



ADDENDUM TO OUR DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

What are the non-essential issues which we will consistently teach, yet not break fellowship with a Christian who believes differently?

There are a number of contemporary theological issues that fall outside the lines of "essential" doctrines, yet often cause division within the body of Christ. It's important for a congregation to understand its church's position on these issues, for they serve as a foundation for unity, for doctrinal teaching, and for practical church life.

Election & Perseverance (*The Question of Calvinism or Arminianism*)

The subject of "election" is replete in Scripture, and, as a result, almost everyone within Christendom agrees that God's election unto salvation is an unavoidable fact. The issue that separates people is the **basis** for God's election unto salvation. So-called "Arminian" denominations claim that God elects some people based on His infinite foreknowledge of the faith response of human beings. On the other side of the debate are the so-called "Calvinist" or "Reformed" denominations who claim that God elects some people based solely upon His sovereignty and good pleasure. The primary difference is stark: Arminian churches emphasize the free will decision of man in election; Calvinist churches point to the sovereignty of God in election.

While the Arminian position is certainly attractive from a human perspective, it has very little positive scriptural support. Arminians view God as looking down the corridor of time and seeing those who will respond positively to the Gospel message. Thus God "elects" these individuals based on their positive response. The problem with this view is obvious: if God elects those who choose Him, the concept of God's sovereignty in "election" is actually nullified because God is simply rubber-stamping *man's* decision. And if God elects based on *man's* decision, we have the beginning of salvation by merit (or works). Man becomes at least partially responsible for saving himself and, thus, has at least *some* reason to boast in his choice to be saved. This is a clear violation of Eph 2:8-9 and other key passages that speak of salvation by *faith alone* by an act of God's *grace alone* for *His glory alone*.

Does that mean that Christians are "pre-programmed robots" whose will is violated by God in the process of salvation? No, this church believes that within time and space, men and women *do* make a *willing choice* to receive God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this church also affirms that without God moving *first* to regenerate the heart of His chosen ones, those same men and women would be incapable of inclining themselves toward God and making such a choice. As a result, God gets all the glory in our salvation!

There are many passages which clearly describe God's sovereign choice in election, among them: Rom. 9:10-23, Eph. 1:3-12, 2 Tim. 1:8-9, and Titus 3:3-5. The primary objection raised against Calvinist doctrine usually isn't the text of Scripture – it's an *emotional* objection which questions God's love and God's fairness in *not* electing everyone. While this truth is sometimes difficult to grasp, we must always remember that God's sovereignty and His Word trump our fallible, human logic. As the sovereign Creator of all things, God is not obligated to act in a way that harmonizes with our finite understanding of "fairness."

The logical end of the Arminian understanding of salvation is that one can "fall away" or "walk away" from a relationship with Christ. After all, if man has the ability to choose God and cooperate in salvation, it seems logical that man can also choose to walk away. This church rejects both ends of this soteriological perspective. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom

8:38-39), no one can snatch the chosen sheep out of Christ's hand or the Father's hand (Jn. 10:27-29), the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance (Eph. 1:14, 4:30, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5), God has begun a work in us and He will perfect it to the end (Phil 1:6), He keeps us from stumbling (Jude 24). If one believes in the sovereignty of God in election, there is no possibility of the loss of salvation for there is no way to thwart the decrees of the Lord! If a person who claimed to follow Christ "falls away," we can be certain that he or she was never a true member of Christ's body (1 Jn. 2:19).

The Role of Women in Church Ministry

The New Testament informs us of two particular categories of "offices" established for the Church. First, there are those charged with the role of:

- (1) oversight: "overseers" (*episkopos*) as in 1 Tim 3:2, or "elders" (*presbyteros*), as in Titus 2:5;
- (2) shepherding: "pastors" (*poimenos*), as in Eph 4:11; and
- (3) teaching: "teachers" (*didaskalos*), as in Eph 4:11.

These are offices of spiritual authority in the Church which are to be respected and submitted to by the members of the church (see Heb. 13:17). Pastors and elders are charged with these three roles - to oversee the flock, shepherd the individual sheep, and teach them sound doctrine.

Secondly, there are those charged with the role of *high service* within the body, usually designated as "deacons" (*diakonos*), as in 1 Tim 3:8. The qualifications for pastors, elders, and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9) should be closely examined before anyone is appointed to such an office in the church.

Paul makes a number of important statements related to how women should function within the body of Christ, the most compelling and universal statement coming in 1 Tim. 2:11-14. Women, he says, are not to assume a position or posture of authority over a man. His statement includes "teaching" men, for theological teaching carries inherent authority. Some have attempted to make this a temporal instruction applicable only to the church of the first century; however, Paul's appeal to the divine order in creation (1 Tim 2:13-14) refutes this idea and strengthens the command as a universal imperative for all time. It is precisely this fact that makes 1 Tim 2:11-14 the most important statement regarding how women should function in the church today. The issue is one of *authority and function*, not *equality*. For elsewhere (Gal 3:28), Paul makes it clear that men and women were both made in the image of God and possess equal *value* in the sight of God.

Understanding that God has created a particular functional order within male/female relationships, this universal imperative of male headship is best applied in marriage, in the home, and in the church. As a result, it is the position of this church that women may not hold the offices of pastor or elder. If a woman were to serve as an elder (overseer), biblical instruction would compel male churchgoers to submit to her position of authority, thereby violating Paul's command. Similarly, if a woman were to be recognized as a teacher of men within the body, her exhortations would carry authority in the life of the men of the church.

So what roles does Scripture permit a woman to play in the local church?

First, it's important to note that both men and women in leadership are absolutely necessary for the successful mission of the local church. The female voice should never be slighted or ignored in the church!

The model of the family is particularly helpful here (after all, the church is the "household of God.") While the husband is to exercise spiritual headship and the wife spiritual submission, each member in the family serves together according to his or her abilities for the good of the whole. In terms of the church, women can and should be recognized as "co-laborers" serving in vital ministries in the church alongside men. Based on 1 Tim 3:11, it appears that Paul is recognizing the ability of women to serve in the role of deaconess, a high standing that connotes servanthood (but not spiritual authority). There should be no doubt that women may head any number of servant-based ministries

within the church. In addition, Scripture makes it plain that women ought to pursue the opportunity to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5) and children (Deut 11:19).

The Role of Supernatural "Sign Gifts" in the church today

In the first century, the spiritual gifts of miracles, healing, prophecy, and tongues were alive and active. The question remains: are they still alive in the church today? There are two extreme positions on this question. First, there are the so-called "charismatic" churches that claim to experience these gifts on a regular basis (which, some claim, are *necessary* as a sign of true conversion). On the other side are the "cessationist" churches that believe the "sign gifts" completely ceased to exist at the end of the apostolic era.

Curiously, the controversy over the "sign gifts" in the church is a debate that began only in the 20th century. There is very little discussion on this topic in the theological writings of the previous eighteen centuries. It appears that the emphasis on experiential gifts which began in the early 20th century was a radical reaction to the rationalism of the previous two centuries where the possibility of miracles was soundly denied by the culture. Today, some in the church are looking for miraculous experiences around every corner! We are the "microwave generation" and we want everything – even our spiritual experience – to be quick and powerful. But we must be cautious about overemphasizing experience at the expense of sound doctrine and careful study of God's Word. On the other hand, any irrational fear of "experience" should not cause us to ignore the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church.

This church does not consider itself a charismatic body, but we do not fall into the category of a hard-line "cessationist" body either. We believe that much (if not all) of the tongues and other signs exhibited in charismatic churches today is, at best, misguided, and, at worst, fraudulent. However, the scriptural evidence to support an absolute cessation of the gifts is thin (1 Cor 13:8-10 is often cited, but is unpersuasive to many). In the past, it seems that God's purpose in miraculous signs has consistently been to validate His message, particularly at times when the message was new or unpopular. Thus, we see certain time periods in redemptive history when miracles were concentrated to accomplish God's purposes. If God were to gift someone with tongues or healing today, one might expect them to show up in the mission fields where God is revealing Himself and the Gospel to new people groups. Could God use sign gifts in the American church today? We should be cautious about saying "absolutely not," however, based on biblical patterns, it is far more logical that He would simply let His written Word speak to those in the American church and use miraculous signs in cutting-edge missionary work around the world. However God chooses to work, it's important for us to understand that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts according to *His* sovereign will and purpose, not according to what we want!

Details concerning the End Times (Eschatology)

Eschatology is one of the most difficult and confusing areas of Christian doctrine, and it has the tendency to cause great divisions between Christians who agree on so many other issues! As a result, it's advisable not to divide the body of Christ over eschatological nuances. As far as this church is concerned, the most critical and essential component of eschatology is this simple statement: *Jesus Christ will one day return*. Collating the scriptural references on this subject and attempting to put them into a clear-cut timeframe is a difficult task – one which has eluded many theologians over the centuries. This following is a brief synopsis which will attempt to elucidate this church's basic position on The Last Things:

This local church holds a "pre-millennial" eschatological perspective. There is coming a period of great tribulation upon the earth (see Rev 4-18). At some point during this period of tribulation, it appears that believers still alive upon the earth will be "caught up" (Latin: *rapturo*) in the clouds to be with Christ (1 Thess 4:13-18). When will this happen? It appears there is a distinction between this event and the Second Coming described in Revelation 19:11-16. Therefore, it seems logical that this "rapture" would take place either *prior* to the tribulation or sometime *during* this period of distress. At the *end* of the great tribulation, Christ will indeed descend from heaven in bodily form just as He had ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11). After destroying those armies aligned against Him

and binding Satan, the beast and the false prophet (Rev 19:19-21), Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years (the Millennial Kingdom) with the faithful saints, including those who refused to take the mark of the beast during the Great Tribulation Period (Rev 20:4-5). At the end of the Millennial Period, Satan will be released long enough to suffer his final defeat and be thrown into the lake of fire for eternity (Rev 20:7-10). Then will come the final "Great White Throne" judgment of the unbelieving world and their final end in the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15). Finally, the arrival of the New Heaven and Earth where the believing saints will enjoy the presence of God for eternity in their resurrected, glorified bodies.

The Relationship between Israel and the Church

In the very complex debate over the relationship between Israel and the universal Church, this local church would describe itself as "progressive dispensationalist." The Church is *not* the same as Israel under the New Covenant and God is not done with Israel as His chosen nation. The covenantal promises of God given to ethnic Israel through Abraham, David, and the prophets are *irrevocable* (Rom 11:29). There is at this time a "partial hardening" of Israel so as to allow the full number of Gentiles to come into the Kingdom of God (Rom 11:25). Believing Gentiles have been "grafted in" to the tree of promise under the New Covenant (Rom 11:11-24). However, the Jews as God's chosen people have not "stumbled" so as to fall away from God's irrevocable promises (Rom 11:11). Rather, once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, Israel will once again come front and center in God's redemptive plan during the Tribulation Period and the Millennial Kingdom. In the Millennial Kingdom Israel will finally fulfill her calling as a light to the nations (Isaiah 60:1-14).

We see a distinction between the age of Law and the age of Grace. Under the Old Covenant of Law, mankind was bound as a slave to sin (Rom 7:14-20) and incapable of attaining to the standards of the Law. As such, the Law was designed by God to serve as a tutor, driving the man under Law to see his need for God's unmerited forgiveness ("grace"). The Old Testament saint was "saved" by his or her belief (saving faith) in Yahweh and in His promises (Gen 15:1-6), exemplified by his or her participation in the sacrificial system by faith. When the promised New Covenant was inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ, God's dispensation of Law was superseded by a "greater" dispensation – one that is represented by the perfect sacrifice of Christ, our high priest who "entered the most holy place once for all" (Heb 9:11-15). The New Covenant has rendered the Old Covenant "obsolete" according to Hebrews 8:13.

Church Discipline

Though church discipline is a very difficult area of doctrine and one hard to practice, it nevertheless rests upon the divine authority of Scripture and is vital to the purity, power, progress, and purpose of the church. The responsibility and necessity for discipline is not an option for the church if it claims to obey the Word of God.

In a general sense, "church discipline" is a confrontive and corrective measure taken by an individual, church leaders, and/or the local congregation regarding a matter of sin in the life of a believer. Behaviors exhibited by a believer which are clearly out of line with the commands of Scripture must be confronted due to the potential impact upon the unity of the body and the corporate witness of the church in the community. Specific categories of such behavior include: immoral conduct, factious behavior which divides the body, false teaching, a spirit of unforgiveness between members of the body, and more.

It is essential to keep in mind the *purpose* of church discipline. We ought not to discipline people with the goal of shaming them or driving them away from the church. The purpose of church discipline is *always* repentance and restoration to the body. We want to restore, heal, and build up sinning believers. We want to produce a healthy faith, one in sound doctrine. We want to set an example for the rest of the body and promote a healthy sense of the "fear of the Lord." There are several examples of church discipline in Scripture (see particularly: 1 Cor 5:1-13, 2 Thess 3:6-15).

Church discipline must always be done in a spirit of humility and self-examination. Those who walk in contradiction to the Scriptures should be personally admonished, warned, and appealed to in love

(Matt 18:15, 1 Thess 5:14-15, Gal 6:1, 1 Tim 5:1-2). If there is no repentant response, a second attempt should be made with one or two others serving as witnesses. Once again, these confrontations must be done in love with the purpose of restoring the sinning brother or sister – we must guard our hearts against pride and self-righteousness. If there is still no acceptance of responsibility and responsive action, the matter must be turned over to church leadership (the elder team) for public discipline as described in Matthew 18:17. The final step is excommunication from the body (also described in Matthew 18:17).