

AC3 POSITIONS ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Within the bounds of the whole-hearted affirmation of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and preserved for us faithfully in the Christian Scriptures, we recognize more than one position as legitimate evangelical options in many areas. As a local church, we hold no single position on many controversial issues consistent with Paul's teaching in Romans 14. We encourage 'unity in the essential things, freedom in the non-essential things, and agape-love in all things.' (*"So then, we must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another."* Rom 14:19)

Issues About Sovereignty and Salvation:

1. **Does God choose who will be saved and who will not?**

We affirm that God loves all whom he has created, that he desires all to be saved, and that Christ died for all people (1 Tim 2:4; 1 Jn 2:2). All who perish do so fairly, of their own volition.

2. **Is all suffering ordained by God?**

We affirm that while God may use suffering to discipline his children and punish sinners, people suffer primarily because the world is under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). Following Jesus, we thus commit ourselves to helping, not judging, people who are in pain.

3. **Is Hell eternal conscious torment, or something else?**

We affirm there are eternal consequences for rejecting God's grace. We believe the biblical descriptors of the state of the lost are not meant to provide literal detail of this state, but to communicate its isolation, pain and destruction. In regards to what a soul being destroyed means (Matt 10:28), we recognize a legitimate disagreement among evangelical Christians about whether this means eventual annihilation or not. We affirm all biblical views reject Universalism, the idea that all souls will eventually be saved, which scripture repeatedly rejects (2 Thess 1:9, John 3:36).

Issues Involving the Holy Spirit

1. **What is the significance of the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit'?**

We affirm that there is an experience, often subsequent to conversion, of being 'filled' with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). However, we believe that one cannot become a Christian without the infilling of the Holy Spirit and his washing, regenerating work (Rom 8:9). Therefore our relationship with the Holy Spirit is not "two stage" with one set of believers having arrived (Spirit filled) another not. Rather, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is ongoing and renewable, both a crisis and a process, and the beginning of this relationship is always at the point of new birth – thus all

true Christians are Spirit filled – yet they may be filled *again* in subsequent experiences for new ministry (Acts 4:31).

2. **Are the ‘Gifts of the Spirit’ for Today?** We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Scripture are still deployed for every believer today, though no particular gift is given to all nor should any one gift to be used as ‘criteria’ of one’s spirituality. They are to be used in appropriate contexts and within the New Testament guidelines, driven by love and servanthood (I Cor 12-14).
3. **Are ‘Tongues’ the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?** While we affirm the value of speaking in tongues for those who have the gift, we deny that it is the single necessary ‘evidence’ of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Issues Involving Ministry

1. **Can women be leaders in the church?**
We affirm that ministerial authority is based upon a person’s character, calling and giftedness, not his or her gender.
2. **Can people who have been divorced and remarried be leaders in the church?**
While affirming the strong biblical teaching on the centrality of the covenant of marriage, we deny that any sin, including whatever sin was involved in a believer’s divorce, in and of itself permanently disqualifies a person from any area of ministry.

Issues Involving the Christian Life

1. **What is the appropriate expression of human sexuality?**
God designed human sexuality to be expressed only within the loving bounds of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage relationship. With regard to the issue of homosexuality: We recognize the consistent biblical teaching that homosexual relationships are not a part of God’s design for humanity. As such, homosexual expression is not a viable lifestyle for believers. At the same time, we do not believe it is biblical to elevate any particular sin above the other, and we commit ourselves to providing a redemptive and healing community for those who struggle with same-sex attractions or transgenderism.
2. **Can Christians use mood-altering substances?**
In keeping with the teachings of Scripture, we reject the use of all illegal substances (Rom 13:1-2). While recognizing the role of individual conscience in deciding certain matters, we reject the addictive and/or immoderate use of any substance (Gal 5:13; I Cor 8:10-13).

3. What are the appropriate roles of husband and wife in a Christian marriage?

We affirm that biblical paradigm of a God-centered, agape-oriented covenant marriage relationship. We also recognize the disagreement among evangelical Christians regarding the nature of gender roles within marriage. Some believe the Bible teaches a timeless principle of male headship, where headship is defined as the model of servant-leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ. Others believe that the ideal model of marriage is that of mutual submission and leadership by gifting, within an egalitarian relationship. We believe that, when guided by the principles of agape-love and servant-leadership, either model of gender roles in marriage can serve to foster God-glorifying covenant-marriages. To that end, we offer the following biblical challenge and encouragement.

- (1) *To those couples who follow the model of male headship:* Husbands strive to avoid both self-centered control and worldly authoritarianism, and seek to exemplify the self-sacrificial servant-leadership demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ toward his bride, the church. Wives, strive to avoid both selfish independence or passive apathy in the marriage, and seek to exemplify the active, passionate submission that characterizes the church's love for its eternal groom, Jesus Christ.
- (2) *To those couples who follow the egalitarian model:* Strive to avoid a marriage characterized by indecision, and seek to lead and/or follow in the various areas of your marriage as God has gifted each of you. In all things, exemplify a heart-attitude of submission toward each other, after the pattern of self-sacrificial servanthood demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ toward our heavenly Father.

4. What should Christians do about abortion?

While not endorsing any particular political position or politician as a Church, we affirm on the basis of Scripture the preciousness of life in the womb. On this basis we commit ourselves to encouraging and assisting women to go through with their pregnancy, while also committing ourselves to graciously assist in the healing process of women who have chosen otherwise.

5. Is it God's will for Christians to always be healthy, wealthy and prosperous?

While affirming that health and wealth can be a blessing from the Lord, we deny that sickness or poverty are necessarily evidences of a lack of faith or of sin in a person's life. Following the example of Jesus, we understand sickness and poverty primarily as works of the kingdom of darkness. Thus, we affirm that one of the Kingdom responsibilities of

those who are blessed with health and wealth is to help those who are sick and/or in poverty.

6. **Can a Christian be demon possessed?**

While we acknowledge that a Christian can never have their spirit 'possessed' or controlled by demons, we affirm that Christians can be significantly influenced by demonic powers and may need deliverance ministry.