The same Spirit brings about the new birth, regeneration, by which a person is given the faith to receive God's gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ by faith. He indwells them to bring about their sanctification according to God's will and His purposes. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son who in turn glorifies the Father. The Holy Spirit leads the Church into a right understanding and application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshipped as God Himself – the Third Person of the Trinity.

**Man's Condition** - God made mankind both male and female in His own image, as the crown of His creation, that man might have fellowship with Him. Tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit. Through Adam's Fall, death entered into the world, separating mankind from God and making us all objects of His wrath. Despite being a responsible creature, Adam and all His offspring are inwardly depraved, unable to do what is right and pleasing in God's sight. Apart from a special work of God's grace, men are utterly incapable in themselves of being saved from His wrath or of returning to His favor and fellowship. This depravity in mankind is radical and pervasive. It extends to man's mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives in bondage to sin. He is at war with God; he is hostile and hateful toward God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or moral successes, remain lost and without hope in the world apart from the salvation which is to be found in Christ alone.

**The Gospel** - Jesus Christ is Himself the gospel, the Good News. This good news is revealed in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the *heart* of the gospel. His resurrection is the *power* of the gospel. And His *ascension* is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is substitutionary. He died in our place. His death was a propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins, satisfying the demands of God's holy justice and appeasing His holy wrath on our behalf. It was a demonstration of God's love that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The benefits of this gracious act that saves us from eternal damnation are freely given to those who repent, to those who place their faith in Christ's atoning work alone and not in their own works. Jesus Christ is the only mediator, or intercessor, between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is Jesus' identity as God in the flesh, and Jesus' cross as the point at which our salvation was fully accomplished. All our gospel worship, praise, obedience, love, and service therefore proceeds from and looks to the cross.

**Our Saving Response to the Gospel** – God’s grace through Christ’s Atonement is the only cause of man’s salvation. From before the foundation of the world, our salvation has been rooted in the free and unconditional election of God which was decreed by God for God’s own pleasure and glory. Every elect man and woman is a free agent, imbued by the Holy Spirit with the requisite faith to trust in Christ alone for his or her salvation. Saving faith requires that we genuinely repent of our sins and by God’s grace embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. The evidence of biblical repentance is a changed life. Saving faith in Christ requires good works as the necessary evidence of that saving faith. And yet neither repentance nor good works can save us; they cannot earn or repay what has been done by Christ alone. Salvation is the free gift of God in Christ. Nonetheless, a believer must be willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, or else he cannot become His disciple.

**Salvation Inherited through the Gospel** – Salvation is the free gift of God provided by grace alone, received through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin and trusting in Christ and His substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life. He is declared righteous by God because of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to Him. He is fully justified and fully accepted by God. He has been reconciled to God. God is His Father and the believer is adopted as His child. The debt of his sin is forgiven. And because he has been made a new creature through regeneration, he is liberated from the law of sin and death. He has been transferred into the kingdom of the Son, to live in freedom according to God’s Spirit. He has become an heir to the kingdom of God and a co-heir with Christ.

**Sanctification** - The Holy Spirit is actively guiding and producing our sanctification. He empowers us to produce His fruit as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds through God’s Word,. Over time we are being transformed into the image of Christ. By God’s grace, the power of sin has been destroyed, even though its presence remains in our flesh; but we can now say no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit. As we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, freely keeping His commandments. We endeavor to live in such a way that people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will give an account to God for every thought, word, and deed. To aid them in their walk of faith, believers ought to practice spiritual disciplines, especially Bible-study, prayer, worship and confession. Nevertheless, the believer’s ultimate confidence to persevere is based on God’s promise to preserve His people until the end. To this end, the Holy Spirit has been given to them as a pledge, guaranteeing what is to come, and empowering believers for Christian witness and service.

**The Work of the Spirit** - All genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion. Yet the New Testament indicates that there is also an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion. Being indwelt by the Spirit as a pledge of salvation, and being filled with the Spirit for works prepared in advance for us to do, are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit continually and repeatedly fills each believer with power for Christian life and witness as necessary. He imparts His supernatural gifts to individual believers for the common good, and to edify the Body of Christ for various works of ministry in the world. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church, and they are meant to

be earnestly desired and practiced.

**The Church** – By His Word and Spirit, God has created, preserves, and guides the Church. The Church is a gathering or assembly of the elect of all ages and all nations. Sinful men have been called out of the whole human race for redemption and sanctification in the fellowship of Christ's Body. The Church is not a religious institution, organization, or denomination. Rather, the universal Church is comprised of all those who have personally appropriated the gospel and who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ. The Church exists to worship and glorify God. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven. Believers commit themselves to God and to one another to preach the gospel and to plant churches throughout the world as a testimony to the love and grace of God. The Great Commission entrusted to the Church is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded. New believers are to be added to a local church. There they devote themselves to the teaching of God's word, to the fellowship of the Body, to breaking bread together, and to prayer.

**Giftedness for Service** - All believers are to be a vital part of a local church. It is in the context of the local church that God's people receive pastoral care and leadership. They are given the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service, both with regard to one another and with regard to the world. They are called to live out the New Covenant in Christ's blood as the people of God, demonstrating the reality of the kingdom in the world. To that end, Christ has gifted the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints for works of ministry, so that the Church will mature and grow. Women play a vital role in the life of the church; but in keeping with God's design, they are not permitted "to teach or to have authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:12). Leadership in the church is therefore male.

**Sacraments** – The Scripture provides for two sacraments or ordinances: baptism and communion. Sacraments are physical signs and seals of a spiritual reality. Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. As such, it is only intended for the person who has by faith received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work, and has become His disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a public testimony to God, the Church, and the world, a believer is immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Water baptism visually represents a person's union with Christ, signifying his own death and resurrection. His former way of life is symbolically put to death as he is immersed in the water, and his resurrection to newness of life is vividly depicted as he is raised up out of the water.

The Lord's Supper is likewise to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf. It is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life in remembrance of the atoning benefits of Christ's death. We partake of the Lord's Supper with faith and an attitude of self-examination as a congregation, so that the whole body is joined together in the communion of the saints. As we take of the elements together, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ on our behalf, and we receive real spiritual nourishment for our souls. By participating, we signify the unity of Christ's Body whose life flows from His blood, and is healed by His stripes.

## Statement of Beliefs

**The Last Day** – We patiently await the visible, personal, and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the translation of those remaining alive in Christ, the Judgment of both the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. On that day, Satan with his fallen angels, and all those who are outside Christ, will be finally separated from the benevolent presence of God and endure eternal punishment. But the righteous who will receive glorious bodies, shall live and reign with Him forever. The Marriage Feast will celebrate the wedding of Christ to His Bride the Church, which will be presented to Him without spot or blemish. In this way, the Church will be in God's presence forever, serving Him and giving Him endless praise and glory. The whole earth will proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

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## Church Discipline

### *For Members of Hope Chapel*

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: those God loves, he disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Discipline is sometimes a challenging process of God correcting his people's thoughts, words and behavior so they can fulfill their calling to become like him. God disciplines his people through a variety of means. He calls his people first to *self-discipline*. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as he reads the Bible and hears the Bible taught and applied.<sup>2</sup> As he compares his life to God's Word, he adjusts himself to conform to his Savior. But individual interaction with God through his Word is not the only means that God uses to make his children holy. God also uses his *people*. "Brothers," writes Paul, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness..."<sup>3</sup> As members of Hope Chapel, we take seriously our responsibility to "restore" members who fail to allow God to discipline them personally for their sins. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the Bible clearly defines as sin.<sup>4</sup> This includes not only sinful words and behavior, but also refusal to turn from heretical doctrine.

Jesus outlined a process for addressing another believer's sin in Mat. 18:15-17.<sup>5</sup> As a church, we agree that this is the way for us to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God's grace for change. Initially, church discipline should be informal: if a Christian sees sin in a brother or sister that appears to be continual, he should approach that person and inquire about it. If in fact there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include a pastor. If this group confirms that, in fact, sin continues without repentance, the process must move to formal church discipline.

When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church's pastors inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church of the member and his sin, urging members to contact the erring member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord's Supper or attend meetings for the purpose of fellowship. Instead, his participation with members should revolve around his need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers: in other words, when they interact with this person, they should not have "fellowship" as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put his faith in Jesus' work on the cross for him and turn from his sin.

Church discipline has nothing to do with "shunning" a person. It involves first confronting in love and gentleness and, if unsuccessful, withholding fellowship. It is not rejection of a relationship

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<sup>1</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives". (Heb. 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13)

<sup>2</sup> See Joh. 15:3, 10, 20; Joh. 17:17; 2The. 3:14; 2Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:11-13;

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 6:1 ESV

<sup>4</sup> Other New Testament passages (besides Gal. 6:1 and Mat. 18:15-17) that support this practice include: 1Cor. 5; Act.: 20:28ff; Gal. 2:11-14; 1Tim. 5:20; Tit. 3:10-11; Rom. 16:17; 2Cor. 2:5-11.

<sup>5</sup> 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. 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. 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 a tax collector. (ESV)



but a change in the nature of a relationship. If a person under discipline is not factious or disruptive or a harmful influence, he is welcomed to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers with the exception of small groups that meet for the purpose of fellowship. The pastors may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be factious or disruptive, or is leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the pastors may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate his sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Mat. 18:12-14; Eze. 34:4,8,16), so shall the pastors and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline. Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the pastors determine that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person's membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged. In doing so, the pastors, at their discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure.

If a member leaves the church while he is under the scrutiny of the disciplinary process or while a censure against him is still in effect, and if the pastors learn that he is attending another church, the pastors may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of his sin, and at the same time serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Mat. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2The. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3Joh. 9-10). Once the pastors make a sin publicly known, they commit as well to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church.

Christians who attend Hope Chapel and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship in Hope Chapel unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church, or the pastors of Hope Chapel are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

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## **Statement on Counseling and Confidentiality** *For Members of Hope Chapel*

While every reasonable effort shall be made to protect confidential communications, especially those received in a pastoral counseling context, there will be times when, to properly fulfill their spiritual and leadership responsibilities, Hope Chapel pastors may deem it necessary or appropriate to share confidential information with one another, or church members, or others they conclude may be part of the church member's problem, or the solution to that problem. They may do this for the purpose of counsel, for the purpose of protecting others from the damaging effects of someone's sin, or for the purpose of assisting one another in providing spiritual care to the people of the church.

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (see Rom. 3:23; 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God commands that he should seek assistance from other members, and especially from the pastors, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 5:14; Gal. 6:1-2, Col. 3:16; 2Tim. 3:16-4:2; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession and to seek counsel from each other and especially from its pastoral counselors.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, our counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry.

Although some members of the church work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or biblical counselors within the church, they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities. Therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions should seek advice from independent professionals. Our pastoral and biblical counselors shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and help members to consider their advice in light of relevant scriptural principles.

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## Statement on Conflict, Disputes, and Lawsuits

*For Members of Hope Chapel*

The church is populated by sinners who have received grace but who continue to face challenges in working out their salvation,<sup>1</sup> especially in their relationships. As the people of God, we commit to overcome our offenses in a biblically prescribed manner, leading to resolution and peace. Bitterness, resentment, and broken relationships are not acceptable for the people of God.

Hope Chapel has adopted as its practice the principles taught in Ken Sande's book, *The Peacemaker*,<sup>2</sup> which provides wise biblical counsel for resolving disputes. When two church members cannot resolve a conflict privately, they should employ the principles of this book, and seek the counsel of wise church members. The church's pastors are trained and desire to assist members in mediating disputes. Therefore, if a dispute becomes long-standing without successful reconciliation privately, members should seek pastoral help.

According to 1Cor. 6:1-8, Christians should never bring a dispute among believers before a civil law court. Instead they should seek the mediation of the church through its pastors. If one or both parties prove to refuse to turn from the sin that produced the conflict, then the pastors should seek to apply the steps of church discipline to restore peace and order in the church. Church members agree to refrain from any lawsuits between Christians, and to seek means of reconciliation through the church.

If a church member has a dispute with a pastor that he does not believe has been successfully resolved after repeated attempts, he should inform the pastor that he would like the assistance of the Hope Chapel Church Leadership Team to resolve the matter.<sup>3</sup> The pastor will then involve the Leadership Team in the disputed matter with the church member, so that it may be resolved successfully.

Church members agree to refrain from filing lawsuits against other Christians, and to seek reconciliation through the church, unless the pastors (and Leadership Team, if appropriate) review their situation and confirm that litigation is biblically legitimate.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:12

<sup>2</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997)

<sup>3</sup> The Church Leadership Team is comprised of the entire group of pastor-elders. Those not involved in the dispute will assist in mediating between the church member and the pastor(s) with whom the member has a dispute. See the "Ministry Leaders List" in this Appendix, or ask for a current leadership list from one of the pastor-elders.

## Statement on Marriage *For Members of Hope Chapel*

It is the belief of Hope Chapel that God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

We believe marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment for a lifetime. Marriage is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church. Marriage also provides the man and the woman the framework for intimate companionship, the channel for sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.<sup>1</sup>

We believe the husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image.<sup>2</sup> The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband, even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Being made in the image of God, as is her husband, and thus being equal to him, she has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband, and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.<sup>4</sup>

We believe children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values, and to lead them to make choices based on biblical truth, through loving discipline and the consistent example of their own lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> Children are to honor and obey their parents.<sup>7</sup>

We express our enthusiastic support for those public policies and programs which aim to strengthen the marriage commitment and to reverse the trend of the disintegration of the nuclear family.

As Christian ministers, we are bound to uphold the integrity of Scripture. We will only perform weddings for believing couples.<sup>8</sup> We do not view marriage as a civil union, but as a covenant between a man and a woman, and almighty God.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we reserve the right to refuse to marry any who, according to the Bible, are ineligible. This includes those who are unrepentant with regard to pre-marital sex, those who are co-habiting together,<sup>10</sup> and anyone who has not made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 2:24; Eph 5:32; Gen 1:22; 8:17; 35:11; Prov 5:18; Mal 2:15

<sup>2</sup> Gal 3:28; 1Pet 3:7; Gen 1:26-27

<sup>3</sup> Eph 5:22-25; 1Cor 11:3

<sup>4</sup> Gen 2:18; Eph 6:4; Prov 31:10-31

<sup>5</sup> Psa 127:3; Psa 139:13-16

<sup>6</sup> 1Cor 11:1; 1Pet 2:21; Prov 13:24;

<sup>7</sup> Exo 20:12; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20

<sup>8</sup> 2Cor 6:14

<sup>9</sup> Jer 31:31-32; Mal 2:14

<sup>10</sup> 2Cor 12:21; Eph 5:3

## Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

*For Members of Hope Chapel*

Divorce is a sad fact in our society and in the church at large. While as Christians we live in this world, we are not to be of this world.<sup>1</sup> Thankfully Scripture provides a clear teaching concerning marriage and divorce. Because of the painful circumstances surrounding divorce, we must be careful not to apply grace at the expense of responsibility and obedience to the Word. While God has, from the beginning, intended that marriage be life-long,<sup>2</sup> and that it glorify God by reflecting the relationship of Christ to His church,<sup>3</sup> there are times when our Lord permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse.

There are only two conditions under which this is permitted:

- When a spouse commits sins that involve sexual contact with another person<sup>4</sup>
- When an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that God *permits* divorce in such cases. Divorce is not *required*, nor will the church encourage a spouse to divorce when he or she has faith toward God for the marriage to be restored – even when the situations listed above exist. If a church member does wish to pursue a divorce, the spouse should submit the facts of his or her marital situation to the leadership, who will assist the spouse to discern before God in Scripture what He would permit.

Concerning the case of marital abandonment of one spouse by another, the church will follow its course of church discipline with the spouse who abandoned the other (even to the point of treating him or her as an unbeliever, as Mat. 18:15-17 requires. The spouse who was abandoned should wait for the church to follow this course before considering divorce an option.

Separated spouses awaiting a pending divorce should consider themselves married, and each act accordingly as a married person, until the day a civil court declares the divorce final and legally recognized.

We welcome people who are divorced who desire to pursue membership in Hope Chapel. But when a divorced person becomes a member of the church, he or she should understand that we can only condone remarriage when the circumstances prior to the divorce, or following the divorce, fall under one of the two biblical conditions listed above. If the circumstances of the divorce do not conform to what Scripture deems acceptable, the divorced person should consider before God whether he or she should seek reconciliation with their former spouse. He or she should also seek to confess to God and to his or her former spouse any sins committed in the seeking of a divorce that did not comply with the teaching of Scripture. He or she must recognize that apart from adultery or abandonment, remarriage is not an option afforded by God in Scripture

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<sup>1</sup> Joh. 17:11,16

<sup>2</sup> Mat. 19:4-5; 1Cor. 7:10-11

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 5:22-33

<sup>4</sup> Mat. 5:31-32 – translations may use “adultery”, “unfaithfulness”, “unchastity”, “sexual immorality”, or “fornication”.

<sup>5</sup> 1Cor.7:12-16

## Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

We believe marriage is sacred and designed by God. As ministers of the Gospel, we perform Christian ceremonies. Therefore we will not perform weddings between two parties that are unequally yoked.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 2Cor. 6:14



## Hope Chapel Leadership

The following is a brief outline of the leadership structure at Hope Chapel. Over the years we have become increasingly convinced that a plurality of Elders best describes the New Testament model. In no way do we feel this is the only model or a superior model, but it is what we believe appropriately fits this body. Sometimes we refer to it as “balanced leadership” where each Elder is co-equal in authority but unique in gifting.

A plurality of leaders has its own inherent value as a system of checks and balances. It is a practical way to submit to one another, care for one another, and bear one another’s burdens. It also evens out the workload in accordance with 1Cor 12 and Rom 12; there’s less chance for burnout because one person isn’t shouldering all or most of the responsibility.

Furthermore, a plurality of leadership facilitates organic growth. When the time comes for the church to multiply by planting another church body, there are ruling elders ready to lead the new body who are known by the church, experienced in their leadership, and qualified to teach. Paul sent established elders into the new churches to organize them and to appoint other elders before they moved on, as with Titus at Crete (*Titus 1:5*)

We hope this leadership model reflects the loving equality that existed between the apostles, with Christ as Head over all, and with each striving to be servant of all. The following scriptures are the basis for Eldership in Hope Chapel and we hope this serves to give a broad understanding of how leadership functions at Hope Chapel.

### The Head of the Church

Jesus Christ is the head of the church from which our church leadership derives its authority and submits to His will. We believe all ministry begins here and therefore our structure of Eldership keeps the priority of Christ in full view. (*John 10:16; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; Heb 4:14; 1Pet. 2:6*)

### Basis for Eldership in the N.T.

The N.T. clearly points out when it comes to leadership that pastoral oversight is by a council of Elders. In other words a plurality of leadership is the biblical model.

- Elders are found in the churches of Judea and surrounding area. (*Acts 11:30; James 5:14, 15*)
- Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (*Acts 15 & 21*)
- A plurality of Elders was established in the Pauline churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (*Acts 14:20-23*); in the church of Ephesus (*Acts 20:17; 1Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-25*) in the church in Philippi (*Phil. 1:1*); and in the churches on the Island of Crete (*Titus 1:5*)
- According to the letter of 1Peter, elders existed in the churches of northwestern Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (*1Peter 5:1*)

## Qualifications for Elder

We believe that the local church is to be led or governed by a group of elders. These are men, who qualify according to the biblical standard for elders/overseers/pastors<sup>1</sup> (*Acts 14:23, 20:17,28; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5, 1Pet. 5:1-4*). These men are also biblically qualified based on 1Tim. 3:1-7<sup>2</sup> and Titus 1:5-9.<sup>3</sup>

## Decision-Making

The Elders of Hope Chapel act jointly as a council and equally share the responsibility for the leadership of the church to include decisions on spiritual matters of doctrine, practice, and essential policy within the church. It is not their job to determine their own will, or the will of the people, but the will of the Lord. Decisions are reached by unanimity, not majority, where we believe the mind of the Lord is best manifested.

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<sup>1</sup> Various words are used in the NT to refer to the same office: *presbuteros* (elder); *episkopos* (overseer or bishop); and *poimen* (pastor or shepherd). We use them interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> <sup>NAU</sup> **1 Timothy 3:1** It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.<sup>2</sup> An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,<sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.<sup>4</sup> *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity<sup>5</sup> (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),<sup>6</sup> *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.<sup>7</sup> And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 1:5** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,<sup>6</sup> *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.<sup>7</sup> For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,<sup>8</sup> but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,<sup>9</sup> holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

## Hope Chapel's Statement on Women in Leadership

During the past thirty years there has been a notable shift in our society concerning the role of women in society. Some of those changes have brought welcomed reform, especially in the area of the workplace. Where the church is concerned, we have been hard-pressed to hold onto the integrity of scripture, not modifying its intent just to conform to outside pressure. The subject of Biblical Leadership is vast and cannot be contained in such a concise statement as this.

We believe God has divinely instituted a chain of authority. Beginning with the Godhead, the Son and the Spirit are submitted to the Father.<sup>1</sup> Paul also teaches that the head of every man is Christ and the head of Christ is God.<sup>2</sup> If authority were based on equality, then Jesus could not be equal to the Father. We believe that authority is given for the express purpose of order. Authority defines how relationships will flow in order for certain purposes to be accomplished.

Authority does not define equality. According to Gal. 3:26-29, both male and female are one in Christ. We believe that men and women are equal in the sense that they bear God's image equally.<sup>3</sup> The Bible teaches that men and women exhibit distinct roles yet the woman is submitted to the man for the sake of order. Paul emphatically states, "The man is the head of every woman." He draws this statement not from a cultural bias but from the very beginning of God's creation. He tells us that man did not originate from woman and woman was created for man's sake.<sup>4</sup>

This brings us to God's very intent from the beginning, His original design. According to Genesis 2, Adam was created first and Eve soon followed, created to be his helpmate. The role of headship was given to the man at the outset of creation. The model of headship is our Lord, the Head of the church, who gave himself for us.

The antithesis to male headship is male domination. By male domination we mean the assertion of the man's will over the woman's will, ignoring her spiritual equality, rights, and value. True biblical submission is never to be confused with male domination. Paul makes it clear that women are every bit as important and not inferior to men. Yet God's will is that men are to be responsible for leadership in the home, and men are to be responsible for the public gathering and care of believers in the church.

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<sup>1</sup> 1Cor. 15:24-28

<sup>2</sup> 1Cor. 11:3

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1:27

<sup>4</sup> 1Cor. 11:8-9

## ***Ministry Teams – Service Opportunities***

**Children’s Ministries:** Team members serve once per month in one of the children’s ministry classes. *Please note:* Our desire is to come alongside parents and assist them in raising godly children by building children into their parents and families into the Gospel. Parents are welcome to keep their children in the main service or allow them to join an age-appropriate class.

**Coffee Bar:** The Coffee Bar is open the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday each month. Team members arrive before we gather to make sure the coffee bar is ready to go. They prepare and serve coffee drinks prior to the service, and then clean-up the kitchen afterwards.

**Worship:** Worship Team members must have an interview process with the worship team leader prior to joining the team. They serve on the schedule arranged by the worship team leader.

**Sound/Video:** Media Team members typically serve one Sunday per month by arriving early to ensure that the audio and video equipment is set-up and functioning properly. They then serve during the worship gathering.

**Office Volunteers:** Those interested may assist the leadership by volunteering to help with special projects or other administrative duties from time to time.

**Hospitality:** Team members serve as greeters or ushers once per month by preparing bulletins for distribution, and warmly greeting those arriving to the gathering. Ushers serve by assisting in the Lord’s Supper, announcements, and collecting the offering.

**Facility Clean-up:** This is a great opportunity to work behind the scenes, cleaning and maintaining our facility for the benefit of everyone who attends. The chores are done between Sundays.

**Prayer Chain:** *“My house shall be called a house of prayer.”* (Isa 56:7) Prayer is how we call upon God to stand in His strength, and how we make our requests known to God. And so the prayer chain is our first line of defense. When needs arise in the body, these brothers and sisters are the first to know, and the first to take action. Join the chain, *for God calls all of us to pray.*

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We are brothers in Christ united in one great cause: to stand together for the Gospel. We are convinced that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been misrepresented, misunderstood, and marginalized in many churches and among many who claim the name of Christ. Compromise of the Gospel has led to the preaching of false gospels, the seduction of many minds and movements, and the weakening of the church's Gospel witness.

As in previous moments of theological and spiritual crisis in the church, we believe that the answer to this confusion and compromise lies in a comprehensive recovery and reaffirmation of the Gospel – and in Christians banding together in Gospel churches that display God's glory in this fallen world.

We are also brothers united in deep concern for the church and the Gospel. This concern is specifically addressed to certain trends within the church today. We are concerned about the tendency of so many churches to substitute technique for truth, therapy for theology, and management for ministry.

We are also concerned that God's glorious purpose for Christ's church is often eclipsed in concern by so many other issues, programs, technologies, and priorities. Furthermore, confusion over crucial questions concerning the authority of the Bible, the meaning of the Gospel, and the nature of truth itself have gravely weakened the church in terms of its witness, its work, and its identity.

We stand together for the Gospel – and for a full and gladdening recovery of the Gospel in the church. We are convinced that such a recovery will be evident in the form of faithful Gospel churches, each bearing faithful witness to the glory of God and the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Article I**

We affirm that the sole authority for the Church is the Bible, verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, and totally sufficient and trustworthy.

We deny that the Bible is a mere witness to the divine revelation, or that any portion of Scripture is marked by error or the effects of human sinfulness.

### **Article II**

We affirm that the authority and sufficiency of Scripture extends to the entire Bible, and therefore that the Bible is our final authority for all doctrine and practice.

We deny that any portion of the Bible is to be used in an effort to deny the truthfulness or trustworthiness of any other portion. We further deny any effort to identify a canon within the canon or, for example, to set the words of Jesus against the writings of Paul.

## Together for the Gospel – Affirmations and Denials

### Article III

We affirm that truth ever remains a central issue for the Church, and that the church must resist the allure of pragmatism and postmodern conceptions of truth as substitutes for obedience to the comprehensive truth claims of Scripture.

We deny that truth is merely a product of social construction or that the truth of the Gospel can be expressed or grounded in anything less than total confidence in the veracity of the Bible, the historicity of biblical events, and the ability of language to convey understandable truth in sentence form. We further deny that the church can establish its ministry on a foundation of pragmatism, current marketing techniques, or contemporary cultural fashions.

### Article IV

We affirm the centrality of expository preaching in the church and the urgent need for a recovery of biblical exposition and the public reading of Scripture in worship.

We deny that God-honoring worship can marginalize or neglect the ministry of the Word as manifested through exposition and public reading. We further deny that a church devoid of true biblical preaching can survive as a Gospel church.

### Article V

We affirm that the Bible reveals God to be infinite in all his perfections, and thus truly omniscient, omnipotent, timeless, and self-existent. We further affirm that God possesses perfect knowledge of all things, past, present, and future, including all human thoughts, acts, and decisions.

We deny that the God of the Bible is in any way limited in terms of knowledge or power or any other perfection or attribute, or that God has in any way limited his own perfections.

### Article VI

We affirm that the doctrine of the Trinity is a Christian essential, bearing witness to the ontological reality of the one true God in three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of the same substance and perfections.

We deny the claim that the Trinity is not an essential doctrine, or that the Trinity can be understood in merely economic or functional categories.

### Article VII

We affirm that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man, in perfect, undiluted, and unconfused union throughout his incarnation and now eternally. We also affirm that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners, as a sacrifice for sin, and as a propitiation of the wrath of God toward sinners. We affirm the death, burial and bodily resurrection of Christ as essential to the Gospel. We further affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord over His church, and that Christ will reign over the entire cosmos in fulfillment of the Father's gracious purpose.

We deny that the substitutionary character of Christ's atonement for sin can be compromised without serious injury to the Gospel or denied without repudiating the Gospel. We further deny



## Together for the Gospel – Affirmations and Denials

that Jesus Christ is visible only in weakness, rather than in power, Lordship, or royal reign, or, conversely, that Christ is visible only in power, and never in weakness.

### Article VIII

We affirm that salvation is all of grace, and that the Gospel is revealed to us in doctrines that most faithfully exalt God's sovereign purpose to save sinners and in His determination to save his redeemed people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to His glory alone.

We deny that any teaching, theological system, or means of presenting the Gospel that denies the centrality of God's grace as His gift of unmerited favor to sinners in Christ can be considered true doctrine.

### Article IX

We affirm that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's means of bringing salvation to His people, that sinners are commanded to believe the Gospel, and that the church is commissioned to preach and teach the Gospel to all nations.

We deny that evangelism can be reduced to any program, technique, or marketing approach. We further deny that salvation can be separated from repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Article X

We affirm that salvation comes to those who truly believe and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We deny that there is salvation in any other name or that saving faith can take any form other than conscious belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving acts.

### Article XI

We affirm the continuity of God's saving purpose and the Christological unity of the covenants. We further affirm a basic distinction between law and grace, and that the true Gospel exalts Christ's atoning work as the consummate and perfect fulfillment of the law.

We deny that the Bible presents any other means of salvation than God's gracious acceptance of sinners in Christ.

### Article XII

We affirm that sinners are justified only through faith in Christ, and that justification by faith alone is both essential and central to the Gospel.

We deny that any teaching that minimizes, denies, or confuses justification by faith alone can be considered true to the Gospel. We further deny that any teaching that separates regeneration and faith is a true rendering of the Gospel.

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### Article XIII

We affirm that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers by God's decree alone, and that this righteousness, imputed to the believer through faith alone, is the only righteousness that justifies.

We deny that such righteousness is earned or deserved in any manner, is infused within the believer to any degree, or is realized in the believer through anything other than faith alone.

### Article XIV

We affirm that the shape of Christian discipleship is congregational and that God's purpose is evident in faithful Gospel congregations each displaying God's glory in the marks of authentic ecclesiology.

We deny that any Christian can truly be a faithful disciple apart from the teaching, discipline, fellowship, and accountability of a congregation of fellow disciples, organized as a Gospel church. We further deny that the Lord's Supper can faithfully be administered apart from the right practice of church discipline.

### Article XV

We affirm that evangelical congregations are to work together in humble and voluntary cooperation and that the spiritual fellowship of Gospel congregations bears witness to the unity of the Church and the glory of God.

We deny that loyalty to any denomination or fellowship of churches can take precedence over the claims of truth and faithfulness to the Gospel.

### Article XVI

We affirm that the Scripture reveals a pattern of complementary order between men and women, and that this order is itself a testimony to the Gospel, even as it is the gift of our Creator and Redeemer. We also affirm that all Christians are called to service within the body of Christ, and that God has given to both men and women important and strategic roles within the home, the church, and the society. We further affirm that the teaching office of the church is assigned only to those men who are called of God in fulfillment of the biblical teachings and that men are to lead in their homes as husbands and fathers who fear and love God.

We deny that the distinction of roles between men and women revealed in the Bible is evidence of mere cultural conditioning or a manifestation of male oppression or prejudice against women. We also deny that this biblical distinction of roles excludes women from meaningful ministry in Christ's kingdom. We further deny that any church can confuse these issues without damaging its witness to the Gospel.

### Article XVII

We affirm that God calls his people to display his glory in the reconciliation of the nations within the Church, and that God's pleasure in this reconciliation is evident in the gathering of believers from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. We acknowledge that the staggering magnitude of injustice against African-Americans in the name of the Gospel presents a special

## Together for the Gospel – Affirmations and Denials

opportunity for displaying the repentance, forgiveness, and restoration promised in the Gospel. We further affirm that evangelical Christianity in America bears a unique responsibility to demonstrate this reconciliation with our African-American brothers and sisters.

We deny that any church can accept racial prejudice, discrimination, or division without betraying the Gospel.

### Article XVIII

We affirm that our only sure and confident hope is in the sure and certain promises of God. Thus, our hope is an eschatological hope, grounded in our confidence that God will bring all things to consummation in a manner that will bring greatest glory to his own name, greatest preeminence to his Son, and greatest joy for his redeemed people.

We deny that we are to find ultimate fulfillment or happiness in this world, or that God's ultimate purpose is for us to find merely a more meaningful and fulfilling life in this fallen world. We further deny that any teaching that offers health and wealth as God's assured promises in this life can be considered a true gospel.

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*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you,  
which you received, in which you stand, and by which  
you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word  
I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.  
For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the  
Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised  
on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...*

1Cor. 15:1-4

*Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead,  
with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell  
on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.  
And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory,  
because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship  
him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."*

Rev. 14:6-7

### **Signatories to the Document:**

J. Ligon Duncan III, C.J. Mahaney, Mark E. Dever, R. Albert Mohler Jr.

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## The Danvers Statement

### The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

#### Affirmations

*Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:*

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen. 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16).
  - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
  - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
  - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).
  - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission – domestic, religious, or civil – ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan. 3:10-18; Act. 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet. 3:1-2).
8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim. 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7f).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

*The "Danvers Statement" was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Mass., in December, 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, Ill., in November, 1988.*

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## Excusing Neglect of the Tithe

In a society that glorifies materialism, tithing can seem to be a radical thing – so radical that despite the tithing history of God’s people, reaching back to Abraham, we find it easy to talk ourselves out of it. In his book, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, Randy Alcorn reveals some of the more common excuses for failing to tithe.

**The Situation:** Bill and Donna are in their mid-thirties. Bill has steady work as a salesman, but there always seems to be too much month left at the end of their money. Bill and Donna sincerely intend to put in the offering box whatever is left at the end of the month. But, between house payments and bills and occasionally sticking a little something into savings, there is just never anything left. They feel bad, but what can you do when you’re out of money?

**The Problem:** Bill and Donna don’t understand ‘first fruits.’ They should give to the Lord off the top, not out of ‘what’s left’ or not left. They don’t realize that the tithe belongs to God, and that there is a word for taking money that doesn’t belong to them – stealing.

**The Situation:** Joan is a twenty-two year old, just finishing college. Her thirty-hour-a-week job pays just over minimum wage. She earns about \$500 a month. Joan’s parents still provide room and board, but she has to take care of her tuition, books, and other expenses. ‘I can’t afford to give,’ says Joan. ‘I’m barely making it now. If I gave up a tithe that would be \$50 a month, and I’d probably have to drop out of school. I’d like to give, but I just can’t.’

**The Problem:** Joan is not only robbing God, but she is robbing herself of the opportunity to grow in faith. Right now she doesn’t believe God’s promise in Malachi 3 (also confirmed in Mat. 6:33) that he will take care of her if she puts God first by giving him what is his. If God is capable of helping her get by on \$500 a month, isn’t he capable of helping her get by on \$450 a month? Joan’s God doesn’t appear to be very big.

**The Situation:** Bob is in his early fifties. His wife Elaine says, ‘For years we frittered away our income on all kinds of luxuries. Now we’re twelve years from retirement and we don’t have anything saved. On top of that, we’ve still got two kids in college that need our help. ‘We’d like to give to the church,’ Bob explains. ‘But Scripture says we’ve got to provide for our family first. After we get our kids through school and maybe get a nest egg started, then we’ll start giving.’

**The Problem:** Bob and Elaine are keeping what belongs to God in order to compensate for their poor planning and lack of discipline in the past. Their first debt is not to their children’s college education. Their first debt is to God. If it wasn’t tuition costs, it would

be something else. Since they have no true conviction about giving and no standard of giving to start with, they will always find a reason not to give.

**The Situation:** Phil and Pam enjoy giving. With their little blue Santa's helper (VISA card) they just gave each other a video recorder and a large screen television for Christmas. The kids got a computer to keep them busy while their parents enjoy the city's finer restaurants. Their three-year-old Chevy was getting a bit tacky, so they just bought a new model.

'Next year I've got a big promotion coming,' says Phil. 'Then we'll start giving – right now the budget's pretty tight. It's not that we don't ever give to God's work,' Phil adds. 'Why, when we were in Hawaii last month we attended a neat church service on the beach and I dropped a \$20 bill in the offering.'

**The Problem:** Phil and Pam are blind. They say there is no money left to give – and they do their best to make sure of it! No matter what they say to the contrary, their life-style proves without argument that toys, trips, and cars are more important to them than God, his work, and the needs of others.

They say they will give when they earn more, but they won't. If Phil and Pam have been unfaithful with a little (more than a little), they will be unfaithful with a lot. Their expenditures will always rise to meet their income. Making more money will only make them guilty of robbing God more.

Like so many of their fellow church members, Phil and Pam simply don't understand that the tithe belongs to God, not to them, and that they are to return to him the 'firstfruits,' not 'last' or 'no fruits.'

**The Situation:** 'There's a lot more to stewardship than money,' says Gina. 'We can't all give – but some of us can teach Sunday school, clean the building, and open our home to guests. I consider that to be my giving.'

**The Problem:** Gina rightly believes stewardship involves more than money – but she wrongly believes that stewardship ever fails to include money. Her argument is just as faulty as saying, 'I can't give the church any of my time or my gifts and talents, so I'll just give my money instead.' God expects all of these, not just some of them. Gina is attempting to justify robbing God by 'making up for it' in other ways that she should be doing anyway.

**The Situation:** 'I'm so far in debt I can't give a dime to the church,' says Tony. 'What am I supposed to do, stop my car payments? What kind of testimony would that be? And it would be bad stewardship to sell my car – I'd have to take a \$2,000 loss. God doesn't want me to be stupid, does he?'



**The Problem:** Tony has already been stupid. In buying his new car, he put himself in a position to disobey God's command to give. He violated Scripture by spending money he didn't have. His greedy and foolish misuse of credit has put him in this fix.

Tony apparently believes that God and his church and needy people should pay for his own foolish choices. Why not take a \$2,000 loss in order to get into a position to obey God? Is there any stewardship more terrible than robbing your Creator and Savior?

Here is another person who thinks the tithe is his, not God's. Nowhere in Scripture does it say 'first fruits' are to be given to those to whom they will be the best testimony, but to God. If Tony ends up having a bad testimony here it is because of his foolish choice, which is not helped but only complicated by further disobedience to God. He needs to ask forgiveness and learn from the situation so that he doesn't do it again. But does it make sense to rob God in order to have a 'better testimony' to men?

**The Situation:** Joe is an outspoken Christian who is known as a man of faith. He stands up at church business meetings and speaks out in private conversations saying he wants to see the church build more buildings, raise the pastors' salaries, and expand into all kinds of new ministries.

Joe challenges the church to rise to the occasion, and reads passages of Scripture about walking by faith and not sight. He inspires everyone. Everyone, that is, except God and the financial secretary, who are the only ones who know the truth: if everyone gave like Joe, the pastors would have to be laid off, the missionaries would have to leave the field, the church would have to sell all of its property, and the congregation would be walking neither by faith nor sight – it would be buried three feet under.

**The Problem:** Joe appears to have great faith and vision when it comes to the obedience of others. It is his own obedience that he has trouble with. He fails to ask himself a crucial question: 'If everyone gave like I do, where would this church be?' He is quick to commit other people's money, but clings to his own. Joe is a hypocrite. He says one thing and does another, and in doing so he heaps up judgment for himself. He will be held accountable to God not only for his lack of giving but for his hollow words of exhortation that he himself fails to follow.

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