

Doctrinal Statements

Our Essential Doctrinal Statement



Purpose of an Essential Doctrinal Statement

Our mission is to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord given to the Church. We recognize that within Christianity there are genuine and sincere believers who have differing views on various doctrines. There is a unifying body of essential beliefs that virtually all conservative evangelical Christians accept. We believe that in order to be a member of this church, one should agree completely with this essential set of beliefs.

Essential Doctrines

(The following is the short statement – the long statement is on file upon request)

The Bible

The Bible is God's word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error. *2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalms 119:105, 160; Psalms 12:6; Proverbs 30:5*

God

God is the creator and ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are coequal and are one God. *Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:2; Psalms 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14*

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ was virgin born and is the Son of God. He is coequal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return to earth again someday to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. *Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14, 15; Titus 2:13*

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is coequal with the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of Spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives every believer a spiritual gift when they are saved. As Christians, we seek daily to live under His control. *2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13, 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12, 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18*

Human Beings

People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for God, all of us are marred by an attitude and act of disobedience toward God called "sin." This attitude and act separate people from God and cause many problems in life. *Genesis 1:27; Psalms 8:3-6; John 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26; Romans 5:1*

Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by believing in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. *Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26; Romans 5:1*

Eternal Security

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. If you have been genuinely saved, you cannot "lose" it. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and keeping power of God that gives us this security. *John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25, 10:10, 14; 1 Peter 1:3-5*

Eternity

People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence. *John 3:16; John 2:25; John 5:11-13; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; Matthew 1:8, 2:44, 46*

The Church

We believe that the Church, the body of Christ, is made up of all believers of the church age; that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church; and that local churches are the practical expression of the Church. The local church is a group of baptized believers voluntarily joined together to worship God and to glorify Jesus Christ through an aggressive effort to disciple others by the preaching of the Gospel, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. *Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:1-16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, 27*

Ordinances

The Bible sets forth two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

1. We believe the local church was commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to baptize those who come to faith in Him. This baptism is an act of obedience to the Lord's Command, an outward testimony of a person's belief in Christ, expresses our union with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and is a basic requirement for local church membership. Immersion is the mode of baptism set forth in Scripture. *Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; 10:47, 48*
2. We believe the local church was commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to remember His death until He returns by taking communion (the Lord's Supper) with one another preceded by a time of self-examination. *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

Sanctity of Life

We believe that all human life is sacred from conception throughout the entire natural human life. Human beings are created in His image and, as such, are to be protected (the weak, vulnerable, infirm, handicapped, pre-born, and needy deserve our respect and our care). *Psalms 51:5; 71:6; 139:14-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44; 1 Corinthians 11:12*

Human Sexuality and Marriage

We believe God has commanded that no sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. God has ordained marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman for life. *Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:14; Romans 1:26-29; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:9; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:4*

Authority of Statement of Faith

This doctrinal statement does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself is the sole and final source of all we believe. We do believe, however, that the foregoing statement of faith accurately represents the teaching of the Bible, and therefore, is binding upon all members. In addition to this statement of faith, a leadership-approved document shall be kept current that reflects the church's position on non-essential, but important matters that sincere believers differ on. That document serves to guard the church's position on these matters and aids in qualifying and guiding those who serve in discipleship and teaching ministries of the church.

Important but Non-Essential Doctrine

Purpose of an “Important but Non-essential” Doctrinal Statement

Our essential beliefs are defined in our essential doctrinal statement. We require complete agreement with those beliefs for church membership.

What makes some doctrines “important but non-essential” is this:

(1) They are non-essential because evangelical Christians hold a variety of positions on them, but, (2) They are important because they determine the methods by which ministry is performed.

Our ultimate goal is to obey the Lord and fulfill the mission He gave us of making disciples. We believe we can do that best by having a balanced approach to doctrinal agreement and differences. We avoid the extreme of requiring everyone's absolute agreement on every teaching position the church holds, because it unnecessarily separates some Christians from us who should be working with us in our mission. We avoid the extreme of taking no position outside of the essentials because it would leave us without a framework for how we do ministry as well as create an atmosphere of argumentation instead of love and service.

While we require members to agree completely in the essentials, we require members to respect our positions in the important but non-essential doctrines. By “respect” we mean that if they hold a differing view, (1) they do so without belittling or criticizing the church and/or its leadership for holding its position, (2) they not have a personal agenda to change the church's position, and (3) they not sidetrack the effectiveness of the church by becoming argumentative or divisive over the matter. We also require members to show respect for those who teach these positions by not being divisive over these “important but non-essential” positions.

For people in key leadership positions, we require not only that they respect the church's positions, but that they also protect them. By “protect” we mean that they take the lead in maintaining order in their ministries dealing graciously but directly with those who do have an agenda to change the church's position or who knowingly or unknowingly sidetrack ministries and make them ineffective.

Concerning Prophecy:

We hold a pre-tribulation and pre-millennial view of future events. This means we believe that a “rapture” or “catching away” of the church from this world will occur before the great Tribulation. We see the return of Christ to earth as occurring at the end of the Tribulation. At that time, He will establish His earthly millennial kingdom.

Concerning Salvation and Predestination/Foreknowledge/Election:

We believe that salvation is by God's grace, through faith and cannot be achieved by any works of man. We believe that while God is completely sovereign, man has a personal responsibility to respond in faith to the message of the gospel. We are completely comfortable with the tension and mystery that exists between these two truths of Scripture. While there are varying degrees on the specifics of this topic, we seek to avoid the extreme positions that are fatalistic leading to an empty passion for evangelism, as well as the manipulative man-centered approach that would attempt to do what God alone can do in drawing sinners to repentance.

Concerning Denominations and Church Affiliation:

We believe that true believers and the true Church are not defined by denominational affiliations or associations. We believe that denominations and affiliations have value as long as they serve the mission of the Church. We freely associate with any churches or ministry organizations with whom we have enough agreement to cooperate in ministry.

Concerning Interpretation of the Bible:

We believe inerrancy applies to the original manuscripts of the Bible and that any version of the Bible based on honest and solid scholarship are valuable.

Concerning Church Government:

We believe that church leadership in the New Testament is best described by a plurality of Elders with a “first among equals” identified as the Senior Pastor. For our purposes, at times we have elders who are associate pastors along with the Senior Pastor. While the Senior Pastor sets the vision for the church, these men are collectively responsible for the spiritual oversight and governing of the congregation. Deacons are also identified and assist our pastors in serving the congregation.

Concerning Charismatic Belief:

We are not Charismatic or Pentecostal in theology or practice. Concerning our specific differences with Charismatic or Pentecostal practices and beliefs:

1. We believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the placing of the new believer into the Body of Christ, not a second work of Grace following salvation by which a person receives the Holy Spirit. We believe a person receives the Holy Spirit completely at salvation.
2. We believe the filling of the Holy Spirit is the Christian's allowing of the Holy Spirit to have control, not a filling in the sense of receiving the Spirit or part of the Spirit that was not there.
3. We believe that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a historical first and marked the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ. We believe that it was at Pentecost that believers, for the first time in history, received the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

4. We believe the phenomenon of speaking in tongues in the New Testament was the supernatural ability to speak an unlearned, though legitimate, foreign language. It was a sign from God used during the transitional period of time from the founding of the Church to the completion of the written Word of God (the New Testament). We do not believe the modern phenomena of “speaking in tongues” fits the New Testament description. While many sincere believers practice “speaking in tongues” as they understand it, we do not practice speaking in tongues in our services or ministries.
5. We believe God's revelation is complete in the Bible and reject the Charismatic view of on-going revelation through tongues, or visions, or a gift of knowledge. We believe the Holy Spirit gives on-going illumination of the meaning of the Bible and that God gives “leading” by His Spirit and His providential control of circumstances.
6. We believe God is able to do any miracle and is able to heal anyone He chooses. We believe in asking God for miracles and for healing. We do not believe Christians today possess the gifts of miracles and healing.

Concerning Baptism:

We believe water baptism is the prescribed method the Lord gives for new believers to express their new faith in Him and identification with Him. We do not believe Baptism is an automatic entry into a local church. We do not believe any denomination or authorizing body has exclusive rights to baptism. We do not believe baptism is a requirement for salvation but is a matter of obedience to God. We believe salvation is by faith. We practice baptism by immersion.

Concerning Grace:

We believe Christians are in a position of God's grace. This position includes God's total forgiveness of all sins and the impartation of Christ's righteousness to the Christian's “official record” with God. This position includes a total reconciliation to God where no works are required to earn God's favor. Christians do works of righteousness because they have God's favor, not to earn it. This grace also includes the active work of the Holy Spirit in the believer to desire and do God's will. God will certainly discipline His children to develop their maturity and to correct them. God's discipline is not a sign of God's rejection of His children, but an indicator that He loves them.

Concerning the Church:

We believe we have a responsibility to extend the “right hand of fellowship” to all believers in the body of Christ. This involves a love and appreciation for them as true brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not believe any denomination or association constitutes the official Church or churches. We believe the local church is the planned instrument of God to carry out the Great Commission. Therefore, we believe every believer should join a local church and its efforts in ministry. We believe our job is to be an effective church and to do our part to multiply new churches as God leads.

Concerning Creation:

Genesis records the literal story of the creation of the world. Man was created directly in God's own image. It was not a matter of evolution. God created all that is in the world in six days. *Genesis 1:2; John 1:3; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 10:8*

Concerning Communion:

We practice “close” communion, which means we do not prevent people from taking communion with us. Following an explanation, we “welcome” all born again believers to join with us in communion whether members at Westside or not. We believe this best honors our responsibility to fellowship with all believers as members of the body of Christ and allows each individual to be responsible for his or her faith and actions.

Concerning Clergy:

We believe God calls some to serve His Church in vocational ministries as pastors and various other ministries. While recognizing the immense value of women in the ministry of the church, we believe the New Testament clearly calls men to spiritual leadership in the church and limits the office of pastor/shepherd/elder to men. We believe the Bible teaches that it is right and ethical for the church to financially support vocational ministers so their needs are met and so they may focus their attention upon the ministry. We also believe pastors/elders are to be given respect and honor as they are given responsibility and authority for the spiritual wellbeing of the Lord's Church. We believe all Christians are “priests” and have direct access to God and do not need pastors/elders to mediate for them with God. The role of pastors/elders is to teach, lead, and give oversight to the church and its ministries.

Concerning Tithing:

We believe that the primary purpose of tithing in the Old Testament was to support the “work” and the “workers” (priests and spiritual servants) of the Temple. We believe that the New Testament defines tithing in the Church Age as the appropriate means of supporting pastors and ministers of the Gospel, as well as the ministry of the church. *1 Corinthians 9, 1 Corinthians 16, Galatians 6*

Concerning Spiritual Gifts:

We believe God gives spiritual gifts or divinely empowered abilities to minister in the church. Each believer has gifts that are to be used and strengthened. God has a calling on each believer's life to serve others, thereby advancing the overall plan of God.

