

# Guiding Perspectives:

## **Baptism:**

The ordinance of baptism is firmly rooted in historical Christianity. Difficulties and differences regarding baptism seldom focus on the importance of the ordinance for the believer in Christ, but rather they usually revolve around questions of the significance and the mode of baptism. The following discussion will help you understand what we believe regarding baptism and why.

### **What is the purpose of baptism?**

Baptism is a means by which one publicly identifies himself with the message of the baptizer. Jesus was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17) in order to identify with the message of John as the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus later stressed the vital importance of baptism for those who would believe in Him when He commissioned His followers to baptize all those who became Christians. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Matthew 28:19

### **What does baptism symbolize?**

Baptism in water signifies the spiritual union with Christ which takes place when one repents and believes in Him. This internal, spiritual baptism is described in Romans 6:3-7. "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

When we believe in Christ, we are spiritually united with Christ and His redeeming work on our behalf: His death, burial and resurrection. Paul pictured our sinful self, under eternal condemnation, as being put to death with Christ on the cross, buried in the tomb with Him, and our new self, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, being raised from the tomb with Him. Baptism in water then, is an outward, symbolic, act of obedience in which the one who believes in Christ outwardly and publicly affirms his identification with the message of Christ and the inward transaction of spirit baptism that has already taken place in his heart.

### **Who should be baptized?**

All Christians are admonished to be baptized. Baptism is far more than a ritual or religious exercise. It is intended to be an essential part of the spiritual foundation of all new Christians. Jesus stressed its importance when He said: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16 Peter, fulfilling Christ's command, preached: "Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Acts 2:38. Peter also commanded it: "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ..." Acts 10:48

### **Is it necessary for you to be baptized in order to be a Christian?**

No! The biblical reason for being baptized is to publicly testify to your belief in Christ. The Bible says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. The work

of baptism is not a prerequisite for spiritual birth. Repentance and faith are the universal conditions for spiritual birth. Paul said to the Philippian jailer "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved ..." Acts 16:31. Numerous other passages present belief in Christ as the sole criteria for salvation. However, baptism is presented as the initial expression of that salvation, so closely tied in some passages that they are considered in conjunction with each other (e.g., Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

**How important is being baptized? If it is not required for salvation, is it really necessary?**

In the passages above which associate believing and being baptized, following Christ in baptism is the rudimentary obedience of the new believer, and it is simply assumed. If you repent of your rejection of Christ, the next logical step is to publicly identify your acceptance of Him. Baptism, the apostles asserted, is the appropriate response to repentance and belief in Him. "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commands." 1 John 2:3.

**When should you be baptized?**

Immediately after you: Repent - turn away from sin to follow Jesus. Believe - completely trust in Christ's death and resurrection for your salvation. "And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'" Acts 8:36-37. There is a pattern of immediacy about baptism in Scripture. No instance is recorded in which baptism does not immediately follow spiritual birth.

**If you were baptized as a baby, is that enough?**

No. Baptism is an ordinance intended for those who repent of their sins and believe in Christ. Obviously, a little baby cannot make a commitment to repent and believe. Baptism must follow your spiritual birth in order to have the meaning which Christ intended.

**Should infants be baptized?**

No. Infant baptism is not explicitly taught in Scripture. Those who practice infant baptism suggest that baptism under the New Covenant took the place of circumcision under the Old Covenant. Jewish children were circumcised as infants; therefore, infants are likewise introduced into the community of faith through infant baptism.

The practice, however, lacks for clear biblical support. There are no commands or instructions regarding infant baptism in the New Testament, nor are there instances of an infant being baptized (although some would appeal to passages in which entire households were baptized, e.g. Acts 15:15). In contrast, the New Testament both commands baptism for those who have believed in Christ and offers many examples of belief followed by baptism.

**Should a child be baptized?**

A child who is mature enough to repent and believe in Christ can and should be water baptized.

**How should you be baptized?**

Jesus told His disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19. In the Book of Acts Christians were water baptized in: "the name of Jesus Christ" Acts 2:38; "the name of the Lord Jesus" Acts 8:16; "the name of the Jesus Christ" Acts 10:48; "the name of the Lord Jesus" Acts 19:5.

Being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is an essential part of our baptism. As in an earthly marriage, when a bride takes the name of the groom, so also Christians are baptized in the name of their heavenly bridegroom in water baptism.

### **What is the biblical mode of baptism, immersion or sprinkling?**

Although many churches practice sprinkling, we believe that the biblical mode of baptism is immersion for the following reasons: First, the word baptism is the transliteration of the Greek word baptizo, which means to dip, immerse, or submerge. This term is used in the New Testament to relate the idea of immersion; the "baptism" of Israel under the cloud and the sea (1 Corinthians 10:2), and the description of Jesus' death as a baptism (Mark 10:38). The root word for baptizo is bapto which means to dip in John 13:26, Luke 16:24, and Revelation 19:13. Second, Scripture pictures baptism as being administered in the water: "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there..." Matthew 3:16 "... and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water..." Acts 8:38-39.

Immersion alone can adequately symbolize the act for which it represents: the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Just as Christ was laid in the belly of the earth in death and was raised to life, so by immersion the believer signifies the death of his old self, and by being lifted from the water, his resurrection to new life. (Romans 6:3-5)

### **Can anyone baptize another?**

Although Scripture does not restrict baptism to the context of the local church (e.g. Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:36), it is clear that baptism signifies one's identification with the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), of which the local church is representative. Therefore, the common practice is for the leadership of a local Church to baptize new believers in Christ. Baptism within a local church allows the new believer to publicly express his identification with Christ to the members of his new spiritual family.

### **What is the difference between water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit?**

#### *Water Baptism:*

In obedience to Christ's command a new Christian is immersed in water in the name of the Lord. He is thus separated from his old sinful life and makes a commitment to serve Jesus. The baptism signifies the old man going into the water and the "new creation" coming out of the water. It is a testimony to others of your faith in and obedience to Christ.

#### *Baptism in the Holy Spirit:*

Every Christian from the moment he believes in Christ is baptized by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13 reveals: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Christians do not need to seek baptism by the Spirit subsequent to salvation. Rather they need to seek to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), in other words, yielding himself to the control of the Spirit so that he can manifest the fruits of the Spirit. Each Christian has all the Spirit, but he must seek to let the Spirit have all of him.

### **If I was baptized, and then later discovered I was not a Christian and subsequently believed in Christ, should I be baptized again?**

Yes. Spiritual birth must precede water baptism. Many people, for example, have looked back on childhood experiences with a great deal of skepticism about whether they were born

spiritually then or at a later time. If you are unsure, you should search out the matter with the Lord and determine before Him whether your spiritual birth preceded your baptism.

### **Summary**

- Baptism signifies publicly the believer's identification with Christ.
- All Christians should be baptized.
- Although we are not saved by being baptized, God nevertheless commands us to do so.
- Someone may be baptized after he has repented and believed in Jesus.
- Baptism should be an immediate response of obedience when a person believes in Christ.
- Children who have made a commitment to Christ should be baptized.
- A believer should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- Immersion is the scriptural mode of baptism and the only mode practiced at Cornerstone. (If you were baptized after placing your faith in Christ for salvation but baptized by a mode other than immersion, any of our teaching pastors or other elders will be glad to visit with you to discuss your individual circumstances.)

### **Conclusion**

Baptism was instituted by God to be an essential foundation of a Christian's new life in Christ. If you have not been baptized you need to follow Christ in the obedience of baptism. "And now why do you delay? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Acts 22:16

## **Baptism and the Lord's Supper**

The position of Cornerstone Bible Fellowship is that only baptized believers should participate in the Lord's Supper.

One of the issues at stake is trying to find a clear biblical foundation for any doctrinal position. This action can be difficult, as many doctrinal positions are not clearly laid out in any single Scripture reference in a point by point fashion but can only be ascertained by examining what Scripture clearly implies. Many doctrines require a systemic study of the entirety of the Bible.

A clear example of this can be found in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible does not contain a clear-cut passage that explains the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is based on an understanding of the Old Testament (the Shema of Deuteronomy 6) and the New Testament (The Great Commission, the teachings of Jesus describing himself as equal with the Father, the description of the deity of the Holy Spirit by Peter in Acts 5, etc.). These passages as well as others are used to establish the Trinitarian doctrine. This same pattern exists concerning the timing of baptism and the Lord's Supper. First, Baptism is a one-time event that signifies:

- identification with Christ,
- initiation into the Christian faith, and
- entrance into the Christian church.

A significant number of passages demonstrate these ideas. For example, in the Great Commission we are commanded to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit –Matthew 28:19. Multiple references in Acts recount where people are baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:39, 8:16; 10:48). In the epistles Paul speaks of being baptized into

Christ and into the body (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:5). Consider especially 1 Cor. 12:13 where Paul says that by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. In other words, baptism is what identifies someone with Christ and unites someone to the church. One also sees this in Acts 2, where people repent, believe, and are baptized and thus are "added" to the church (Acts 2:38-41).

Second, The Lord's Table, on the other hand, is an ongoing, repeatable event ("as *often* as you eat this bread and drink this cup do this in remembrance of me") that signifies:

- fellowship with Christ,
- continuance in the Christian faith,
- and unity with the Christian church.

This is especially clear in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, where Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." This demonstrates that communion involves both a special fellowship ("participation") with Jesus and symbolizes our unity with the "one body" of Christ ("we who are many are one body").

The inference is clear. A person who confesses Jesus as Lord and converts to Christianity is first to be baptized to publicly confess his new identity. From that point on, he is to reaffirm this new identity through the celebration of the Lord's Supper with a local body of believers.<sup>1</sup>

A doctrinal position that baptism should take place prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper does not elevate baptism to a requirement for salvation. Salvation is an act of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), no human contribution or work is required for one to be saved (even baptism). Baptism preceding the Lord's Supper is simply following the clear pattern in scripture of obedience of a believer. A person to continue to partake of the Lord's Supper while not being baptized indicates a rebellious, disobedient position. The question would be asked, "Why wouldn't this professing believer be baptized

Therefore, the elders invite "baptized believers" to share in the Table at Cornerstone Bible Fellowship. Stating it this way is not only follows a scriptural example, but also helpful in two other situations. First of all, it's a helpful reminder for parents that their kids should be baptized before taking communion. It's also helpful for seekers and non-Christians who need a concrete way of discerning whether they are really converted Christians or not. Of course, as noted, being baptized itself doesn't make someone a Christian or necessarily prove they are. But making a public profession under the authority of a local church who affirms the reality of someone's conversion is an important step and a good safeguard against self-deception.

## **Church Discipline:**

The church is called to purity and unity and is directed to diligently preserve the unity of the body in the bond of peace (Ephesians 3:4). Sinful actions, divisiveness, and sins committed by one member against another threatens the purity and unity of the church. God's program

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper have been taken from the article *Why Only Baptized Christians Should Take Communion* by Brian Hedges. The full article can be found at <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/why-only-baptized-christians-should-take-communion.html>

for his church includes the process of church discipline by which evil is purged and the unity and purity of His church is preserved.

While the term "church discipline" does not appear in Scripture, numerous references speak of separation from a sinning brother. Paul speaks clearly of this separation in 1 Corinthians 5:13 by directing "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." Other descriptions of this separation include treating the person as a "sinner and tax gatherer" (Matthew 18:17), turning away from the person (Romans 16:17), rejecting the person (Titus 3:9-10), handing the person over to Satan (1 Timothy 1:20), and not associating with the person (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

Church discipline is not presented in Scripture as optional, but rather as a command to be carried out. Unresponsiveness to situations that demand church discipline is a sign of failure on the part of the church (1 Corinthians 5:2). The process is particularly binding on the elders of the church in their role as those who keep watch over the souls of church members (Hebrews 13:17).

### **The Purpose of Church Discipline**

The purpose of church discipline is to preserve the purity and unity of the body by confronting sin in order that the sin might be removed through repentance and restoration of a sinning member or by consequent removal of the sinning member from the church.

As it relates to the church, church discipline is God's means for preserving the purity and unity of the body by removing sin from the church, restraining the spread of sin in the body, and protecting the body from damage to the faith of its members. The process is to preserve the church from the "leaven" of sin, which acting unchecked, will permeate the whole body and damage the faith of others (1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Timothy 2:16-18).

Church discipline, as it relates to a sinning member, is God's means for restoring the sinning member to fellowship with God and the church. The purpose of church discipline toward the sinning member is remedial, and not punitive. The process purposes to result in repentance and restoration of the sinning member to fellowship. Even the ultimate result of disfellowship is remedial; the discipline should result in ultimate change and growth in the sinning member (1 Timothy 1:20; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).

### **The Authority of Church Discipline**

Matthew 18:15-20 is the primary Scripture dealing with church discipline. The passage reveals heaven's view the church discipline process in verses 18-20. When the church administers church discipline according to the biblical pattern, it can act in confidence knowing that it acts with the authority and blessing of heaven. The conclusions reached are recognized in heaven. The initiatives introduced for purifying the sin will be carried out by the Father. Further, when two or three have gathered together to faithfully carry out either the disfellowship of a sinning member or the restoration of fellowship, Christ Himself is present in the proceedings.

### **Reasons for Initiating Church Discipline**

While not providing a definitive statement on sins which merit church discipline, the examples of Scripture help us understand the principle by which the decision to exercise church discipline may be made. Those examples are:

- ongoing immorality — 1 Corinthians 5:1-13
- unwillingness to repent of sin — Matthew 18:15-17

- a disorderly life, particularly by an unwillingness to work — 1 Thessalonians 3:6-15
- divisiveness in the church — Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-10
- false teaching — 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18
- a pattern of sinful conduct inappropriate for a believer (e.g. an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler) — 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 6:1

These examples suggest four general categories of sins that merit church discipline: The church discipline process is to be initiated when a member of the church either (1) destroys the testimony of the church, (2) threatens the unity of the church, (3) denies the truth of the church, or (4) is involved in a sin from which he or she cannot or will not extricate themselves.

### **The Process of Church Discipline**

Our Lord Jesus presented an outline of the church discipline process in Matthew 18:15-17. The process involves four successive stages of confrontation of the sin in which a member is involved.

The succession of stages, each stage encompassing a wider circle of individuals that are made aware of the sin suggests an overarching principle of confidentiality: The sin is to be kept to the smallest circle of individuals possible by which reconciliation may be accomplished.

Each stage is separated by the phrase "If he refuses to listen..." This phrase suggests that there is not a defined length of time or number of attempts before moving to the subsequent stage, but rather when the point is arrived at which it is apparent that the sinning member has unquestionably chosen to reject the appeals of that stage to bring reconciliation.

#### **Stage 1: Go and show him his fault in private.**

The first stage of dealing with sin in the church is not simply the responsibility of church officials, but of every member. This stage is one in which the sinning member is confronted in private by another individual in the church. All members of the church are under obligation to reprove a sinning member (i.e., expose his action as sin and provide biblical correction). Often, it is right and appropriate to overlook a sin of a personal nature committed by one member against another (Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 19:11). However, if there is a sinful pattern in a member that is detrimental to his spiritual life and witness, it is an act of love to confront him (Proverbs 27:6).

Bringing a member's sin to light is an act of love, just as our Father disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). If as a result, the sinning member confesses and repents, no further discipline is necessary and the matter should not be brought to the attention of others. Through his repentance, the errant member has been restored to fellowship with the body and its head, the Lord Jesus.

#### **Stage 2: Confront him with his sin in the presence of one or two others.**

The presence of multiple witnesses guards the accused against unjust accusations, establishes the weight and seriousness of the accusation on the witness of two or three, and provides a means by which the words of the accused and the accuser may be confirmed if the process proceeds to later stages. This stage may be accomplished by two or more members of the church, or it may be brought to the attention of the elders, who will implement the confrontation.

If as a result, the sinning member confesses and repents, no further discipline is necessary and the matter should not be brought to the attention of others. The errant member has been restored to fellowship with the body and its head, the Lord Jesus.

**Stage 3: Tell it to the church.**

The third stage moves from informal to formal, from a private arena to a public one in the church. The church is to be informed that the member has been brought under discipline and the sin for which the discipline is instigated. The church is brought into the circle of the informed for the same purpose as in stage 2; to bring about a concerted effort to win the sinning member back to fellowship through repentance. The church is asked to corporately appeal to the member to turn from his sin in repentance and restore his fellowship with the church and with the head of the church, Jesus Christ.

This attempt to gain the repentance of the sinning member may include steps such as numerous warnings (Titus 3:10) or a conditional disassociation in order to put the member to shame while at the same time exhort him as a brother to repent (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

**Stage 4: Relate to him as one would relate to an unbeliever.**

The last court of appeal is the church itself. If the sinning member is unresponsive to even the efforts of the church to facilitate repentance and restoration, he is to be considered "as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17). Gentiles were excluded from the covenant life in Israel by reason of birth. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors to Israel, shunned because of their choice. This would suggest that the sinning member is to be regarded as an outsider and an unbeliever; one who by his actions has removed himself from the covenant family. This step of disfellowship may be done publicly when the church is assembled (1 Corinthians 5:4).

The examples of church discipline provided in Scripture range from sins that were open to public view (1 Corinthians 5:1, 11) to those that were restricted in view to the church body (Romans 16:17-18, et al), to those that were generally hidden from view (Matthew 18:15-17). While the four stage process of Matthew 18:15-17 deals particularly with a sin that is not open to public view, it provides a general framework for dealing with sins that are more open to public scrutiny as well. However, the example of 1 Corinthians 5 also reveals an immediate and public response to a sin that is publicly known and overtly harmful to the purity and witness of the church. In cases where the sin is publicly known, the elders may deem it appropriate to proceed directly to stage 3 or stage 4.

**Voluntary Termination of Membership by the Sinning Member**

Scripture does not recognize an official membership, as is the modern day practice. Therefore, it does not provide instruction regarding the actions of the church when a sinning member voluntarily terminates their membership with the church while in the process of church discipline. It is the practice of this church that the process of church discipline stops at such point that the sinning member removes himself from the fellowship of the body. The act of removing oneself from fellowship in effect accomplishes the same purpose as disfellowship. In such cases, the elders may or may not inform the church of the reasons behind the voluntary termination of membership, depending upon the stage to which the process had progressed and the degree to which the offense is publicly known.

**Restoration of a Sinning Member**



The goal of church discipline is the restoration of a sinning member. Repentance by the sinning member at any point in the process of church discipline concludes the discipline process and the church is to welcome the member back into fellowship. However, the elders may require the sinning member to meet certain conditions as a part of the restoration process (cf. Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:12), including a confession of the sin to the appropriate circle of the informed (James 5:16).

If repentance takes place after disfellowship, the sinning member should be forgiven and restored to fellowship so that the member is not overcome by sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:5-8; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

### **Church Discipline Directed at Elders - Special Considerations**

In order to protect an elder of the church against false or vindictive accusations, an accusation against an elder is not to be received except on the basis of two or three witnesses. An elder who is confirmed to be in a pattern of sin, and who continues in the sin even after he has been confronted is to be rebuked for the sin in the presence of the church. This is to produce a sense of fear and seriousness about sin in the body (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

## **Worship and Music:**

### **Purpose**

The ultimate purpose in our music ministry is to bring glory to God by developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ, which is the ultimate measure of success for all ministries of our church (Matt 28:19-20). The worship ministry fulfills this purpose by:

- Leading believers to worship in spirit by engaging the heart and emotions (Deut. 6:5; Matthew 22:37)
- Teaching believers spiritual and theological truths about who God is and what He has done (Jn 4:24; Deut 6:5; Matthew 22:37)
- Encouraging believers to experience the immanent, personal God among us
- Drawing believers attention to the transcendent, magnificence of Almighty God
- Preparing the hearts and minds of believers to receive God's Word
- Setting an example of authentic worship to unbelievers
- Communicating truth about God to unbelievers

### **Relevance to Audience Makeup**

The worship expressions should be generationally sensitive such that the worship experience engages the full scope of the body of Christ. The music should thus reflect a corresponding variety in forms and styles. God encourages variety in worship (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), including new, fresh, and creative forms (Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9 Is 42:10; Rev 14:3). The expressions should draw from the cultures of the past to honor how God has met us in the past and also draw from the "cutting edge" of music culture in anticipation of how God will continue to meet us in the future with new experiences with Himself. Drawing from the past encourages younger believers to continue in the doctrinal roots of Christianity. Learning new songs and styles is an opportunity for the more mature believers to establish a cultural bridge to the future.

### **Environment of Worship**

The elements of the environment, including but not limited to, lighting, volume, and song difficulty, should be conducive to congregational participation and not focused on performance. The leaders of worship are charged with the privilege of facilitating the worship of the people

Whether it is the rousing volume of instruments leading the worshippers into celebration, or the quiet reflection of an a cappella chorus, we gather to worship together. However, we also recognize that personal reflection and personal communion with God are essential to the worship environment (see point #5).

The environment of worship is not exclusive to the musical elements and teaching, and may include prayer, scripture reading, the Lord's Table, creeds, or responsive readings.

### **Content**

In the content of our worship, we must be sensitive to doctrinal issues embedded in the lyrics, and occasionally the leader should offer a narrative on the doctrine or emphasis of a song. At the same time, we should not allow worship to become merely a cerebral exercise. We are to worship with our hearts and our minds (Jn 4:24; Deut 6:5; Matthew 22:37). We do not seek out the emotional response for the sake of the experience; rather, we emotionally react to the knowledge of who God is and what He has done for us. The content should evoke responses of joy (Ps 5:11), shouting (Ps 27:6), and delight (Ps 63:4-5).

### **Corporate Focus / Individual Focus**

We believe that the focus of the worship service should primarily facilitate and encourage the body of Christ in corporate worship. However, the personal nature of our relationship with God will stimulate times of personal prayer, confession, application of Scripture, and praise. Participation and introspection weave in and out of the service.

### **Believer / Seeker Focus**

We believe the focus of the worship service should be directed toward believers. We also recognize that our culture, as well as our specific geographic location, invites and encourages the participation of unbelievers. Using 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 as a guide, we desire that our worship environment be sensitive to the unbelievers in our midst. This also implies that our communication should be clear. We recognize that God may be drawing the unbeliever to Himself, and that the Spirit may use the worship experience to lead people to Christ.

### **Form & Style**

The worship environment should reflect a variety of forms and styles. (Col. 3:16) The variety is not to keep everybody happy, but rather to teach believers dimensions of God that extend past their preferences and traditions. The changing forms and styles of our culture will also necessitate changes in our worship expressions.

## **Leadership:**

### **The Head of the Church**

The Head of the Church is Jesus Christ. He leads and guides His church primarily through the word of God, the Bible. The word of God is the final rule of authority for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life. Secondly, He leads and guides His church through a group of biblically qualified men.

### **The Offices of the Church**

The Bible defines two continuing offices in the church, the offices of elder and deacon. The two offices are validated in Scripture by Paul's references to the offices as present in the churches and by the enumeration of those qualifying character traits of the persons who are candidates for the offices. The offices are specific to a local church (Titus 1:5) and are not portrayed as having authority beyond the scope of their local assembly of believers.

### **The Office of Elder**

The office of Elder is held by a group of biblically qualified men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34) who are entrusted with leading and guiding the local church under the leadership of Jesus Christ as prescribed in His Word, the Bible. Each church does not have *an* elder, but rather a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 1 Timothy 3:17, 5:17-25; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 1:1, 5:1-2). The office is referred to interchangeably in Scripture by three terms; elder, pastor, and overseer (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2). The three terms convey three aspects of their role. The Greek term "*presbuteros*" is translated *elder*, and conveys the spiritual maturity and experience of the man holding the office. The Greek terms "*episkopos*" (translated *bishop* or *overseer*) and "*poimen*" (translated *pastor* or *shepherd*), emphasize the primary roles of the office.

As pastors and overseers, the tasks attributed to the Elders include:

- Ministry of the Word – preaching and teaching; deciding on theological issues; refuting false doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17, Acts 16:4, Acts 20:28-31)
- Shepherding the flock – prayer for the sick; guidance, correction, and discipline to those under their care; encouraging the body with biblical teaching; setting an example for the body; managing the church family (James 5:14, Hebrews 13:17, Titus 1:9, 1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:5)
- Oversight of the church – managing the affairs of the church (1 Timothy 5:17)

Scripture does not identify an office of "Pastor" in the local assembly that is held by one man and that has primary responsibility for directing and shepherding the church. Nor is there evidence of one elder being leader among the elders. Rather, the leadership of the church is entrusted to a group of spirit-led men subordinated to the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit works in the church to provide qualified men to serve the church as elders (Acts 20:28). The church recognizes those men whom the Holy Spirit has provided by meeting the biblical requirements of: the candidate must (1) aspire to the office (1 Timothy 3:1), and (2) meet the prescribed qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The qualifications describe character traits that are representative of the man's life. The man must not be without fault in each of the qualifying character traits, but rather must be "above reproach," i.e., the character trait described must fairly represent the pattern of his life.

Elders will have to give an account for the quality of their shepherding (Hebrews 13:17) but will be rewarded for their faithful service at the coming of Christ (1 Peter 5:4).

Certain elders who work hard at preaching and teaching are to receive financial compensation for their work, but the "honor" of their position is not distinguished from those who do not receive financial compensation (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

### **The Relationship of the Elders to the Church**

The elders are to serve the church by leading, instructing, shepherding, and protecting the church. They are not to be motivated by money or power, but rather by a love for Christ's

church and His people. Accusations are not to be received against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses, but if an elder continues in a confirmed sin, he is to be rebuked publicly (1 Timothy 5:19-20). The church is to obey and submit to the elders such that their work is done with joy and not with grief (Hebrews 13:17). The elders are not to lord it over those entrusted to their care, but rather provide examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

### **The Leadership of the Elders**

Cornerstone's Elders operate on the principle of *unanimity*, that is, the process of leading the church is guided by all of the Elders being in agreement. While this principle is not a command of Scripture, its basis is derived from the pattern of the early church leaders who *became of one mind* and the *one-mind* objective of the church, of which its elders are examples (Acts 15:25; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27). In addition, there is no indication of a single elder who has greater authority than the rest, but rather the pattern of mutual submission (1 Peter 5:5).

### **The Office of Deacon**

While the office of deacon is validated in Scripture and the qualifications for those who would hold the office are enumerated (1 Timothy 3:8-13), there is no specification of the function of the deacons. The name of the office (*deacon* is a transliterated form of the word for *servant*) as well as the qualifications themselves describe the office as one that provides *service* to the church, assisting the elders in the ministry of the church.

### **The Distinction between the Offices**

The qualifications for elders and deacons are essentially identical in terms of character and spiritual maturity. However, it is significant to note that nowhere in Scripture do deacons have authority over the church, nor do they have responsibilities for teaching and doctrinal defense. The one difference between their qualifications is the aptitude to teach. In summary, the elders' role is one of oversight, shepherding, and ministry of the word to the body; the deacons' role is one of administration, service, and caring for the body. In addition, we believe that scripture identifies the role of elder to be reserved for men while in regards to the role of deacon scripture displays an openness to both men and women in the role. Cornerstone may, or may not, at any given time have both men and women deacons.

### **Selection of Elders and Deacons**

While apostolic guidance was evident in the selection of elders in newly established churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), Scripture indicates participation by the local congregation in the selection and recognition of the persons who serve (Acts 1:15; 6:3).

### **Practical Considerations**

The focus of the office of elder at Cornerstone is primarily on pastoring (shepherding) and ministry of the Word in addition to oversight. In addition, there is no indication of a term or rotation in Scripture. Therefore, Cornerstone views the appointment as an elder as one that is not limited by time. However, an elder may choose to set aside his duties for a period of one year after his seventh year of service. Likewise, deacons may set aside their duties after three years of service. Afterwards, they may return to the office or alternatively, choose to be released from their duties.

## **Giving:**

The practice of giving is a spiritual discipline of great significance for all Christians. During Christ's ministry on earth, He talked more about money and giving than any other topic, including heaven, hell, or prayer. Accordingly, Cornerstone must give equal attention to the topic of money. This Biblical Perspective paper outlines the major teaching of Scripture regarding money and possessions, and provides appropriate application to our lives.

### **The Inherent Conflict between Money and God**

The heart of Christ's teaching on money and possessions is found in His first recorded sermon in Matthew 6:24:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

In this foundational verse, Jesus characterizes wealth as a false god that has an inherent conflict with God because it possesses certain godlike traits. Money has the inherent potential to take the place of God because it feeds us, it clothes us, it gives us good things to enjoy, we work for it, we depend on it, and we gain security and significance through it. Jesus further points out in this verse that service to the true God and the false god of money are absolutely exclusive. One either serves God or serves wealth. There is no middle ground. John Stott comments, "anybody who divides his allegiance between God and mammon has already given it to mammon, since God can be served only with an entire and exclusive devotion. This is simply because He is God: 'I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other.' To try to share him with other loyalties is to have opted for idolatry."

Worship of the false god of money permeates our society in the form of materialism and consumerism. These are most often recognized in the pursuit of money and the lifestyle it provides and becomes the very thing God hates most - idolatry. Christians and the church are not immune to the attraction of this idol. However, Jesus warned His people that you cannot serve God and wealth. To the degree that a Christian allows money or possessions to take precedence over God in their affection, trust, or pursuits, that Christian is serving a false God and not the true God. Materialism and consumerism drains the vitality and power out of one's spiritual life and places one in bondage to the things of this world. Worship of the false god of money is a real and dangerous threat to the church.

As in all other areas of the Christian life, obedience is the key to freedom from the bondage and deadness of materialism. Obedience in the area of money starts with obedience in giving.

### **The Theology of Giving**

Giving is the key that breaks the power of the false god of money (John 8:32). Scripture indicates how giving fits in to God's plan for the Christian life. While the biblical teaching on money and giving is extensive, the following points represent the major truths regarding giving:

- Giving is rooted in the character of God. God gives to His children forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, peace, and countless other blessings. All of His blessings are given, not earned. Therefore, the practice of giving is imitating the character of God (John 3:16; John 14:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; et al).

- God is the owner of all one possesses. Scripture describes each believer as manager of that which God has entrusted to him. Giving is an acknowledgement of God's ownership (1 Corinthians 4:7; Deuteronomy 8:18; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Malachi 3:8).
- One who does not give is robbing God of the honor He deserves as the One who provides all things to His children. God blesses in order that we might bless others, starting with blessing the Provider. Giving expresses one's gratitude to God for all His goodness (Malachi 3:8, 9; Hebrews 7:7; Proverbs 3:9, 10; Psalm 116:12).
- Obedience in giving is the ultimate test that determines whether one trusts God or one trusts the false god of money; whether one's focus and treasure is in heaven or on earth (Malachi 3:10; Matthew 6:20-24).
- Giving is a means by which God blesses the obedient believer (Acts 20:35). Benefits of giving promised by God include God's continued provision (2 Corinthians 9:7b-8), abundant gifts in return (Luke 6:38), an enlarged impact for the kingdom (2 Corinthians 9:10), and eternal reward (Philippians 4:17).
- Giving serves the primary purposes of supporting God's workers (Galatians 6:6), meeting the needs of God's people (Romans 12:13), ministering to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:10, 11), and funding ministry through the local church (1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 4:34, 35).
- The priority in giving is toward those through whom you have received spiritual benefit (Matthew 10:9, 10; Romans 15:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17, 18).
- Giving is a privilege and an act of worship to be done with generosity and sacrifice (2 Corinthians 8:3, 4; 9:6, 7; Mark 12:42-44).

### **The Pattern of Giving**

The biblical pattern of giving is presented in two forms - the tithe and voluntary gifts apart from and above the tithe. Scripture provides several primary principles related to this two-fold pattern:

- Giving is primarily related to the principle of "firstfruits." Beginning in Genesis 3 and continuing throughout Scripture, the response of the righteous to God's provision is to return the firstfruits of their increase back to God. This practice of giving the first and best part of one's wealth back to God was commanded as the appropriate way to honor the Giver (Proverbs 3:9-10).
- The tithe is presented as the biblical pattern for giving the firstfruits back to God. The word tithe means "a tenth part," thus establishing a proportional basis for giving; the more God blesses, the more one gives (Deuteronomy 16:17; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Tithing is commanded in the Old Testament (Leviticus 27:30) and validated by Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 23:23). The pattern of tithing is not limited to Israel's covenantal relationship with God, since it was practiced by both Abraham (Genesis 14:20) and Jacob (Genesis 28:22) before the Law was given.
- Scripture is filled with examples of voluntary and sacrificial gifts apart from the tithe. These gifts spring out of a heart of gratefulness toward God (1 Chronicles 29:10-17), a concern for fellow believers in need (2 Corinthians 8:3, 13-15), and a desire to participate in the work of God (1 Chronicles 29:3-9, Philippians 4:13-17).

## **Application for Cornerstone**

In order for Cornerstone to teach and live the authentic Christian life, we must pay close attention to the biblical teaching on money and giving. We are at risk of falling victim to the forces of materialism in the society in which we minister and thereby losing our effectiveness for Christ. With this in mind, we have taken the teachings and patterns of Scripture and applied them to our church life and our individual lives as follows:

- Giving is the key component of breaking away from the power of materialism and consumerism. Our church will never be free from the deadening effects of these pursuits until our families are practicing biblical giving.
- Giving is an absolutely essential component of spiritual maturity and leadership. Conversely, an absence of giving is a genuine sign of spiritual immaturity, and potentially points toward service to the false god of mammon. Not practicing the discipline of giving is to be in disobedience to the express will of God in Scripture.
- The tithe must be the "firstfruits," i.e., the first portion of one's income. The biblical foundation of giving is the tithe, which is 10% of one's income. One who gives less than 10% is giving but is not tithing. The discipline of tithing should find its motivation in a heart of grateful obedience to God.
- Giving as described in the New Testament is primarily for the purpose of providing for those from whom you receive spiritual benefit and funding the ministries of the local church. The local church is the primary source of one's spiritual benefit and the primary extension of one's personal ministry. Based on these principles of Scripture, we believe that the tithe should be given to the local church for the purpose of meeting the needs of the staff, funding the ministries of the church, and funding missionary work beyond the immediate ministries of Cornerstone. Cornerstone allocates a significant portion of the tithes of its members to sub-cultural and cross-cultural missionary endeavors both locally and around the world.
- Voluntary and sacrificial gifts above and beyond the tithe are made in the desire and motivation to invest in God's kingdom and His people. These gifts include meeting specific needs in the body of Christ, funding specific ministry endeavors and parachurch organizations, and contributions to Christian organizations and secular charities. Based on the principles of Scripture, we believe that the tithe, the first 10% of one's income, should not be used for these purposes, but should rather be directed to the ministry of the local church.

## **Alcohol:**

### **The Use of Alcohol:**

What should be the attitude of a Christian toward the use of alcoholic beverages? This question frequently stirs the emotions of people on all sides of the issue. To some, the idea that a sincere follower of Christ would drink wine or beer is unthinkable. To these people, total abstinence is the only option for a Christian today. Others, while allowing a believer the option of using alcohol, would quickly add that abstention is a much better choice. Then there are those who feel that their fellow brothers and sisters who demand abstention are quite legalistic

in their position. Who is right? More importantly, are any of the above positions right? We must be careful to answer that question from the perspective of God's Word, not simply from the standpoint of tradition, culture or mere human logic.

Does the Bible address this issue? Indeed, we believe it does. There are well over 200 references to "wine" or "strong drink" in the Old & New Testaments. Some people argue that the "wine" used in Bible times did not have the same alcohol content as the products commonly used today, and therefore we are comparing "apples" to "oranges," so to speak. Whether or not that is true, it is clear from the Biblical record that drunkenness was a common and well-known phenomenon from even the earliest times. The first recorded instance of drunkenness was that of Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:20-24). Likewise, Lot became drunk and committed incest with his daughters (Genesis 19:31-35). In later times the apostles were falsely suspected of being drunk on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:13), and even Jesus Himself was accused of being a "glutton and a drunkard" by those who opposed Him (Matthew 11:19).

As we honestly seek to examine Scripture concerning this issue, the following principles seem to be evident:

**Drunkenness is sin.**

The Bible is quite clear in its condemnation of the excessive use of alcohol resulting in drunkenness. Believers are even warned not to keep company with those who are called "brothers" but are drunkards (1 Corinthians 5:11). A host of other scripture references warns against the dangers of intemperance in the area of "wine" and "strong drink" (Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:20, 21, 31-35; Isaiah 5:11-12; 28:1-8; Hosea 4:11; Joel 1:5; Nahum 1:10; Habakkuk 2:15; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5: 19-21; Ephesians 5:18). There can be no debate on the issue of whether or not it is acceptable for the Christian to engage in the use of alcohol to the point of drunkenness. Drunkenness is clearly set forth as sin. Rather than being drunk with wine, believers are urged to be "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

**Scripture does not require the believer to abstain completely from the use of alcoholic beverages.**

Those who promote the idea that a Christian should never drink will search in vain to find Biblical support for their position. To be sure, there were occasions when certain people were forbidden to drink, such as those who had taken the Nazarite vow, but these cases were not to be considered normative for everyone. The Bible warns against intemperance, but it does not demand total abstinence. This is not to say that many people might not be well advised to abstain completely in light of their own life situation or background, such as a past struggle with alcoholism. For many Christians, the decision not to drink at all may be a very wise choice. However, this decision is not required of all believers. Jesus Himself apparently was not a "teetotaler" (Matthew 11:19). In fact, His first recorded miracle was that of turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee. Paul advised Timothy to "... use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Elders and Deacons are not to be "addicted" or "given" to wine (1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7), but nowhere are they prohibited from using wine in moderation.

**True spirituality is not a matter of food or drink, but of the heart.**

Jesus said, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'," and "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'" (Matthew 15:11, 18).



Likewise, Paul tells us "... the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," (Romans 14:17). The type of food one eats, or the beverages one drinks, can never serve as a true measure of that person's spiritual condition.

**Believers are not to use their freedom in such a way as to cause a brother to stumble.**

Paul's exhortation to the believers at Rome was that "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." (Romans 14:21). It is important to note that Paul does not say that we should seek to avoid doing anything that our brother might disagree with. Such a task would be impossible! The exhortation is that we are not to cause our brother to stumble or become weak. For example, there may be two different people in the church who take issue with the use of alcohol. For one person the problem is that he or she has a history of struggling with alcoholism. For the other person, the issue is that he or she holds to a personal conviction that a Christian should never use alcohol. In other words, for the first person the issue is one of experience, while for the second person, the issue is one of belief (or doctrine). A careless use of Christian liberty on my part may well be a cause of stumbling for the first individual, while for the second individual it might simply highlight a disagreement over what constitutes appropriate Christian behavior.

**We ought to welcome all true believers, regardless of their choice regarding this issue.**

Romans 14 makes it clear that in areas of personal conviction and preference "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." (Romans 14:5). Furthermore, Paul asks us the penetrating question, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (v.4). Each of us will give account of our own actions before God, and whether my brother chooses to use alcohol or not use alcohol is in reality an issue between himself and God alone. While all of us have the responsibility to warn an erring brother who we know to be living in a way that violates Biblical standards, none of us has the right to impose our own personal standards on a fellow believer. The Christian who chooses to abstain from drinking should not consider himself superior to the one who chooses to drink in moderation, nor should he who chooses to use alcohol feel superior to he who does not.

**Christians are to submit to civil government and obey its laws.**

God has ordained civil government for the purpose of maintaining an orderly and safe society in which to live. Government authorities have the right and responsibility to create and enforce laws that promote the general safety and welfare of society. As Christians, we are to submit willingly to civil authority (unless that authority is in direct conflict with God's commandments). To disobey a legitimate civil ordinance is tantamount to disobeying God, since He has appointed and sanctioned the institutions of civil government (Romans 13:1-7). Possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages by those who are under the legal age limit or driving a vehicle with a blood-alcohol level above the legal limit are not only crimes against the state, but also against God Himself.

**Conclusion**

We must emphasize that we do not expect all believers to arrive at the same conclusion concerning how they might best please the Lord in this area. It seems abundantly clear that the Biblical mandate is one of temperance, moderation, and self-control. For many people, total abstinence provides a safeguard against a tendency to overindulge. Those who do choose to use alcohol in a responsible manner should guard against allowing their exercise of freedom to

become an obstacle for a weaker brother. As a church body, we must always respect each individual's right to follow the dictates of his or her own conscience. The guiding principle for the life of our church ought to be in keeping with the motto: "In essential things, unity; in doubtful (indifferent) things, liberty; in all things charity (love)."

## **Divorce and Remarriage:**

Many dear Christian people have been deeply hurt by divorce and are confused about the possibilities of remarriage. We hope to give some definitive direction to those seeking help. This is a controversial matter, for sure. We recognize that there will be godly and sincere Christians who will disagree with the position that we have taken. We have sought to be as biblical, clear and compassionate as we can in what we have written. We ask that you be equally careful in what you read, working hard not to read anything into this that we are not saying nor taking to an extreme what we have endeavored to keep in proper balance.

### **Divorce**

Divorce was never a part of God's original design for marriage (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-8). It is something that God hates (Malachi 2:16). Christ permitted divorce only for the cause of *sexual immorality*<sup>2</sup> (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). However, it must be remembered that divorce was allowed under the law because of the "hardness of men's hearts" and not because of the original intentions of God. If sexual immorality has been committed, the faithful mate has the option to divorce, but it is not mandatory. We believe that the best course of action is for both partners to make every attempt to rebuild their marriage, even when sexual immorality is involved. The issue becomes a choice between that which is permissible under the law and that which is most like the heart of God. Therefore, we believe that no Christian should aggressively seek the dissolution of his or her marriage bond.

### **Remarriage**

If you are divorced because of your mate's sexual immorality, no matter who initiated the divorce, then you have three options before you. You may (1) be reconciled to your mate, (2) remain unmarried, or (3) marry someone else.

In all relationships throughout the Bible, reconciliation has been held as the highest expression of love and commitment and is therefore clearly most desirable (Matthew 5:23-26; 6:43-48; 18:21, 22; 19:5, 6; Mark 10:6-9; Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; 1 Corinthians 13). To remain unmarried is certainly not a "curse," since Paul teaches that in many cases it is a purposeful calling which can bring an individual to a place of usefulness to God, perhaps unattainable if married (1 Corinthians 7:25-35; 1 Peter 2:19, 20). Remarriage to another is allowed if your divorce was because of sexual immorality by your spouse. However, such a marriage may not always be best for the parties involved, especially when there is the possibility of reconciliation with one's original mate.

### **Pastoral Application**

We are committed to resolving marital conflicts and healing broken relationships. Therefore, we will encourage the removal of all bitterness and hurt through confession,

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<sup>2</sup> "Sexual immorality" (Greek, *porneia*) refers to intimate sexual involvement with someone other than one's mate. This would include all forms of unlawful sexual activity: incest, homosexuality, prostitution, adultery, etc.

restitution and forgiveness as needed, and a renewed commitment to the original marriage relationship.

We will not consider remarrying a divorced person unless (1) his or her divorce was because of a mate's immorality (or desertion that led to immorality), or (2) he or she was deserted for other reasons and every possibility for reconciliation has been exhausted due to his or her mate's remarriage (thus making the mate adulterous) or death (1 Corinthians 7:39).

By becoming agents of reconciliation, we are upholding the highest degree of marital commitment and the original intention of God. We realize that not everyone will agree with our understanding of Scripture. This is an extremely emotional subject, making agreement even more difficult. However, we in no way intend for this statement to be harmful or divisive in the body of Christ. We are more than happy to spend the necessary time to pray and talk through this issue from Scripture with anyone who desires to do so.

## **Gender Roles:**

Today's culture has continuously and progressively redefined the gender roles from past generations. The church has not been immune to the pressure to conform to our society on issues of gender and sexuality, and the authority of Scripture on these issues has been brought into question. Cornerstone's leadership is aware of that pressure and wants to do all we can, by God's grace, to live true to the Scriptures, without erring on either the side of irresponsible biblical interpretation or elevating culture demands over Biblical truth. A number of questions arise from the divergence between our societal norms and the biblical texts that warrant consideration: 1) Are the commands in Scripture concerning women and men binding for all generations and cultures? (Or are they to be understood as applicable to that cultural setting alone.) 2) Can women serve as elders and deacons in the church? 3) Are women permitted to teach in the church? Our desire in this perspective paper is humbly seek a correct understanding of the teaching of Scripture regarding the gender roles. It is established on the firm commitment that Scripture, when rightly understood and applied, stands in authority over the life of the church.

### **Do The Biblical Gender Roles Still Apply to Us Today?**

A key principle for determining if a passage of Scripture is normative for all ages is to consider the basis on which the appeal in Scripture is made. If a command is based on the character of God, for example, then it is *prescriptive*, binding for all ages. Likewise, if a command is based on *creation*—either the order of creation, or the cultural mandate of Gen. 1,2, then that command is binding for all cultures and generations.

Virtually everything we have in the Bible about the role of men and women in the church comes from the Apostle Paul. And when Paul talks about the role of women in the church, he typically goes back to the creation order in Genesis 1 and 2. By doing so, he

emphasizes that these gender roles in the church are not simply pertaining to one specific situation, time, or culture, but that they apply to all cultures at all times.

Jesus did the same thing when he was pressed on the issue of marriage and divorce by the Pharisees in Mark 10. When asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” he went behind the authority of the Torah and appealed to a prior and more fundamental authority in the order of the creation. This understanding of creation is central to a correct understanding of male and female roles. All Biblical teaching on gender roles emanate from this historic event. Thus to think of the matter of subordination in marriage and in the church as a past local custom or specified by a time period is wrong. Our understanding and teaching on gender roles rests on the apostolic appeals to Creation.

### **Equal before God**

Men and women are of equal value before God. The Bible is unmistakably clear in making this assertion. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28 ESV). Thus we must passionately guard against any hint of chauvinism that says that women are inferior to men, less valuable, or unworthy of respect. Likewise we must combat with equal fervor the prevailing characterization of men as weak, unable to lead, and dependent upon women for guidance and direction. Though created perfectly by God and then distorted by the Fall, the Church’s effort is to restore the roles of men and women to their original design. As image bearers of our Creator, women and men have equal status before God: “So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them*” (Gen. 1:27 ESV). Similarly, God has bestowed upon both men and women spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7), unique talents, and has given each the responsibility for doing the work of the ministry (1 Pet. 2:9).

### **Different by Design**

Although men and women are equal before God, they are nevertheless different. Even small children are aware of this: men and women are not the same. They are different by God’s design – physically, emotionally, and relationally. They are designed different by God in order to fulfill *complementary* roles, not competitive roles in the family unit, the church, and society. The challenging task, however, is recognizing God’s intent for these differences in the life of the church and the home. This is critical, because our society is blurring the differences, and thereby misappropriating gender roles. As a result of stepping outside of God’s intended roles, our society has reflected a devaluation of marriage, a redefinition of marriage, and an explosive upsurge in homosexuality and divorce, even among professing Christians. The results of a non-Biblical understanding of “different by design” leads to the loss of the rich blessings resulting from living within God’s intended design.

### **Gender Distinctions in the Home**

The New Testament provides clear teaching on how the relationship between a husband and a wife should honor the Lord. Key characteristics of shared responsibilities are mutual submission (Eph. 5:21), showing love for one another (Col. 3:19; Titus 2:4), mutual sexual fulfillment (1 Cor. 7:2-4) and common care for the raising of children to honor God (Eph 6:4 Titus 2:4,5). I Corinthians 7:12-17 indicates that husbands and wives should both be concerned with the salvation of the other and should lead lives that serve as examples one to the other.

The distinctive nature of the roles of husband and wife are also described in the New Testament. The key characteristics uniquely applied to the husband's role are the primary responsibility for leading the family (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph 5:23; 1 Tim. 3:10) and sacrificially loving his wife (Eph. 5:25,28; Col. 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). The key characteristics uniquely applied to the wife's role are a voluntary submission to and respect for the husband's leadership (Eph. 5:22, 33; 1 Peter 3:5; Titus 2:5) and the primary responsibility for the nurturing atmosphere of the home (Titus 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 5:10). These primary responsibilities do not preclude the husband's respect of his wife and nurturing of his home, nor the wife's leadership within the home and her sacrificial love for her husband.

God's word makes it clear that both husbands and wives should strive to please one another (1 Cor. 7:34; Deut. 24:5) and serve together in the church (1 Tim 3:8-11). In a Christian marriage, husbands and wives are equal in value, share common responsibilities, and are uniquely created by God to utilize their characteristics as men and women to fulfill their unique and complimentary roles.

### **Gender Distinctions in the Church**

A central statement that sheds light on the relationship between gender and leadership in the church is found in 1 Timothy 2:12-13, where the Apostle Paul writes: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet." Not surprisingly, this statement that today seems like an incendiary prohibition by Paul has spawned all kinds of interpretations, from people who simply reject this passage at face-value, and suggest that it really means the opposite of what it says, and thus conclude that women can and should fill all the leadership positions within a church to those who go the other end of the spectrum and argue that women can't serve in any leadership positions in the church and cannot teach anyone in the church except for children.

We believe that each of those extremes is problematic. First of all, there are women in the Scriptures who taught—even taught men—and women who exercised authority. Our job, then, is to figure out what was originally meant by the words 'teach' and 'exercise authority'. The word 'teach', given the use of the word throughout the Pastoral Epistles, has to do with the exposition of Scripture, that is, the authoritative communication of the sound doctrine. The next phrase, translated 'exercise authority', comes from a unique Greek construct that only appears once in the New Testament, and it has to do with judicial or governing prerogative. Given the historical and literary context, the grammatical structure and the fact that these words are so closely related—we believe these words 'teach' and 'exercise authority' are to be taken together—they qualify each other. Thus, we believe they are to be understood to communicate a wider Pauline concern that *positions of teaching authority in the church should be reserved exclusively for men*. This passage, along with others in the New Testament, seem to indicate that, while men and women are of equal value before God, the role of teaching authority, namely the role of elder, should be limited to qualified men.

### **The Role of Elder**

The clearest statement that the role of elder is to be male appears in 1 Tim. 3:1-2, wherein Paul writes: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife..." An 'overseer' is an elder in the church. The Greek words for *pastor*, *elder*, *presbyter*, *bishop* and *overseer* are used interchangeably in the New Testament. A pastor, at least strictly

speaking, is an elder; and elder is an overseer. (We acknowledge that the term “pastor” is often used more broadly today by both culture and the church to denote a church staff position or ministry “head.”) And Paul says that an elder must be a “husband of one wife”, or perhaps truer to the original language, a one-woman-man (and not “true to one mate” as some would suggest). A woman cannot be a one-woman-man. Consequently, scripture does not forbid a woman from *all* teaching and *all* authority, but rather limits teaching and ruling as an elder to men.

Based on this passage, along with others that have been referenced, we have concluded that men and women are given distinctive, complementary roles by God, and that the ultimate purpose of these roles is to help men and women work in harmony to fulfill the mission of the church: to make life-long, passionate followers of Jesus Christ. Men whom God calls and equips to serve as elder are to embrace a benevolent responsibility to lead and serve within the church. Men and women may serve in other leadership roles in the church, including the office of deacon, and should eagerly employ their gifts and talents to teach, administrate, pray, lead worship, oversee specific ministries, and contribute to the church for the glory of God, while affirming and submitting to the spiritual oversight of the men that God calls to serve as elder. In regard to these distinctive, complementary roles, we must note that in God’s view, equality and hierarchy are not mutually exclusive concepts. The Bible teaches that God the Father and Jesus Christ are equal; yet, within the Triune Godhead, a hierarchy of authority and submission exists. Christ is equal to God, yet submits to the authority of the Father. God the Father is “head” over Christ. Yet both are forever equal.

### **Summary**

- Men and women are of equal value before God; men are not better than women, nor are women more important than men.
- Men and women, though being equal, are different by divine design. Men and women are given distinctive, complementary roles by God within the family and the church.
- Men (husbands) and women (wives) share common responsibilities and yet are uniquely created by God to utilize their characteristics as men and women to also fulfill their unique and complimentary roles within marriage.
- Men and women may serve in other leadership roles in the church, including the office of deacon and should study theology, teach, lead, administrate, oversee specific ministries, serve as deacons, and use their varied gifts and talents for the benefit of the believing community.
- The role of ‘teaching authority’, or elder, however, is reserved for qualified men—men that God calls and equips to serve and lead the church.
- Men and women of Cornerstone are called to joyfully submit to the governing group of elders that God has placed over them in the church.
- The issue of gender roles ought not to be a cause for division or separation, but should represent differences that we celebrate, as gifts from God.

### **Homosexuality:**

Homosexual behavior has been adopted by segments of certain cultures as an acceptable alternative to heterosexual marriage since at least early Biblical times (see Genesis

chapter 19). Our society's acceptance of the practice of homosexuality as a life style presents challenges to the Christian community who seek to hold to Biblical positions on marriage and human relationships. There are few television shows or movies produced today that treat the practice of homosexuality in relationships as wrong, unhealthy, or sinful. Leading talk show hosts and others in the entertainment industry continue to present the choice to practice homosexuality as common and healthy, as something to be celebrated openly in society so that even its mention as less than ideal or contrary to religious teachings about God's view of relationships is seen as unacceptable. Leading American business and industrial companies have developed "diversity" plans to be sure that those who practice homosexuality are not the subjects of prejudicial acts yet have carried these plans to a point where active support, sometimes encouragement, of the practice of a homosexual lifestyle has resulted. While protection for those who choose to practice homosexuality from employment discrimination is equitable, some states have passed laws allowing for the intermarriage of those who practice homosexuality, insurance coverage under family plans for those who choose to practice homosexuality, etc.

What perspective should the Christian church have about the practice of homosexuality? What does the Bible say about those who practice homosexuality and how the Christian should relate to those individuals who make this choice? How is this applied in our world today?

#### **What does the Bible say?**

In Genesis 2:21-25 man and woman are created by God. They are created for one another. As the text says "*a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*" (v. 24). Thus God established the sexual relationship in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. In Matthew 19:4-6 our Lord confirms marriage of one man and one woman as what God intended in His design. There is no room in Scripture for a sexual relationship in any other context. In Genesis 19 which indicates the desires of the wicked men of Sodom, the sin for which they are condemned is the sin of practicing homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 include practicing homosexuality among the list of detestable deviations from God's design for marriage. Practicing homosexuality is described as shameful, unnatural and indecent in Romans 1:26-27 and as wicked in I Corinthians 6:9-10. I Timothy 1:10 simply says such perversion is contrary to sound doctrine. There are presently those who represent themselves as members of the Christian community who attempt to justify the practice of the homosexual lifestyle in spite of these clear references, suggesting that the biblical authors lacked knowledge of the possible impact of genetics on a propensity to engage in the practice of homosexuality. We reject this "justification" as scripturally baseless and, in fact, counter to the clear teachings of the Scripture. Likewise, others attempt to justify the practice of homosexuality based on other scripturally baseless thought such as describing the sinful activities in Sodom in Genesis 19 as a lacking of hospitality rather than homosexual activity, or that David and Jonathan were actually lovers engaged in homosexual activity and so forth. We reject these theologically hollow and senseless attempts to justify this lifestyle of sin as just what they are – baseless and disturbingly contrary to the text of Scripture.

**What principles are set forth in the Bible to help Christians to know how to treat those who practice homosexuality?**

The Bible tells us how to care for those who continue in sin. As to believers, we are to approach them regarding their sin following the principles of Matthew 18. As to those who are not believers, we are to be salt and light in accordance with Matthew 5 and to pray for their response to the revelation of God's truth about their separation from God due to their sins.

**What does this mean in our teaching today?**

The principles remain the same today as they were in Jesus' day. Just as the sin of lust or adultery is a choice to sin, so is homosexual activity a choice to sin. Consequently, our position and teaching at Cornerstone will be consistent with the truth of the Scripture that participation in any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sin. Therefore, as we teach through or from the text of the Bible, we will teach exactly what the Scripture says regarding the practice of homosexuality.

**Given that the Bible teaches homosexual activity is a sin, what is our perspective on how those who practice homosexuality are to be treated in society and in our church and its services?**

Those individuals who practice homosexuality are to be treated with respect and honor as image bearers of our Holy God. There is to be no crude talk that might demean those who practice homosexual behavior with careful consideration being given to James' admonitions regarding the tongue. While the life style chosen by these men and women is contrary to the teachings of the Scripture, God's grace is available to them as it is to any sinner who will confess Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior. Those individuals who practice homosexuality are to be welcomed and allowed to participate in the worship activities of Cornerstone. Cornerstone does not permit any type of activity on its campus that the leadership considers disruptive to church activities including worship. Consequently, conduct deemed inappropriate by Cornerstone leadership on the Cornerstone campus whether during worship services or at other times will not be allowed.

While appropriately conducted participation in worship is permitted for all people whether believers or non-believers, participation in ministry, baptism and other activities as determined by the leadership are reserved for those who meet the prerequisites for membership.

**God's Plan for Marriage**

Marriage is a union of one man and one woman. No "marriage" of same sex couples is acceptable in God's church because of the clarity of Scripture from its earliest writings. The "marriage" of couples of the same sex is sin and any such "marriage" is not recognized as a marriage by those who adhere to the Holy Scriptures.

It should be pointed out that Scripture is equally as forthright in its condemnation of heterosexual relationships outside the context of marriage. God designed the sexual relationship to be enjoyed exclusively within the context of marriage between a man and a woman and nowhere else. As leadership of Cornerstone, we consider any sexual activity that comes short of this standard to be sin as well.

**Conclusion**

We believe that homosexual activity is a sin that can be conquered through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit living in an individual. It is not the temptation to participate in homosexual activity that is sin but rather the sin of participation itself. Therefore, those who



practice homosexuality who desire to discontinue such activity are welcome to seek the help of Cornerstone's leadership who will provide counsel and direction leading to a lifestyle that is honoring to God and consistent with His Word.