

position paper

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF ELDERS – FEBRUARY 20, 2025

Where We Stand at Calvary Church: Denials and Affirmations

INTRODUCTION

Calvary Church is bound together by the biblical gospel, and we seek to live in the unity which that gospel creates. We believe and practice, “In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.” In that light, we seek to address social movements and cultural trends that can create division among us.

Just as the Apostle Paul needed to explain and defend himself and his ministry (2 Corinthians 10-13), we, too, sense a need to explain the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. Because of questions asked, concerns raised and criticisms made for and against various cultural trends, the Board of Elders and the Strategic Leadership Team have adopted this declaration. The following statements are not meant to demonize or denigrate but are attempts to clarify where Calvary Church stands as we seek to make the biblical gospel, and not any social movement, central among us.

DENIALS AND AFFIRMATIONS

- We are not adherents of the secular “Social Justice” movement as held in progressive circles, but we do believe that biblical justice has social implications, particularly in protecting those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.
- We are not “woke” in the sense of having embraced a progressive ideology that is grounded in critical theory rather than the Bible, but we do see the need to be awakened to the global and indeed cosmic impacts of sin, including racial injustice, and to be attuned to the biblical call for gospel-driven efforts toward reconciliation and restoration.
- We are not adherents of “Critical Race Theory” that reduces all racial inequities to a struggle between oppressor and oppressed and presents a worldview that is contrary to the Scriptures, but we do believe that the questions and challenges it raises stir us to recall critical biblical truths that we may have neglected and require our attention.
- We are not “Christian Nationalists” who believe the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation or who believe that Americans are “God’s chosen people,” but we do believe that an appreciation of one’s nation is appropriate and that Christians should be good citizens who may freely advocate for God-honoring public policies.
- We do not believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God, but we do believe that God has appointed governing authorities to do good and that, for citizens in Christ’s kingdom, King Jesus’ rule and reign transcends all other citizenships and partisan ideologies and transforms how we live in the world.
- We do not believe that a person’s biological sex should be separated from their self-perception as a man or a woman nor that the body should be altered when it does not conform to that self-perception, but we do believe that some people experience a distressing struggle between these two and that we must treat those who struggle in this way with love and compassion as we seek to help them, with the truth and power of the gospel, toward the wholeness of a biologically-sexed identity grounded in God’s “very good” design in creation as male and female.
- We do not believe in the annihilation of those who die apart from Christ, but in their eternal conscious punishment. Among the kinds of suffering we ought to seek to alleviate, this is the most grievous, and it is our urgent duty and God-given privilege to seek to alleviate it by proclaiming the gospel and calling all people to believe the gospel by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

A FEW SUMMARY STATEMENTS REFLECTING OUR CONVICTIONS

We believe that the good news of the Kingdom of God, announced and embodied by Jesus Christ, is the ultimate and final solution to the problems of this world. Love for God and love for our neighbor, to which the gospel calls us, requires that we seek the welfare and common good of our communities and nation.

We believe the church is the new community created by God, the “pillar and buttress of truth.” Our primary ministry and mission is to proclaim the gospel and to “raise up followers of Jesus” as salt and light in the world as we await the glorious return of Jesus who will complete the transformation He has begun.

We believe that biblical truth and the gospel are to be valued above any contemporary social ideology, while acknowledging that social movements may contain biblical truth to which we must attend.

In sum, Calvary Church is neither “Progressive Evangelical” nor “Neo-Fundamentalist.” We remain tethered to the text of Scripture and grounded in the gospel (evangel) of Jesus Christ as we love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-39). As we interact with one another and the world around us, we are committed to convictional kindness—conviction that is grounded in the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and kindness that manifests “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). We both proclaim the gospel (Rom 1:16) and seek to live in a manner worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

LEARNING HOW TO RESPOND TO THOSE WITH DIFFERENT OPINIONS

As Christians, we affirm the truth of the Scriptures and the truthfulness of biblical doctrine with an unqualified “Yes” (1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 2 Corinthians 1:20). When the truth of the Scriptures and biblical doctrine are being denied, we respond with an unqualified “No” (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Pet 2:1).

When we encounter those with views different from our own, how do we respond? We are called to listen respectfully and to affirm what can be biblically affirmed. Unfortunately, too often there is either an attempt at via media, a “middle of the road” belief as if differing beliefs can be melded together or that they do not matter, or an “all or nothing” approach, either naively and uncritically accepting everything, or critically and condemningly rejecting everything. There is a better way.

Affirming what is true. This means, first of all, that in our approach to contemporary claims we need to learn to say “yes.” We need to avoid an attitude of hyper-criticism, which assumes that if any idea is new (or, if we have never heard it said that way before) it must be false. Although we have the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Scriptures, no church body or theological tradition has all the truth.

Denying what is false. Just as clearly as we must affirm the truths others hold, we must also reject their errors. Too many of us are extremely naive in our acceptance of the truth claims of others. Too often we allow ourselves to be misled by others’ false notions because we are convinced that their motives are pure, unaware of the damaging spiritual effects of every false doctrine or teaching.

How do we do a better job of engaging the increasingly diverse religious opinions we are hearing today? By teaching our minds and our lips to say “yes and no.” “Yes” to what is good and right. “No” to what is bad and wrong. This will require that we use our critical faculties and listen to people respectfully and kindly as they speak and write. It will also require us to search the Scriptures more carefully and fully to be in a better position to make valid assessments of others’ truth claims.



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