

# Oak Community Church (PCA)

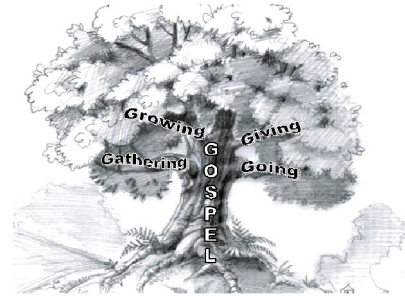
*A congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America*

*10760 Dorchester Road*

*Summerville, SC 29485*

*843-851-1900*

*www.oakpca.org*



*A Guide to Getting to Know Us...*

*A Summary of our Doctrines, History and Organization*

## *OCC Ministry Statement:*

*"Living out the Gospel by Gathering, Growing, Giving and Going!"*

## *OCC's Ministry Definitions:*

- *Gathering: we are committed to gathering weekly for Christ-centered corporate worship.*
- *Growing: we are committed to regularly meeting with a few others to encourage and equip you*
- *Giving: Supporting the local Body of believers with your time, talents, and treasure*
- *Going: we are sent by the Spirit as disciples of Jesus who make disciples with others*

## *The Gospel:*

*We believe the gospel is the power of God for salvation through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ saving me for the purpose of glorifying God and participating in His mission of saturation through making disciples who make disciples.*

- *We believe we have been saved from the penalty of sin*
- *We believe we are being saved from the power of sin*
- *We believe we will be saved from the presence of sin*

## *Introduction:*

We are so glad you are here. We welcome you to the fellowship of believers here at Oak Community Church (PCA). We recognize that all genuine believers are members of the body of Christ. Yet, we also believe that God draws believers with like convictions together into bodies called "Churches" to serve the Lord Jesus, the "Head" of His body (Col. 1:18).

In the providence of God, He has brought you to our local church. This book is designed to acquaint you with the things about our church you should know in order to become an informed member of the church. We trust you will prayerfully read this booklet and after due consideration of what we believe, decide to join us as a member of Oak Community Church (PCA).

*Your or Our Gospel Identity:*

- *I believe that I have been given a new identity in Christ. I am now a child of God (Family) sent by the power of the Spirit (Witness) to serve our King (Servant) in fulfilling his mission to be disciples who make disciples.*
- *Jesus commands us to make disciples everywhere we go, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything He commanded (Matthew 28:19–20). Baptizing people into the name of Jesus is about establishing them into their new Trinitarian Identity. This means:*
  - *God is our Father, and we are His family.*
  - *Jesus is our Lord, and we are His servants.*
  - *The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Sender, and we are His witnesses.*
- *These three statements of identity are true of a disciple of Jesus.*
- *A disciple of Jesus is one who worships Jesus (follows and submits to Him in all of life), is changed by Jesus (living out his or her new identity), obeys Jesus, and leads others to do the same (makes disciples of Jesus).*

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For More Information Check us Out on the web:

[www.oakpca.org](http://www.oakpca.org) or [www.oakbrookpca.org](http://www.oakbrookpca.org)

Pastor TE Mark Turner [mturner@oakpca.org](mailto:mturner@oakpca.org)  
Office Contact: [office@oakpca.org](mailto:office@oakpca.org)

**A. What is the church?**

Simply put, the church is the name for that group of people that God has saved out of the fallen human race from the beginning. It is the "body of Christ" (Eph. 5:23:25; Col. 1:18), all those who are united to Christ by faith in His atoning work. This vast group of people includes all those who are saved, living here and in glory. It is often referred to as the "church universal" (Rev 5:9). Smaller portions of this vast group that no man can number (Rev 7:9), are also designated "churches." The Greek word translated church is "*ekklesia*." It literally means "the called out assembly." Believers are "called out" of the world unto God. In the New Testament the word church is used in reference to groups of believers in houses (Rm. 16:5), cities (1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 11:22), regions (Acts 9:31), and the entire world (1 Cor. 12:27,28).

**B. What are the Characteristics of the church?**

The churches in the New Testament had certain characteristics and functions. They met for fellowship, prayer and worship (Acts 2:42,46). They elected officers elders and deacons to lead, teach and serve (Acts 6:3;14:23; Eph 4:11,12). In these churches Baptism (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 1:13-16) and the Lord's Supper were administered (Acts 2:41,42), fellowship meals were eaten (1Cor 11:20; Jude 12) and money was collected for the Lord's work (1Cor. 16:1,2). These churches also administered "church discipline." That means they removed from the fellowship those who professed Christ, but continued obstinately to live in open sin or teach doctrinal error (1Cor 5:1-5, 9-11; Rm. 16:17,18; Tit 3:10). By the way, there is evidence that the New Testament churches also had particular or definable doctrines to which the members adhered (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20; Gal 1:9; Rev 2:14).

**C. Why be a member of a local Church?**

We've seen what the church is and what it does, but what about church membership? Was there any such thing in the New Testament?

First of all, God is an orderly God who has created an orderly universe and expects all things to be done "decently and in order" (1Cor. 14:40). This is why God has given instructions regarding the leadership, functions and discipline in the church. Now, a part of good order is the distinction between people in the fellowship who are members and those who are only attenders or visitors. This kind of distinction was made in the Jewish synagogues which formed the pattern for the New Testament churches (Jms 2:2 "synagogue"). In order to be "put out" or excommunicated you must first be included in an assembly (Jn 9:22-34). The excommunication of the unrepentant fornicator in Corinth (1Cor 5:4-5) assumes that he was an official part of the assembly. A "casual attender" is not subject to the discipline or doctrinal standards of an assembly anymore than an observer at a civic club is subject to the bylaws of that organization. But when you "join" a particular church you voluntarily submit to the standards and regulations of that church. Without such official submission on the part of individuals, church discipline would be very difficult (Heb 13:17).

**D. What does it take to become a Member?**

**The Church Universal**

To become a member of the church universal, one must be converted. He must repent of sin and believe on Christ. To become a member of a local church one must make a public profession of faith that is backed up by a Godly Christian life. Furthermore, in order to be sure your belief is consistent with Scripture, you must agree to a basic statement of faith concerning such doctrines as the Authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the Person and Work of Christ, the Plan of Salvation, etc.. Also, if not already baptized, a person should be upon joining the church (Acts 2:42; 19:4,5).

## **E. The Gospel Basics**

### **God made us with the ability to know, worship and obey Him**

*"So God created man in his own image" Gen.1:27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10*

### **Man disobeyed and turned away from God this is called SIN.**

*"We all like sheep have gone astray, each has turned to his own way for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Rm 3:23; Isa 53:6a; Jer 17:9; Rm 3:10-18; Isa. 64:6; Jm 2:10; I Jn 3:4*

### **Sin has led to a separation from God. We are under His judgment.**

*"Your iniquities have separated you from your God For the wages of sin is death The wrath of God is being revealed against all the wickedness of men" Isa. 59:2; Rom. 6:23; 1:18; Mt. 10:28; Rom. 2:5; 5:12; Heb. 10:30,31*

### **Our situation is such that self-salvation is impossible.**

*"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags not by works, so that no one can boast no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" Eph 2:9; Is 64:6; Rm 3:20; Gal 3:10,11; Eph 2:8,9; Phil 3:9; Tit 3:5,6*

### **God's provision for salvation is Christ, who perfectly obeyed and died for our sins.**

*"He committed no sin he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities by his wounds we are healed while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." 1 Pt. 2:22; Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:8; Mk. 10:45; Rom.3:25, 5:10; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I Pt. 1:18,19; I Cor. 15:3,4*

### **Salvation is available only through Christ and His work on the cross.**

*"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jn 10:9, 14:6; Act 4:12; 16:31; Rm 4:4,5; 1Jn. 5:11,12*

### **To be saved we must turn from our sin and trust in Christ alone as our Savior.**

*"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Act 3:19; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Mk. 1:15; Act 20:21; I Jn.1:9; Lk. 13:3; Rm.5:1, 8:1; Jn. 3:36, 6:47*

## **F. How to Join Oak Community Church (OCC)**

In our church we usually have you attend a membership class to acquaint you with our belief system. To evaluate your conversion we ask you to share your "testimony" and be interviewed by the elders. The elders have the job of giving oversight to the flock (BCO 8-1). If you are a member of another Bible-believing church and desire to join OCC, you should request that a "transfer letter" be sent to OCC, affirming that you are a member in good standing and not under church discipline in your previous church. Believers who are not members of another fellowship may join based on their "reaffirmation of faith." New believers may simply join based on their credible "profession of faith." We do ask that all members agree to these questions:

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

## II. THE HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH

### A. Where does the PCA fit into Church History

OCC is part of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) which is part of the continuing witness to Christ which began centuries ago. The following is an outline of Church history since the time of Christ:

#### a. Early Church period A.D.30-590

- 1) Apostolic Period (30-100) Apostles alive, miracles, revelation
- 2) Post Apostolic (100-150) Apologists, church fathers
- 3) Conflict with Roman Empire (150-313) Persecution of unauthorized sect.
- 4) Growth of Old Catholic Imperial Church (313-590) Constantine 313; 476 fall of West.

#### b. Medieval Church Period A.D. 590-1517

- 1) Christianity in West (590-1054) westward expansion, papacy, rise of the "Roman" Catholic Church, split of 1054.
- 2) Golden Age of Papal Power (1054-1305) Crusades, Precursors of Reformation.
- 3) Early movement toward Reformation (1305-1517) Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola.

#### c. Modern Period A.D. 1517 to the present

- 1) Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli.
- 2) Catholic Counter Reformation (1546-1648) Jesuits, Trent, Inquisition.
- 3) Colonial Christianity and Revival (1648-1789) Colonies, Great Awakening.
- 4) Christian Expansion in Britain and America (1789-1914) 2nd Awakening, Rationalism.
- 5) The Church of the 20th Century (1914 to present), Ecumenicity; Neo-Orthodoxy;

### B. What is the Presbyterian Church in America?

Our church is a part of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a denomination which stands in the line of historic orthodox Christianity. Our creed ("credo" means "I believe"), the Westminster Confession of Faith, was written in 1647 and is held by most Bible-believing Presbyterian denominations throughout the world. The Presbyterian Church in America has a strong commitment to evangelism, missionary work at home and abroad, and to Christian education. From its inception, the church has determined its purpose to be "faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission."

Organized at a constitutional assembly in December 1973, this church was first known as the National Presbyterian Church but changed its name in 1974 to Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). It separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. Additionally, the PCA held to the traditional position on the role of women in church offices.

In December 1973, delegates, representing some 260 congregations with a combined communicant membership of over 41,000 that had left the PCUS, gathered at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and organized the National Presbyterian Church, which later became the Presbyterian Church in America.

In 1982, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, joined the Presbyterian Church in America. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, had been formed in 1965 by a merger of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod.

The PCA Ministry Buildings in Lawrenceville is the location from which most of the ministries of the denomination are coordinated. These ministries are carried on by four Program committees -- Mission to the World, Mission to North America, Christian Education and Publication, Reformed University Ministries, and one service committee, the Administrative Committee, responsible for the administration of the General Assembly. Additionally, there are five agencies which also minister to the denomination: PCA Foundation, PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc. (both located in Lawrenceville), Ridge Haven, (the PCA conference center located close to Rosman, North Carolina), Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, (the national educational institutions of the PCA).

The influence of the PCA extends far beyond the walls of the local church. Mission to the World has 570 career missionaries in almost 100 nations of the world and over 1167 short term missionaries. Because of the unique relationship between Mission to the World with over thirty mission organizations with whom some of our

missionaries are working, some consider that the influence is far greater than our size might indicate. Indeed, PCA churches support an additional 690 career missionaries, covering over 130 nations all tolled. Further, with more than 100 chaplains in the military, Veterans Administration, prisons, and hospitals, and 45 college and university campus ministers, the Gospel is proclaimed to a rather large audience around the world not reached through usual outreach channels. Because of the emphasis on education, there are many members of the PCA who are teachers and professors at all levels, including a significant number of large universities and theological seminaries.

In this new century, the Presbyterian Church in America continues its commitment to evangelism world-wide and the building up of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The PCA is one of the faster growing denominations in the United States, with over 1932 churches and missions throughout the USA and Canada. There were over 390,316 communicant and non-communicant members as of December 2022.

### **C. What is the History of OCC?**

Oakbrook Community Church was formed by the Palmetto Presbytery on September 11, 1988. The initial meeting of the officers of OCC was held on September 21, 1988 with Teaching Elder Cam Kirker, Ruling Elder Jim Knowles, Ruling Elder Ray Nash, and Deacon Larry Falls. In February of 1989 TE Kirker reported 89 members and regular attenders. While early worship services were held in an old theater on Trolley Road, in of November of 1990 OCC moved into a ministry center at 705 Old Trolley Road. In July of 2005 TE Mark Turner was installed as the second pastor of OCC. Over the years OCC has sought to find a facility for worship and ministry where they could impact Summerville with the Gospel. In October of 2021 they made an offer on a large house on Dorchester Road. After retrofitting and permitting, the church moved into their new facility at 10760 Dorchester Road and held their first worship service on May 14, 2023. They celebrated with a building dedication service on May 28, 2023. The church name was changed from Oakbrook Community Church to Oak Community Church since we no longer were located in the Oakbrook area of Summerville.

**A. What is "Reformed" Theology?**

The PCA has made a firm commitment on the doctrinal standards which had been significant in Presbyterianism since 1645, namely the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. These doctrinal standards express the distinctives of the Reformed tradition. The Westminster Confession defines our Presbyterian distinctives, but also lays out our positions on the basic doctrines of Christianity. It adopts the positions which the church leaders hammered out in the early Church Councils (Nicea, A.D. 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus 431; Chalcedon, 451) on the doctrines of the Trinity, deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It also states our Protestant positions: that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ's completed work of atonement, and that the Scripture alone is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

**The Name**

Reformed theology takes its name from the Protestant Reformation which took place in the sixteenth century. These are the distinctive scriptural teachings that come out of the reformation. Reformed theology has often been called "Calvinism," after John Calvin who systematically taught these doctrines in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, and "Augustinianism" after Augustine who defended these doctrines in the 4th and 5th centuries.

**An Important Foundation**

Among the distinctive doctrines of the Westminster Standards and of Reformed tradition is the unique authority of the Bible. When ordered to recant his beliefs, under sentence of death, Martin Luther, uttered these words at the Diet of Worms, "Unless I am convinced by Sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe." The reformers based all of their claims on "sola scriptura," the Scriptures alone. This included the doctrine of their inspiration (2 Tim 3:16-17) which is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of Scriptures (in their original autographs) so that their words should convey the thoughts God wished conveyed, bear a proper relation to the thoughts of other inspired books, and be kept free from error of fact, of doctrine, and of judgment -- all of which were to be an infallible rule of faith and life. Historically, the concept of infallibility has included the idea of inerrancy and we believe that the Scriptures are both. We believe the Bible to be the Word of God, not just a good book written by spiritual men (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

**The Sufficiency of Scripture**

Because the Bible is God's Word and it has been faithfully preserved (See Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*) we can depend upon it for the answers to life. We do not need to look elsewhere to find out what to believe, how to behave or how to interpret the experiences of life (2Tim 3:16-17).

There are some important truths that go along with these recognitions:

- We are not to add to Scripture or take away from it. (Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18-19)
- Anything which goes against the plain teaching of the bible is false. (Gal 1:8-9)
- We are to examine everything in light of Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 Jn 4:1-2)
- Error comes when we fail to examine everything in light of Scripture (Mark 12:24; Col 2:8)
- We are to give the Bible a central place in our lives by: reading it during public worship (1 Tim 4:13), proclaiming it in preaching, teaching and speaking (Acts 20:27; Col 3:16),and giving priority to the daily reading and memorization of Scripture (Psa 1:2, Psa 119:11, 16)

**An Important Emphasis**

The sovereignty of God is the focal point of this Reformed system of doctrine which views the whole world from a God-centered outlook. The message of Scripture is that our lives are to be lived for the glory of God (Mk 12:28-30; 1 Cor 10:31; Eph 1:12).

Before the creation of this world, God planned all that would come to pass. He is in control of all things and is working all things out according to His will (Gen 50:20; Is 46:10; Dan 4:25b-35; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Eph 1:4-5,11).

At first glance this might appear selfish of God. But it is not. Think about it, God wouldn't be God if He didn't deserve all glory. Biblical Christianity is all about God and his glory. Many perversions of Christianity start with

man first, in effect, exalting man above God. It is important to remember that we, mankind, are God's creation and were created for His glory (Isa 43:7; Rev 4:11).

### **Man's Responsibility**

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for many people about the Doctrines of Grace is that they believe that we deny human responsibility that our actions and choices are not our own and that we are not morally accountable to God because He ordained whatsoever comes to pass. The Bible clearly teaches that people are not mere puppets or robots and we will be held accountable for our deeds (Ezek 33:1-9; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-13).

Consider some SINFUL human actions and God's sovereignty:

- In Joseph's life we see clear choices on the part of his brothers, but we also see God's sovereign plan (Gen 37:26-28 vs. 50:20).
- In David's life we see a remarkable synthesis of God's sovereignty, Satanic activity and human responsibility (2 Sam 24:1,10; 1 Chr 21:1).
- In the same sentence Jesus taught God's sovereignty and Man's responsibility in Luke 22:22 *"The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him."*

Consider some GOOD human actions and God's sovereignty:

- A believer coming to Christ shows that we are responsible to repent and believe the gospel (Mt 11:20-24; Acts 2:37-38; Acts 13:48).
- But at the same time we are told by Jesus that it is only God who enables people to come to Christ (Jn 6:37, 44).
- Scripture describes both man's responsibility and God's sovereignty in our sanctification (Phil 2:12-13; Jude 21,24).

The logical necessity **for both**:

- God's sovereignty is necessary to His being and holiness. If there is something over which God can't rule, then he is not truly God. Further, it would be immoral of God either to chose not to control or to have made a universe which he could not control. Likewise, there is a similar logical necessity of real human responsibility and freedom. The whole of Christianity presupposes human responsibility. Unless there is a voluntary element in love, love is not love and God is not truly loved by his people. Love in Mt 22:37 is a love that is active and involves our whole being. It is clear that the words, "I love you" have totally different meaning when said by a sincere human and a programmed robot. Thus we see that both God's total sovereignty and man's real responsibility are logically necessary and taught by the Bible although we can't fathom how they ultimately fit together. We must be content with realizing that God and the relationship that he bears to the world are greater than we can understand.

### **God's Sovereignty in Salvation**

God's sovereignty over all things extends even to the matter of salvation. The essential tenants of this system have come to be known in the Reformed Church as the 5 points of Calvinism that can be remembered by using the TULIP acrostic. The 5 points were affirmed at the Synod of Dort in 1618 as an answer to the 5 points of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) which has come to be known as Arminianism.

#### **B. The 5 Points of Calvinism:**

1. **Total Depravity (or Inability) of man.** As a result of the Fall, man is completely incapable within himself to reach out towards God. Man is totally at enmity with God, cf. Romans 3:10-23.
  - a. Every mere man since Adam is born with a sinful nature (Rm 5:12) and sins (Rm 3:23). No man can please God by his actions (Isa. 64:6).
  - b. No man understands the things of God (1Cor. 2:14). He does not desire to come to God (Jn 1:13; Rm 3:11). He does not have the ability in himself to accept Christ (Jn 6:44, 6:65; Eph 2:1,5).
2. **Unconditional Election by the grace of God.** There is absolutely no condition in any person for which God would save him. As a matter of fact, long before man was created, God chose or predestined some to everlasting life. He did this out of His mere good pleasure, cf. Eph 1:4, 5.
  - a. Left to themselves, all of fallen mankind would choose to reject God; the end result would be that all would end up in hell.



- b. But God graciously elected (chose) to draw some to himself through the Holy Spirit.
- c. This election was "unconditional" in that there was nothing in us to merit this election.
- d. Scripture proofs: Jn 6:37-39; 15:16; Acts 13:48; Rm 8:28-30; 9:11-23; Eph 1:4-5; 2Ths 2:13.

3. **Limited (or Particular) Atonement.** God in His infinite mercy, in order to accomplish the planned redemption, sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a substitute for the sins of a large but specific number of people (Rm 8:29-30).
- a. Having thus elected some to eternal life, God sent forth His Son to secure their salvation by His death for their sins.
  - b. Both Calvinists and Arminians agree that the atonement is sufficient to pay for the sins of everyone in the world (it was an infinite payment), and that it is efficient only to those who accept Christ (only their sins will be forgiven that they may be in heaven). Where they differ is on the intent of the atonement. The Arminian says that Christ died to make it possible for all men to be saved, but not guaranteeing that any would actually be saved. The Calvinist states that Christ died to secure (guarantee) the salvation of God's elect (see Gal. 1:4; Mt 1:21; Rm 8:30).
  - c. Scripture proof: Christ died not to merely make salvation possible, but to actually save particular sinners (Mt 1:21; Lk 19:10; Gal 1:4; 1Ti. 1:15). Christ died for a particular group (Mt 1:21; Jn 10:11,15,26-28; Rm 8:32-33; Eph 5:25-27). God's work of salvation is an unbroken chain (Rm 8:29-30; Eph 2:4-10).
  - d. John Owen's argument, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* might be helpful:  
The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:  
1) All the sins of all men 2) All the sins of some men, or 3) Some of the sins of all men or 4) some sins of some men. In which case it may be said:
    - 1. That if the 3<sup>rd</sup> or last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so, none are saved.
    - 2. That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.
    - 3. But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?  
You answer, "Because of unbelief." I ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!"
4. **Irresistible (or Efficacious) Grace of God.** This is the effectual work of the Holy Spirit moving upon a particular person whom He has called, applying the work of redemption, cf. John 3:5-6.
- a. When God does something the result is certain. When the Holy Spirit inwardly calls a person to believe, that person comes to Christ. We should not picture the person coming against his will. The Holy Spirit gives a new heart and so changes and motivates the man's will that he now desires and loves that which he before hated.
  - b. Shorter Catechism Q#31: What is effectual calling? "*Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.*"
  - c. Scripture proof: Jn 1:13; 6:37,44,65; 10:16; Rm 8:29-30; Eph 2:8-10; Jm 1:18
5. **Perseverance of the Saints.** All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are kept in faith such that they to persevere to the end. Even though the process of sanctification is not complete in this life, from God's perspective it is as good as accomplished, cf. Rm 8:30, 38, 39, and Phil 1:6.
- a. Those whom the Holy Spirit regenerates and brings to faith in Christ, will be kept by Christ (Jude 1; 1Jn 5:18) with the result that they will continue in the true faith and grow in Christ. They will not fall away and be lost. They have eternal life now, and forever.
  - b. Scriptural proof: Jn. 6:39; 10:28-29; Eph. 1:13-14; Phil. 1:6; I Pt 1:4-6.
  - c. This doctrine is NOT "*once saved, always saved*". A better way to view this doctrine is to state it in biblical terms. Those who fall away and perish in their sins give evidence that a work of grace has never occurred in their hearts (Heb 3:14) A better cliché would be: "*once saved, never the same.*"

### Some Common Objections:

As stated above, we seek to stand for what the Bible teaches. In this section we will attempt to answer two of the common objections raised.

#### 1. Jn 3:16 - God gave His one and only Son to the "world" (*kosmos*).

This simple verse (and others like it) seem to imply *all human kind*. However, a simple study using only a concordance will show that the precise meaning of world is not nearly so easy as is popularly supposed. The word *kosmos* and its English equivalent "world" is used with a uniform significance in the NT. Consider:

- a. *kosmos* = universe as a whole. Acts 17:24
- b. *kosmos* = earthly ball. Jn 13:1; Eph 1:4
- c. *kosmos* = world-system. Jn 12:31; Mt 4:8; 1 Jn 5:19
- d. *kosmos* = whole human race. Rm 3:19
- e. *kosmos* = humanity less believers. Jn 7:7; Jn 15:18; Rm 3:6
- f. *kosmos* = Gentiles in contrast to Jews. Rm 11:12,15
- g. *kosmos* = believers from every nation. Jn 1:29; 3:16-17; 6:33; 12:47; 2Cor 5:19

From these uses of *kosmos* we can see at least 7 clearly defined different meanings in the New Testament. So can we know the meaning of words? Is God seeking to confuse us? NO! Rather, just as we do with normal language and grammar, we may understand a word's meaning by carefully studying the context (asking what is predicated by the word) AND by prayerfully consulting other Scriptures (Scripture interprets Scripture). So let us take Jn 3:16 and look at the word, "world" to ascertain its meaning:

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

The principal subject of Jn 3:16 is "Christ as the gift of God."

The 1st clause tells us that God's love moved God to "give" His Son

The 2nd clause tells us for "whom" God gave His Son: whoever believes.

The last clause tells what happens to those "who believe", they will not perish, but have eternal life

So now we must determine which of the 7 meanings for world fits best with the text. We are given a clue in that "God's love" was the stated motivation towards the "world" so let's start with passages dealing with God's love: While we can say that God demonstrates His goodness (Psa 145:9; Mt 5:45; 6:26; Lk 6:35; Acts 14:17) and patience (Rm 9:22) towards all mankind, the Scriptures teach that God loves believers with a special love (Dt 7:9; Rom 5:8; 8:39; Eph 2:4,5; Heb 12:6; 1 Jn 3:1, 4:10,11,16,19).

This special love of God is what helps us understand the meaning of "world" in Jn 3:16 believers from every nation.

#### 2. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Just like before, a single word causes a question of meaning: all(*pas*). It does not always mean every person on the face of the earth (Mt 3:5; Jn 3:26; Col 1:23).

"All men" is used in a similar way to "all evil" in 1 Tim 6:10-*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil* and note how the NIV translates it: "all kinds of evil"; therefore 1 Tim 2:4 is all kinds of men as opposed to just Jews.

#### Keeping Perspective

The doctrines of grace are very deep doctrines. Many have difficulty in understanding it, some become unsettled by it, and others fight very hard against it. While we must always stand for all that the Bible teaches, we must be sensitive to the theological perspective of others and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

However, it is helpful to realize that much of the opposition to this doctrine is due to our sinful human nature. Even Christians sometimes adopt a humanistic viewpoint on things. We see ourselves, not God, as the center of the universe and we rebel against the idea that we were created for and by Him. Only as we submit to God and His Word can we accept the truth that we are but "clay pots" made by God to use as He desires (Rom. 9:18-24).

When we grasp that, then our praise to God truly becomes overwhelming because we thank Him for all the unmerited riches that He has graciously bestowed on us such undeserving sinners.

This is a tremendous doctrine, but let us remember that both Calvinists and Arminians are God's elect and should extend Christian recognition and fellowship to each other. In our opinion, this area of doctrine should not be used to divide the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:25).

#### Suggested Reading for Further Study:

Edwin Palmer, *The Five Points Of Calvinism*.

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*.

Benton, John *God's Riches - A Workbook on the Doctrines of Grace*

### **C. Covenant Theology vs. Dispensationalism**

There are basically two overall schemes of Bible interpretation current today Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation formalized in the nineteenth century by John Nelson Darby and later popularized by the publishing of the study Bible of C.I. Scofield and the establishment of Dallas Theological Seminary by Lewis Sperry Chafer. It is the foundation of what is known in eschatological studies as "pre-tribulational premillennialism" and involves the division of history into (usually) seven distinct periods of time known as "dispensations". This system tends to divide the Scriptures and the people of God. The church is distinguished from the people of Israel with separate promises and destinies for both. Covenant theology, on the other hand, sees God's dealings as one unified Covenant that passes through various stages, but stretches from Adam to the end of the world. It teaches the following:

#### **The Federal Headship of Adam and Christ**

Only Adam (before the fall) had the ability to be (or continue in) righteousness by perfectly keeping the law of God. When Adam (as federal head or representative of mankind) fell into sin, he passed on to his race a sinful nature (Rom. 5:12,14,17-19).

All humans are born sinners (Rom. 3:23) and are incapable of gaining eternal life through the "Covenant of Works" (perfectly keeping the law; Rom. 3:10-12, 19-20).

God in mercy established the Covenant of Grace whereby men from Adam till the end of the world would be saved through faith in the atoning work of the Messiah. This salvation was accomplished through Christ, who fulfilled the Covenant of Works by perfectly keeping God's law, and dying on the cross to pay the penalty for man's failure to keep God's law, thus meriting salvation for God's elect (Rom. 5:15-19; I Cor. 15:21-22).

#### **The Unity of Christ's Church**

Thus in both Old and New Testament times, salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and His work on the cross (read Rm 4; Gal 3). Paul asserts in Gal 3:6-7 that Abraham was saved through faith in the coming Messiah.

No man could be saved by keeping the law, because since the fall, no mere man has been capable of perfectly keeping God's law (Gal 3:10,11). Also, Heb 9:15 states that the saints in Old Testament times were saved by Christ's redemptive payment for their sins.

While God's Covenant of Grace goes through different forms (The Abrahamic Covenant, Sinaitic Covenant, New Covenant and others are mentioned in Scripture), the fact that they are but fuller unfoldings of the same basic covenant is shown in Gal. 3:14-17,29.

These verses show that New Testament believers who are under the New Covenant (Mt 26:28; Heb 8:6-13), are also considered to be under the Abrahamic Covenant. God's true church, the body or bride of Christ, consists of all true believers throughout all ages (Eph 5:25-27; Rv 21:9,12-14). The Old Testament Jewish believers and New Testament Gentile believers are part of one continuing body (Rm 11:17-21). The New Testament Church is not a totally new organization. It is a continuation of the Old Testament "church" (Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12). God's church is one (the Greek word for church means "called out people"). New Testament saints are called the true spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:28-29) and stand in the line of the covenant promises (see Acts 2:39; Rm 4:11-13,16; Ga. 3:29).

### **Conclusions**

The implications of covenant theology are several. God's moral law (Ex. 20:1-17), given in Old Testament times is still binding on believers today. Christ did not come to abolish the law (Mt. 5:17-18). Instead He preached the Old Testament moral law and expanded its application (Mt. 5-7). He said that the wise man will keep it (Mt. 5:19; 7:24). Secondly, any Old Testament command that has not been abolished by the New Testament remains in effect today. It does not need to be repeated in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1-3 and James 2:10-11 take this for granted.). And thirdly, God is still a covenant keeping God, and the covenant privileges and promises still extend to the children of believers (Gen. 17:9-13; Acts 2:38-39).

### **Suggested Reading for Further Study**

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*.

Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law*.

**Introduction**

A sacrament is basically a picture lesson that reminds us of the work of salvation that Christ has accomplished and that the Holy Spirit has or will apply to us. Sacraments (or ordinances) are also a pledge or reminder from God that He will grant us the many blessings that He has promised us. They also serve as a reminder of the responsibilities that we have as children of God and members of Christ's body.

**The WSC Q92: What is a sacrament?** *A92: A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.*

**Q93: Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?** *A93: The sacraments of the New Testament are, Baptism (Mk 16:16), and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23)*

Some Christians wonder how to view the sacraments. One common error is to place some magic power in the water or in the bread and wine, as if to say God's grace is automatically dispensed in them. This has caused many to focus on and trust in the sacraments instead of Jesus Christ and His work that the sacraments point to (error of R.C.). Another mistake (especially for evangelicals) is to treat the sacraments as only symbols or as meaningless rituals – we do them because they are commanded, but they don't seem to be real and bring blessings to our lives. Between these two extremes is the view that the sacraments are a "means of grace." They can be used by God to bring tangible, real blessings to our soul.

**A. The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper consists of bread, a picture of the broken body of Christ, and the fruit of the vine as a picture of Christ's blood shed upon the cross for us (Mt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20).

As baptism relates to circumcision, so the Lord's Supper relates to the Old Testament feast of Passover (Ex 12:11-13). The Lord's Supper is a new twist given to the Passover. Instead of pointing to the Exodus event, it's symbols point to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of His death for us and our deliverance from the punishment we deserve. It is not a sacrifice, but a "sacrificial feast" like Passover, in which the lamb was eaten after the sacrifice had already been made. The sacrifice of Christ has already been made once for all (Heb 9:24-26; 10:10-18). This view differs from the Roman Mass!

We not only commemorate Christ's sacrifice, but apply it to our souls; Christ's "flesh and blood" sacrificed for us are our "spiritual food." Christ's presence in the elements is spiritual (Jn. 6:54,55), not physical.

Our souls are fed and nourished by Christ our Passover Lamb, as we receive Him by faith (1 Cor. 5:7). This is a visible picture of Christ, and just as the Christian feeds upon the written Word for spiritual growth in grace, so he should meditate upon Christ's death (frequently and through the Communion) as a means of spiritual growth. The spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper draws us into intimate fellowship with God and fellow believers as we partake together (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

We invite to the Lord's Table all those who are baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, under the authority of Christ and His body, the Church. What this means is that if someone is not a member of OCC we do ask that they be a member in good standing in an evangelical bible-believing church where the true gospel is clearly taught. We request that children, prior to partaking, first speak to the session regarding their salvation and the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Before partaking of this sacrament, believers ought to examine their hearts, confess sin, and thank our gracious God for giving us Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23-31).

**B. Baptism**

**1. The Meaning of Baptism**

- Baptism is the sacrament which pictures and testifies [to others] that we have entered God's covenant of salvation and the true church of Christ (Acts 2:38-41).
- The water symbolizes the washing away of our sins through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).
- The true baptism is spiritual and takes place when the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart and new desires, and cleanses us from sin (Rom. 6:4).
- The outward water baptism is a public profession and testimony to the salvation and cleansing which the Holy Spirit has done or will do in the heart (Acts 2:41).

## 2. The Mode of Baptism

When we think of washing today, we often might think of dunking a plate in a sink of water. But in biblical times such an action would not at all have pictured cleansing to the Jews. The Jews of biblical times, symbolized cleansing a different way. Spiritual cleansing was always pictured by the ritual of sprinkling or pouring of water or blood upon an object (Lev. 3:8; 14:7; 16:14-16; Num. 19:11-13, 18-19).

So uniform was this symbolism, that the prophet Isaiah used sprinkling to picture the work of Christ in cleansing sin: "Behold, My servant . . . will sprinkle many nations" (Is. 52:13-15). And Peter carried the image of sprinkling on in the New Testament by saying, "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood... 22 "Now that you have purified your souls" (I Pet. 1:2,22).

The Bible tells us about the mode of Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:13-17). John objected to baptizing Jesus because he realized that Jesus was the Messiah, but Jesus said, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15)." Jesus was already perfect (and we don't believe baptism can do that anyway) so how did His baptism fulfill all righteousness? Jesus was to serve as our priest and He had to be consecrated as a priest to fulfill the law (all righteousness). We find that Numbers 8:5-7 teaches that priests were purified by having the water of cleansing sprinkled upon them. So according to Scripture we believe that Jesus was sprinkled.

### Biblical Meaning as it relates to Mode

The Bible teaches that the meaning of baptism is spiritual cleansing (Eze. 36:25-27; Jn. 3:22,25; Rom. 6:4,6-7; Titus 3:5). Thus the only mode of a baptism that would have carried the proper symbolism and made sense to the Jew, was baptism by sprinkling or pouring. The writer of the book of Hebrews points to the Scriptural mode of baptism for us, because in Heb 9:10 he calls the Old Testament "sprinklings" (9:19) "baptisms" (9:10<sup>KJV</sup> "washings"). Many New Testament occurrences of baptism rule out immersion:

Acts 8:26, 36, 38. [desert road, found some water, both went into water]

Acts 9:18. literally "arising, he was baptized" implying little preparation.

Acts 16:33. *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.* – Midnight where was water? How much water to immerse? How many gallons?

Typical waterpots of day held typically 10 gal, (max 27) [8lbs to gal...] available @ jail, home @ midnight?

Mrk 7:2-4. Normal words for baptism yet speaking of tables & couches! (Look at KJV) baptism doesn't demand immersion as a normal practice!

### Closing Thoughts on Mode

While we believe that the Scriptural and proper mode of baptism is sprinkling; yet, we also accept pouring or immersion as valid forms of baptism. The reason is that the Scriptures do not make an issue over the mode; it is the public profession of one's faith in Christ that is usually emphasized (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38,41).

## 3. The Subjects of Baptism.

Infant baptism is the historic Christian practice! In his book *Outlines of Theology*, A.A. Hodge sums it up like this:

*"the practice of infant baptism is an institution which exists as a fact, and prevails throughout the universal church, with the exception of the modern Baptists, whose origin can be definitely traced to the Anabaptists of Germany, about A.D. 1537.... Then, as proof, he cites Irenaeus (who was born before the death of the apostle John), Justin Martyr (138 A.D.), Tertullian (born 160 A.D.), Cyprian (253 A.D.), and Augustine (born 354 A.D.). Hodge concludes: ...infant baptism has prevailed (a) from the apostolic age, (b) in all sections of the ancient church, uninterruptedly to the present time, (d) in every one of the great historical churches of the Reformation, while its impugners date since the Reformation. Now that's interesting. It encourages us. But that not why we baptize infants.*

The bottom line is, we baptize the children of believers in the Presbyterian Church in America because we firmly believe that God's Word tells us to! To correctly answer the question, "should we baptize infants?" you have to look to the Word of God as your final authority. You have to ask, "is infant baptism biblical?"

Having said that, you still have to face the question of how rightly to approach the Bible in order to correctly understand it.

### **An interesting aside on normal approaches:**

Believers commonly approach topics like baptism by looking at disconnected proof texts (e.g., what verse in the Bible explicitly teaches infant baptism?) You begin to see a serious problem with this approach, though, when you observe that this is the very same approach that sects & cults use to deny other doctrines (e.g., what verse in the Bible explicitly teaches that the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week?)

In fact, this is the exact same approach that cults use to deny the very essentials of the faith (e.g., what verse in the Bible explicitly teaches the Trinity?) **A better way is to let Scripture interpret Scripture!**

That is, to interpret texts in light of their immediate setting, then in light of their broader setting, and then in light of the total system of truth taught in the Scriptures. This 2nd approach is better because to correctly understand texts you need to interpret them in their context. And when you take this second approach, you find that there clear biblical warrant for baptizing both believers and their children.

### **4. There are 5 steps to understanding Infant baptism.**

#### **Step #1. The church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament are, in essence, the same church.**

A good illustration of this might be the comparison between a caterpillar and a butterfly, they are very different in form, but they are the same in essence.

- Both have the same way of salvation. Rm 4:13
- Both look to the same Savior. Rm 3:20-26
- In Old Testament times, people were saved by trusting in the redeeming work that God would provide in Christ. Today, people are saved by trusting in the redeeming work that God has provided in Christ. When Old Testament believers brought sacrifices in faith, they were trusting in the sacrifice that God would one day provide. Hebrews 10:1-14
- Both are under the same covenant relationship. Gal 3:7-29 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you. So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.... [Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham seed, and heirs according to the promise.
- Both are members of the same body. Eph 2:11-19
- Both are "branches" in the same olive tree. Romans 11:17-26. The apostle Paul declares that Israel as a whole was not disinherited, but that the unbelieving Jews were cut off from their own olive tree, and the Gentile branches grafted in their place; and he predicts a time when God will convert many Jews and graft them back into the same tree with the believing Gentiles.

Because the church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament are, in essence, the same church, they sometimes swap names. On the one hand, the Bible calls Old Testament Israel "the church". "Church" [*ekklesia*] is the New Testament Greek word for the Old Testament Hebrew "congregation" [*qahal*]. Compare Psalm 22:22 with Hebrews 2:12. Thus Stephen called the congregation of Israel at Mount Sinai "the church in the wilderness", Acts 7:38.

On the other hand, the Bible calls the New Testament church "Israel", Gal 6:16. The apostle Peter applies rich Old Testament Israel terms to the New Testament church in 1 Peter 2:9. The apostle Paul describes all who rest in Christ alone as the true circumcision, Phil 3:3. James 2:2 calls a local church a synagogue. The elders of the New Testament Church are identical in name and function with those of the Old Testament synagogue. Conclusion: the church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament are in essence the same church.

#### **Step #2. God includes the children of believers as members of this church.**

Our baptistic brethren sometimes wonder why we consider the children of believers to be members of the church. The reason is that the living God himself embraced the children of believers as members of his church<sup>Gen 17:7</sup>.

God nowhere rescinded this principle that the children of believers are church members. This is very significant. In order to maintain their position, those who oppose infant baptism have to prove that he did rescind this principle.

*Where does the Bible teach that?* This is a question that demands an answer. Matthew Henry put it this way,

*Our opponents call upon us to prove by express Scripture that infants are in the covenant; but certainly, having proved even to demonstration that they were in the covenant, it lies upon them to show where and when they were thrown out of the covenant; which they*

*were never yet able to prove, no, not by the least footstep of a consequence. It is as clear as the sun at noon-day that the seed of believers had a right to the initiating seal of the covenant; and how came they to lose that right? If the seed of believers who were taken into the covenant, and had a right to the initiating seal under the Old Testament, are now turned out of the covenant, and deprived of that right, then the times of the law were more full of grace than the times of the gospel; which is absurd. Can it be imagined that the Gentiles are, in respect of their children, in a worse state than they were under the [Old Testament]? Then, if a Gentile was proselytized and taken into the covenant, his seed was taken in with him; and is that privilege denied now? Is the seed of Abraham faith in a worse condition than the seed of Abraham flesh?*

We believe that the baptistic view is built on this hidden assumption: in the New Testament, children of believers are no longer members of the church.

But when you read the New Testament you find just the opposite! The NT lines right up with the Old Testament in continuing to assume that children of believers are included in the church.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ assumed that children of believers are part of his church (Lk 18:15-16).
- The apostle Peter also assumed that the children of believers were included in the church (Acts 2:39). This is reminiscent of Genesis 17:7! Peter was talking to Jews people who were steeped in the Old Testament. If he had intended to teach that God was now rescinding the principle of church membership for covenant children, then he chose the wrong language! "Wait a minute!" someone might object. "Peter is not talking about the promise to Abraham! He says he is talking about the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), doesn't he?" Well, look again at Gal 3:14, "*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. The promise to Abraham involves the promise of the Spirit.*" And so Peter is saying that the promise to Abraham is to you and your children right now in the New Testament era!
- Likewise, the apostle Paul assumed that children of believers were included in the church. If he was trying to teach that God no longer included covenant children in the church, he used the exact wrong words in Acts 16:31 *Believe [singular] in the Lord Jesus, and you [singular] will be saved you [singular] and your household.* Again, in 1 Cor 7:14, Paul assumed that God includes children in his covenant community, the church. The word holy is a covenant word. It means set apart. Children of even one believer are holy, set apart, in a special way to God.
- Again, in Eph 1:1 Paul said that he was writing his epistle to the saints in Ephesus. That word saint comes is the same Greek word "*hagios*", which literally means "holy one". In Eph 6:1, Paul directly addressed some of these "holy ones" who were part of the church in Ephesus: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* You see, the children of believers are part of the church. God himself included them as members in the Old Testament, and God never took back this "you and your children principle." Rather, the New Testament confirms it and carries it on.

**Step #3. In the Old Testament era, the children of believers, because they were church members, were given the covenant sign of circumcision.**

Believers pretty much agree on this point, so just look at Gen 17:10-12.

**Step #4. In the New Testament era, God took this sign of circumcision and changed it to baptism.**

How do you see this?

**First**, our Lord Jesus put baptism in the place of circumcision as the entrance rite into the visible church. In the Old Testament, whenever someone was converted, he had to be circumcised as the entrance rite into the church (Ex 12:48). But when Jesus gave the Great Commission, commanding his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, he told his church to baptize converts rather than to circumcise them. Thus, Jesus put baptism in the place of circumcision in Mt 28:19..

**Second**, God's Word teaches that circumcision and baptism share the same basic spiritual meaning. Our baptistic brethren say that circumcision was a national sign, while, in contrast, baptism is a spiritual sign. But what does God's Word say? In Deut 30:6, circumcision symbolized regeneration and the new birth! Jeremiah 4:4 tells us that it was also a sign of conversion repentance and faith. In Rm 2:28-29, we again see that circumcision was a sign of regeneration, the new birth. It did not automatically save. Personal faith in God's salvation was required in the Old Testament, just as it is in the New. Speaking of Abraham, Rm 4:11 teaches that circumcision was a sign and seal of salvation justification by faith alone. And so:

- 1) Our Lord Jesus put baptism in the place of circumcision as the entrance rite into the church.
- 2) The Bible teaches that circumcision and baptism share the same basic spiritual meaning.

- 3) The New Testament explicitly parallels circumcision and baptism; it even uses them interchangeably! For example, Colossians 2:11-12 so strongly links circumcision and baptism that it identifies them by using them interchangeably. In other words, your baptism was your Christian circumcision.

The New Testament inseparably links circumcision and baptism. And what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. What this boils down to is that baptism is to the New Testament what circumcision was to the Old Testament. This means that the very same objections that our baptistic brethren often raise against infant baptism must also be raised against infant circumcision. And yet, God clearly commanded infant circumcision - it was not an unbiblical practice... Because of 1-4...

**Step #5. Therefore, in the New Testament era, children of believers, since they are church members, are to be given the sign of baptism.**

### 5. Common Objections:

"All this seems to make sense," someone might say, "except doesn't our Lord clearly annul this in Mark 16:16 - *He who believes and is baptized shall be saved?* Doesn't Jesus teach that faith has to come before baptism? Don't we have to conclude that since infants cannot believe, therefore they cannot or shouldn't be baptized? How do you respond to that?"

Well, first, note that this objection would also have to apply to infant circumcision. In effect God told Abraham to believe and be circumcised. Personal faith was just as necessary for salvation in the Old Testament as it is in the New. Adult converts to Judaism had to believe first and then be circumcised. And yet, God also commanded infant circumcision!

Second, you can see that this objection is flawed because it proves too much. The fundamental argument is that because infants cannot believe, they cannot be baptized. However, if you apply this same logic to the rest of the verse, you are forced to conclude that because infants cannot believe they cannot be saved either. This objection not only keeps infants from baptism, it keeps all of them from heaven!

Third, you can see that this objection is mistaken because it is Pelagian to the core. By making baptism depend on human ability, it assumes that saving faith is a product of the flesh and not a work of God's sovereign grace. But the Bible insists that no one but no one whether infant or adult is able to trust Christ until the Holy Spirit supernaturally enables him (Eph 2:1ff.). Thank God, that he's not bound by our inability, or we would all be without hope! But what is impossible with man, is possible with God! The sovereign God can even work faith in an infant (Psalm 22:9)! The sovereign God can even work faith in an unborn child (Trivia question: who was born again before he was even born? John the Baptist! See Lk 1:41)! And that is part of what baptism says: you did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15:16).

Fourth, you can see the fallacy in this objection if you apply this same logic to other verses. Look at 2 Thess 3:10- *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* If this logic is valid, then you have to say that since infants cannot work, therefore they may not eat. Many object by saying that to apply 2 Thess 3:10 to infants in that way is clearly to take it out of context. And that exactly the case with Mk 16:15-16! Mk 16:16 is a command for evangelizing unbaptized adults, and that is our practice. An unbaptized adult must profess belief before he can receive baptism. That was true in the Old Testament with circumcision, and it true in the New Testament with baptism.

Others might object: But there no direct or explicit command in the Bible to baptize the children of believers. Well, that's true. Even so, as we've seen, God's "*you and your children*" principles are loud and clear. They proclaim an indirect or implied command to baptize the children of believers. If children of believers are not to be baptized, what we really need to see is an instruction that children are no longer to receive the covenant sign. There is none in Scripture!

Rather, as we've seen, the New Testament assumes these, "you and your children" principles. In light of this assumption, consider these examples of baptism in the New Testament:

- Acts 16:15 ...she and the members of her household were baptized....
- Acts 16:33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.
- 1 Cor 1:16 I also baptized the household of Stephanas....



How would the early Christians mostly Jews steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures have understood these verses? God's Word nowhere says that these households did not include children. Indeed, a Jewish mind would immediately assume that they did! If covenant children were no longer to receive the covenant sign, wouldn't this have caused tremendous confusion in the early church? Wouldn't the early believers have needed instruction to the contrary, as they did about so many other problems? Why, then, can't you find any? This doesn't make sense... unless God actually did continue his mode of relating both to believers and their children!

Further there is not one example in the whole New Testament of the believer's baptism of someone who grew up in a Christian home. On baptistic assumptions, there must have been hundreds of such cases before the New Testament Scriptures were completed. Yet, there not a single example of it! There not even a shred of teaching about it. Why not? This doesn't make sense unless God actually did continue his mode of relating both to believers and their children!

You see, baptistic arguments generally try to shift the burden of proof to the paedobaptist. They keep saying, "show me an explicit command or example of infant baptism in the New Testament." However, when you approach the issue in light of the **whole system of truth** taught in God's Word, you will see that the burden of proof is really on the Baptist. He's the one that is going completely against the grain of God's revealed mode of relating to his people. He's the one who has yet to show where the Bible teaches that God has rescinded the, "you and your children" principle established in Genesis and reaffirmed all through the Bible. He has yet to show where the Bible teaches that God no longer deals with both individuals and families as he always has. And that's precisely what he can't do.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the cumulative evidence of comparing Scripture with Scripture, the Presbyterian Church in America is persuaded, as historic Christianity has been persuaded, that the answer to the question, "is infant baptism biblical?" is a resounding, Yes! God reveals that he wants to extend his church both through space (by the conversion of pagans) and through time (by the covenant nurture of children, so that generation after generation grows up trusting and serving the Lord).

God deals with individuals, as well as with families. This means that conversion isn't automatic. And baptism isn't some magic. Baptism doesn't guarantee salvation any more than circumcision did.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You can legitimately paraphrase Rm 2:28-29, *you are not a Christian if you are only one outwardly, nor is baptism merely outward and physical. No, you are a Christian if you are one inwardly; and baptism is baptism of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*

Christian parents, this means that you must actively nurture your children in the Christian faith. You may not treat your children as neutral until they are old enough to make their own decision. In baptism, God has laid claim to your child. Thus, you must train your children to respond with faith and obedience to the Christ of the covenant.

On the other hand, covenant children, this means that you must respond with faith and obedience to the Christ of the covenant. You must personally entrust yourself to Jesus to be your Savior. If you don't, then you'll go to Hell. And let me warn you: the Bible teaches that the hottest spots in Hell are reserved for those who have tasted the heavenly gift and turned away from it (He 6:4-6)! In a child's baptism, the Lord, through this sacrament says, "my child, you belong to me. Give me your heart." A child should respond, 'Lord, I give you my heart, promptly and sincerely.'

God has initiated, God has planned, and God has established salvation for his people. Through his Word and Spirit, God is building his Church. And God has given baptism as a sign, a seal, and a means of confirming his gospel promises. It a privilege both for you and for your children. God graciously binds himself to the promises of his Word. And he calls you and your children and your children children to keep his covenant and know his blessing from generation to generation.

### **Suggested Reading for Further Study:**

Jay Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism.*

Randy Booth, *Children of the Promise*

James Chaney, *William the Baptist.*

John Sartelle, *Infant Baptism.*

Pierre Ch. Marcel, *Baptism: Sacrament of the Covenant of Grace.*

[www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com) sub-topic: *Baptism*

The PCA maintains the historic polity of Presbyterian governance set forth in The Book of Church Order, namely rule by presbyters (or elders) and the graded assemblies or courts. These courts are the session, governing the local church; the presbytery, for regional matters; and the general assembly, at the national level. It has self-consciously taken a more democratic position (rule from the grass roots up) on presbyterian governance in contrast to a more prelatical form (rule from the top assemblies down).

#### A. Foundational Principles

There are the seven principles of church government found in Scripture upon which the doctrine of our church government is formed.

1. The Scriptural form of church government is representative or presbyterian. The office bearers were chosen by the people (Acts 1:15-16,23; 6:3-6; 14:23). The word translated "ordained" in Acts 14:23 can be translated "to elect by stretching out the hand."
2. The church is Christ's visible kingdom of grace for the gathering and perfecting of the saints. The church is one and the same in all ages. Christ is the only Head of the church (Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). The church has no human, secular head (like a King Mk. 12:17), nor any human religious head (like a Pope I Pt. 5:3; II Cor. 1:24; Gal. 2:11; Mk. 10:42-45).
3. The members of the visible Church catholic are all those persons in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and promise submission to His laws.
4. The officers of the Church are according to the Scriptures, teaching and ruling elders (Acts 6:4; 1 Jn 5:17; Eph 4:11) and deacons (Phil 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13). Bishop and elder are two terms for the same office (Titus 1:5,7; Acts 20:17,28).
5. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is exercised by presbyters in courts. This is called the Principle of the Presbytery or "higher courts." The local church has the right to appeal to an assembly of elders, and this assembly has the authority to hand down decisions and exercise government. The Session of the local church, Presbyteries and the General Assembly in our denomination are like courts in the American court system, with the General Assembly being the highest court. The genius of the Presbyterian system of government is that it provides checks and balances and makes use of the combined wisdom of its elders for the governing and benefit of the church.

Acts 15 sets forth this principle of church government. The church in Antioch had a matter that reached beyond itself. It did not settle it independently of the other churches, but rather referred the matter to an external ecclesiastical assembly consisting of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem and also those who went up from Antioch (Acts 15:2). We note:

- a. A local church is a complete church, fully able to govern itself.
  - b. When a local church (1) cannot settle a matter belonging to its sphere, or (2) has a matter that also affects other churches, it has the privilege of appeal to an assembly of elders (Presbytery).
  - c. The inspired Apostle Paul could have ruled on the matter, but chose not to. Seems that this was to provide an example for the time when there would be no more extraordinary officers (apostles) in the church?
  - d. This assembly met publicly, deliberated on the question, and pronounced a decision.
  - e. The elders took part in the decision (Acts 15:2,7,22-23; 16:4).
  - f. The local churches submitted to this decision (Acts 15:28; 16:4).
6. The ordination of officers is ordinarily by a court.
  7. The scriptural doctrine of Presbytery is necessary to the perfection of the order of the visible Church, but is not essential to its existence.

#### B. Representative Government

Our form of government is Presbyterian, which is representative government. Both Presbyterian and Reformed churches have this type of church government. The two other basic kinds of church government are: 1) Prelatical (Episcopal) gradation of offices and ranks resulting in a hierarchy (e.g. Roman Catholic, Episcopal); and 2) Congregational – Independent local congregations (e.g., Congregational, Baptists, Brethren). Of these three forms of government, we believe Presbyterianism best conforms to the biblical data outlined above.

## **Elders**

There are two basic offices in our church elder and deacon. The elders have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching. In Scripture we find both teaching and ruling elders. The teaching elder (pastor) is one who labors in the study of God's Word and prayer (Acts 6:4; I Jn. 5:17, Eph. 4:11). Ruling elders are elected to represent and serve local congregations (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Ruling elders and teaching elders have the same authority and eligibility to office in the courts of the Church. Ruling elders should cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity to do so.

## **Deacons**

The deacon is the other church office found in the N.T.(Phil 1:1). The office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people. His responsibilities are listed in Acts 6:1-6 and his qualifications in 1Tm 3:8-13.

## **C. THE COURTS OF THE CHURCH**

### **The Session**

Presbyterian church government is based on a series of courts. The session, made up of the elders including the teaching elders (pastor), is charged with the spiritual care of the local church. They are required to govern the church by receiving members, censuring those found delinquent, giving admonition or rebuke, settling controversies and differences, promoting the spiritual interests of the congregations, ordaining and installing officers, approve actions of special importance affecting property, promoting missions and obedience to the Great Commission, and to exercise authority over corporate worship. Elders are elected by the congregation.

### **Presbytery**

The Presbytery is made up of all the teaching elders and churches within its bounds that have been accepted by the Presbytery (such as our "Lowcountry Presbytery"). The Presbytery receives and considers complaints and other matters brought before it by the sessions. As a body, it also licenses and ordains ministers and helps form or receive new congregations. It is responsible to promote the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to individual congregations and churches under the PCA Constitution.

### **General Assembly**

The General Assembly is the highest court of the Presbyterian Church in America and in one body represents all the churches of the denomination. It has the authority to form new presbyteries. It provides a bond of union, peace, and correspondence among all our churches and seeks to promote love, truth, and holiness.

## **D. PCA Committees and Agencies**

From our founding in 1973 with 240 congregations and just 40,000 members, the Presbyterian Church in America now has grown to almost 2000 congregations and over 3950,000 members. For several years we have been one of the nation's faster growing Protestant denominations.

But mere numbers do not tell the story of this young denomination which is seeking to be 'true to the Scriptures, the Reformed Faith, and the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.' God has richly blessed the work of the Presbyterian Church in America. Across North America and in almost sixty countries around the world (over 500 career and "short term" foreign missionaries), there are new believers and new churches worshipping God and seeking to serve Him in their communities.

While the personal witness of individuals and the programs of local churches are foundational to fulfilling the Great Commission, it is their collective efforts that greatly multiply their effectiveness. The various ministries of the Presbyterian Church in America are carried out through the General Assembly's committees and agencies.

### **Committee on Discipleship Ministries – CDM**

CDM's mission is to assist leaders in the local church as they make disciples (Matthew 28:19) among children, youth, and adults in the congregation. In 2014, the PCA General Assembly changed the name from Christian Education and Publications (CEP) to reflect better the broad nature of the ministry of discipleship in the local church. We seek to help by connecting people to people and people to resources. We do this through consultation, training events, conferences, and resources available on the website. Our hope is that God will use the ministry of

CDM to help PCA members experience the great blessings of a connectional church as we seek to partner together to fulfill the Great Commission.

We connect leaders. God has blessed the Church with human resources. Our desire is to connect leaders with leaders and leaders with learners, so that resources can be developed and shared with the purpose of leading others to a deeper knowledge of Christ. We provide training. A follower of Christ is one who is always learning. CDM staff, trainers, and associates work with individuals and groups in local churches to improve the ministry of discipleship. We seek to help leaders identify best practices for their particular context and need. We provide resources. CDM desires to equip the members of the local church with quality materials for Bible studies, small group meetings, and educational programs. The PCA Bookstore is a ministry of CDM that provides books, materials, and curriculum for those serving in the local church. We also serve the PCA by overseeing the work of Great Commission Publications (GCP), which produces curriculum for children, youth, and adults. GCP is jointly owned by the PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

#### **Mission to North America**

Mission to North America (MNA) is a Christ-centered organization dedicated to providing the leadership and the resources that enable the Presbyterian Church in America to plant, grow, and multiply churches throughout the United States and Canada.

#### **Mission to the World (MTW):**

MTW is the mission sending agency of the PCA, advancing Reformed and covenantal church planting movements in strategic areas worldwide resulting in mature churches and equipped leaders among all peoples.

#### **Geneva Benefits Group**

PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc. provides life and disability insurance coverage and retirement plans for PCA pastors, lay church workers and the staffs of PCA committees, agencies and institutions.

#### **Presbyterian Church in America Foundation, Inc.**

From the beginning of the Presbyterian Church in America, the General Assembly has been committed to the goal of teaching its members the Biblical principle of stewardship. The vehicle established by the 3rd General Assembly was first the Stewardship Committee, later replaced by the Foundation.

#### **Ridge Haven Conference Center**

Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, the 902-acre Ridge Haven Conference and Retreat Center is the ideal setting for a weekend excursion, a family vacation or a special seminar. From camping facilities to apartments, from cafeterias to kitchens, from swimming pools and playgrounds to hiking trails, Ridge Haven can fulfill your specific needs to get away from the daily stresses of life. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) established the Ridge Haven Conference and Retreat Center in 1978 as a year-round ministry outreach to individuals, families, churches, PCA and other ministry organizations.

#### **Covenant College**

Located in beautiful Lookout Mountain, GA, Covenant College is a Christ-centered institution of higher education, emphasizing liberal arts, and operated by a Board of Trustees elected by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. It exists to provide educational services to that denomination and the wider public. The college offers Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Science, Master of Education, and Associate of Arts degrees and a number of pre-professional programs.

#### **Covenant Theological Seminary**

Covenant Theological Seminary, since its founding almost 50 years ago, has remained strongly committed to the three-fold purpose of training servants of the triune God to walk with God, to interpret and communicate God's Word, and to lead God's people. In pursuit of this purpose, we believe that preparation for Gospel ministry must be firmly rooted in the divinely inspired Holy Scriptures, which provide us with the knowledge of God and His will that is necessary and sufficient for our salvation, faith, and life.

The seminary was originally established by concerned Christians in what was then called the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. These believers recognized that their denomination, born out of resistance to rising liberal influences, needed a strong theological school of its own. In 1956, Covenant Seminary began with 11 students on a plot of land a few miles west of St. Louis, Missouri. The seminary continued to grow in both size and reputation in the years that followed, and in 1982, following a denominational merger, Covenant Seminary became the national seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), which elects and oversees the work of the seminary's Board

of Trustees. Today Covenant Seminary it is a school of more than 700 students.

### **Reformed University Ministries (RUF)**

RUF brings to the campus a heart for God, a love for the campus and convictions that are well formed, deeply held and which allow us to bring a fully-orbed ministry to students.

### **Suggested Reading For Further Study:**

Thomas Witherow, *The Apostolic Church: Which is it?*

Constitution of the PCA @ [www.pcanet.org](http://www.pcanet.org)

## **VI. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN LIBERTY?**

Session 6

A preliminary principle of the PCA is that: God alone is the Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for the protection and security equal and common to all others (BCO II.1).

Christian liberty refers to the freedom that Christians have to choose in the area of doctrine or ethics where the Bible is not explicit. There are many things that God has not revealed to us in the Scriptures. We believe He expects Christians to make responsible choices in these areas, guided by biblical principles and the Holy Spirit. The issue of Christian liberty is an important one, because some churches seek to "bind the conscience" of Christians by forcing them to adhere to doctrines or obey rules that are not commanded in Scripture. These are usually based on tradition or misinterpretations of Scripture, not explicit commands. Another reason it is important to understand the concept of Christian Liberty, is that Christians tend to differ about so many things (e.g. standards of dress, what entertainment is acceptable, alcohol, Lord's Day keeping, eschatology, baptism, Bible versions, etc.). If we don't understand this concept, we could become either pharisaical (condemning those who don't have our standards) or irresponsible just doing what we want regardless of how it is affecting others.

### **Distinguish Between Commands and Traditions**

We must determine if our conviction in an area is based on a clear command of Scripture (a command is clearly taught in God's Word) or rather our own or church's determination of what is right (church decides practice). In Paul's day, one issue that divided Christians was whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to idols (1 Cor 8:4). Another was the question of vegetarianism (Rm 14:2) and another, the keeping of Jewish "holy days" (Rm 14:5). In his treatment of these controversies Paul makes it clear that these are activities that are not good or bad in themselves, but rather are areas in which a Christian has liberty to make his own choice (Rm 14:14,20; 1 Cor 8:9; 9:4-6; 10:23,29). So, the first thing to do is to determine if something is in the area of a command or a conviction. Am I doing or believing this thing because it is clearly and unmistakably taught in Scripture, or because my church or my own tradition favors it?

### **How to Develop Convictions**

It must be pointed out that though God has not given us direct commands or prohibitions on every detail of life, He has given us precepts and principles that touch on almost every area. When trying to determine what is right or the best thing to do, these questions should be asked:

- Is it lawful (1 Cor. 10:23)? Has God strictly forbidden it? If so, the case is closed.
- Does it edify (10:23)? Does it build me up spiritually, physically and emotionally?
- Is it profitable to others (10:33)?
- Am I sure that it will not offend others (10:32)?
- Will it glorify God (10:31), make Him happy, make others think highly of Him?
- Is it something you could imagine Christ doing (11:1)?
- Is it worth imitating (11:1)? Does it set a good example to follow?
- Am I sure that it will not enslave me (6:12)? Am I controlled by it?

If you can honestly answer all the underlined questions in the affirmative, then do it and don't feel guilty.

### **How to Respond to Others**

In regards to others who have differing convictions than us in non-essential areas, there are two things to remember. First, we should not condemn them (Rm 14:3,13). We should not condemn others.

We should allow them to have their own personal convictions. Paul says we should "accept" or welcome them as brethren (14:1). Our fellowship is not based on uniformity of opinion, but on unity of relationship (14, 17). Secondly, we should temper our liberty by love. If what I'm doing becomes a "stumbling block" to another Christian, I should stop doing it or at least not flaunt it to his detriment (1Cor 8:9-13; Rm 14:13). Love for others, not self-edification, should be the supreme guiding principle of our lives (Rom. 15:1-3). We should seek peace and mutual edification and not make a "big deal" about minor issues (Rom. 14:19).

May God grant us the wisdom to discern God's will for us in regards to areas of liberty, and the grace to accept others who hold to different convictions.

## VII. WHAT IS OUR POSITION ON THE "CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT?"

### A. Concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

(Taken primarily from a PCA position paper <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/pastoralletter.html>)

Baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by Joel and other prophets in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28,29; Is. 32:15; 59:21; Ezk. 36:26,27) as well as by John the Baptist and our Lord in the New Testament (Jn. 7:37-39; Mt. 3:11; Acts 1:4-8; Jn. 14:16, 27:26; 15:26; 16:7-16).

It found its fulfillment at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). While public and external manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on occasion in the Apostolic Age (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 19:6,7), Scripture teaches that the normal experience of the Spirit's baptism coincides with regeneration (Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38; Rm 5:5; 8:9, 1Cor 12:13). It is therefore not to be viewed as a second blessing or special work of grace enjoyed by some, but not all Christians (1Cor 12:3; Rm 8:9-10; I Jn 4:2).

Every Christian received the Holy Spirit completely, not partially, when he received Christ as Savior.

### B. Concerning the Life in the Spirit

- Life in the Spirit begins with regeneration (Col. 2:13; Jn. 3:3-8; Eph. 2:1-5).
- The first manifestation of this life is the believer's calling on the name of the Lord for salvation (Rom. 10:13-14; Gen. 4:26; Joel 2:32; I Cor. 12:3).
- Assurance of salvation is not based on any experience, but on the Word of God that promises eternal life to all who believe (II Pt. 1:17-19; Ps. 19:7; Jn. 1:12,13; 17:7,8,14,17; 20:31; Eph. 2:8,9; Heb. 11:6; I Jn. 5:13, 18-20).
- This assurance is to be cultivated by the continual and diligent use of God's means for our growth in grace the Word, prayer, fellowship, baptism and the Lord's Supper (Phil. 2:12, 13; Acts 2:41,42; II Pt. 1:3-11).

### C. Concerning the Filling of the Spirit

- The filling of the Spirit denotes the dominion of Christ in our lives and occurs when one is led willingly by the Word through which the Spirit works (Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:4,13,14; Gal. 3:3; 5:16,17).
- By their subjection to the Word of Scripture, believers grow in grace and receive the benefits of redemption freely through Christ (II Tim. 2:15; 3:16,17).
- The evidence of this spiritual growth is seen in the fruit of the Spirit, which is proof of their abiding in Christ and His Word abiding in them (Jn. 15:4-7; Gal. 5:22,23; Eph. 5:18-21).
- By the filling of the Spirit they are enabled to speak the truth of Christ with great boldness (Acts 4:13).
- The Scripture commands every Christian to be filled continually by the Holy Spirit, and to grow spiritually by obedience to God's written Word and the proper use of the means of grace (Act 2:41,42; Mt 28:18-20; Eph 5:18).
- When we neglect or ignore His Word or are disobedient to it, we are guilty of quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25-30; I Thes. 5:19-22).

### D. Concerning the Gifts of the Spirit

Spiritual gifts are granted to every believer by the Holy Spirit who apportions to each Christian "individually as He wills" (I Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4). Christians are to use these gifts to serve Christ in the work of His kingdom and for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 14:12, 26). All true believers receive some spiritual gift or gifts (I Cor. 12:7). No spiritual gift is to be despised, nor is it to be misused to bring glory to any other than to God (Jn. 16:14; I Cor.10:31; 12:21; 13:1-3). Specific spiritual gifts in Scripture are found in the following passages from which we can list some 21 gifts:

1 Cor 12:28: 1) apostle, 2) prophet, 3) teacher, 4) miracles, 5) healing, 6) helps, 7) administration, 8) tongues

1 Cor 12:8-10 9)word of wisdom, 10) word of knowledge, 11) faith, (5) healing, (4) miracles, (2) prophecy, (2) discerning of spirits, (8) tongues, (3) interpretation of tongues

Eph 4:11 (1) apostle, (2) prophet, (4) evangelist, (5) pastor-teacher

Rom 12:6-8 (2) prophecy, (6) serving, (3) teaching, (17) encouraging, (18) contributing, (19) leadership, (20) mercy

1 Cor 7:7 21) celibacy

1 Pet 4:11 whoever speaks (several gifts) & whoever serves (several gifts)

Some spiritual gifts plainly have ceased, such as the founding office of apostle. Others are obscure and can't be clearly defined, such as "helps." Others are clearly seen today, such as "teaching" and "giving." Some have received undue prominence in recent days, such as "tongues," "working of miracles" and "healing."

## 1. Miracles

Much discussion and debate continues throughout the church of Christ on the subject of miracles. In the Scripture certain clusters of miracles were associated with various servants of God and related to the giving of revelation, such as Ex 4:1-9; I Kgs 17:23-24; Jn 2:11; 3:2. Such miracles were signs by which God communicated divine truth or confirmed that the speaker indeed spoke from God. Miracles seemed to authenticate the apostolic office 2 Cor 12:12. These miracles related to revelation have ceased, since special revelation was completed with the closing of the Canon in the New Testament era (I Cor. 13:8).

Scripture also uses the term miracle or wonder to describe the acts of God in all areas of creation and providence (Ps. 107:23,24; 139:14). The power of God in response to believing prayer to work wonders and to heal the sick can not or should not be limited (Js. 5:14-16).

Finally, we would speak a word of caution against an obsession with signs and miraculous manifestations which is not indicative of a healthy church, but of the opposite, an unhealthy church (Mt. 12:39; 24:24; Jn. 4:48; I Cor. 1:22,23; 14:22; II Thes. 2:9-12).

The Spirit provides all that is necessary for the equipping of the saints through His presence and power in the church (II Tim. 3:16,17; Lk. 16:31; Jn. 14:16,17; 16:7-16; I Cor. 12:1-11; 13:1-14:1; Gal. 5:22-23). The true basis of faith and spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit in believers as they are made subject to His written Word, which is sufficient in itself for spiritual growth unto complete maturity.

## 2. Tongues

It is evident that the tongues described in Acts 2 were foreign languages known to the hearers present and unknown to the speaker. Tongues were a special sign to the Jews that the new age of the gospel had begun (I Cor. 14:20-22; Is. 28:11,12; Acts 2:4,38; 10:46; II Cor. 12:12).

Tongues were used as a means by God to reveal His will to early New Testament Churches. It should be noted that few believers in the New Testament spoke in tongues (Acts 2:38,41; 3:7-9; 4:4; I Cor. 12:10) and those who received the gift did not seek it (Acts 1:5; 2:33; I Cor. 2:11,18). Any view of tongues which conceives of it as an experience by which revelation is received from God is contrary to the principle of the completion of revelation with the completion of Scripture. In addition, any view of tongues which makes this an essential sign of the baptism of the Spirit is contrary to Scripture (Eph. 5:18-21).

Today's "tongues movement" seems to have little in common with the New Testament gift of tongues which itself began to fade as Scripture was completed (I Cor. 13:7-13).

## 3. Healing

God still miraculously heals sickness in response to believing prayer and confession (Js. 5:15,16). But it is not always God's will to heal His stricken children. He sometimes uses illness to chasten or to develop Christ-like character in His people (Heb. 12:6,; II Cor. 12:7-10).

The "gift of healing" was a special sign gift given to the apostles to authenticate their message during the apostolic age (II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3,4; cf. I Cor. 1:22). It was not a permanent gift otherwise why would an apostle leave sick people (Phil. 2:30; II Tim. 4:20, etc.).

Since the passing of the apostles, the authentication of the gospel is not miraculous signs which can often be fraudulent or Satanically induced (Mt. 7:22; I Cor. 13:1; Gal. 5:22; cf. II Thes. 2:9,10; Rev. 13:3; Mt. 21:24), but by the signs of the resurrection (Mt. 12:39; Rom. 1:4), and the transformed lives of believers (II Cor. 5:17; Jn. 13:35; II Cor. 3:2; Titus 2:10).

### Suggested Reading:

Gardiner, *Corinthian Catastrophe*

John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*

Hank Hanegraff, *Christianity in Crisis*



## E. Some Things We Believe Regarding the Holy Spirit and Sign Gifts

- a. Why we believe the revelatory and sign gifts are no longer in operation in the church.
  1. All Christians have been given spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom Eph 4:7,16; Rm 12:3-7; 1 Cor. 12:11
  2. But revelatory gifts (having to do with the revealing of God's will: prophecy, 'knowledge,' languages) and sign gifts (wonders, miracles to authenticate the message) are no longer in operation in the church (1 Cor. 13:8).
  3. Such gifts were necessary during the foundational stage of the church Heb. 2:3,4; II Cor. 12:11,12; 1 Cor.1:22.Eph 2:20
  4. The completed scriptures have superseded these kinds of gifts-1 Co 13:10; Jms 1:25; 2 Tim 3:16,17; Rm 1:17
- b. Why we believe that tongues are no longer in operation in the church
  1. They were to be a sign of judgment to the Jews that the gospel age of universal salvation has come and that no longer would they be the bearers of God's message to the world (I Cor. 14:21, 22; Isa. 28: 11,12).
    - a. The Pentecostal experience was an inaugural event that occurred in four stages to prove to the Jews and the world that this new age has dawned.
      - 1) The Holy Spirit age foretold by prophets (Joel 2:28-32), John the Baptist (Luke 3:16) and Jesus (John 14:16,17: Acts 1:4,5,8) has come
      - 2) Speaking in unlearned languages (not gibberish) was one of the signs at Pentecost (Acts 2:4)
      - 3) It was repeated when different groups of people were "officially" brought into this new body.
        - a) Jews - Acts 2
        - b) Samaritan (« Jew, « Gentile-ethnic mix) Acts 8:17
        - c) Gentiles (non-Jews) Acts 10:44-46
        - d) Mixed--(1/3 Gentle, 1/3 Christian, 1/3 Jew) Acts 19:2
      - 4) It was an unusual occurrence-Acts spans approximately 35 years; but tongues mentioned only 4 times.
      - 5) Notes: not all (only 120 at Pentecost; not Paul at conversion Acts 9:17); not sought (a surprise gift) apostles were always present,
    - b. The use of unknown languages as a revelatory gift was also happening before the scriptures were completed- I Cor. 12:10
      - 1) The languages were supposed to be translated in order for others to be edified by the special revelation that came through them to the church-I Cor. 14:5
      - 2) All spiritual gifts (those in operation today and those not in operation today) are given by God for the profit and edification of the church - I Cor. 14:3,4,6,12,17
      - 3) The purpose of the gift was not for self exaltation (I Cor. 13:4,5) or personal edification.
        - a) The only person who could possibly be edified by an unknown language that is uninterrupted is the person- who is speaking (I Cor. 14:2,4), since the truths he is speaking (which he would know) are only known by him.
        - b) Without interpretation, what you understand in your mind when speaking in an unknown language is not fruitful for anyone else (I Cor. 14:14).
      - 4) The speaking with unlearned, foreign languages was not an ecstatic trance-like experience
        - a) I Cor. 12:2--pagan oracles had ecstatic speech; 2. The spirit of true prophets are subject to control of the prophets 14:32,33
    2. Other reasons we believe tongues are no longer for today.
      - a. They are not mentioned anywhere in the NT after I Cor 14; (54 AD) 1Corinthians is only the 6<sup>th</sup> book written out of 29 NT books
      - b. There is nothing about tongues in the list of requirements for church officers found in 1 Tim 3 or Titus 1.
      - c. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues was not found in the church (except in a few minor unorthodox sects) until 1900.
  - c. Why we believe that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at conversion and not at a post-conversion special experience.
    1. Baptism by the Holy Spirit as an event happened at Pentecost and at successive stages as recorded in the book of Acts
      - a. This was a prophesied event-Joel 2:28,29; Isa. 32:15, 59:21; Ezk. 36:26,27. [see above B.1.a.]
    2. Baptism by the Holy Spirit as a personal experience takes place when people are converted
      - a. The pouring out of the Spirit on us is synonymous with regeneration and conversion--Tit. 3:5
      - b. When we repent and believe on Christ we receive the Holy Spirit-Acts 2:38 (note; none of the converts on Pentecost spoke in tongues)
      - c. The Corinthians, who were notoriously carnal and immature, (I Cor. 3:13) all were baptized by the Holy Spirit-I Cor. 12:13
      - d. All who are Christians have the Holy Spirit and are baptized (united) into Christ-Rom. 8:9
  - d. Why we believe the "filling of the Holy Spirit" is a state of empowerment Christians should seek daily.
    1. Except for Acts 2:4 every other place in Acts when people were filled it refers to the empowering by the Spirit 4:8, 31, 13:9
    2. There is never any exhortation to be baptized by the Spirit but Paul exhorts to be filled (Eph. 5:18) the tense of the verb "be filled" means to constantly be filled.
    3. The evidence of being filled is joy, thanksgiving and humility Ep5:19-21 (not speaking in tongues) & the fruit of the Spirit-Gal 5:22,23
    4. In order to be filled believers must do the following
      - a. resist and reject sin-Eph. 4:30
      - b. be filled with and live by the Word of God-Col. 3:16; cf Eph.5:18,19

**Fellowship is the Context**

God's Word states that faith in Jesus Christ brings us to fellowship with God and also with all God's children (I Jn. 1:3). I Cor. 12 (esp. vv 12-13,25) teaches that we have become part of the one body of Christ, composed of all believers. As members of this body, we are admonished to demonstrate love and care for one another, since every member of a body is needed for the whole to function properly. Verse 25 warns us against schism and fighting between Christians. The love and concern which Christians are to have for the other members of the body of Christ must transcend denominational labels and doctrinal "sacred cows." While in this world, we will never all agree on every minor point of doctrine; yet, we have a biblical responsibility to practice a genuine love for all those who are members of Christ's body (John 13:33-35).

**Discipline**

However, God has commanded that Christians and the church must take action to confront and discipline believers who are living in open sin (Mt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5:1-13; II Cor. 2:6-10). The purpose of church discipline is to protect the name of Christ, to preserve the purity of the church and to bring the offender to repentance and restoration. Mt. 18:15-17 sets forth three steps that we are always obligated to follow whenever we seek to carry out church discipline. Excommunication from the church, according to Mt. 18:17, comes as the result of a person's unrepentant continuance in his sin and his refusal to heed the authority which Christ has given to His true church to discipline sin.

**False Teachers**

While Christians are to demonstrate love to the whole body of Christ, we are warned that not everyone who claims the name "Christian" is genuinely a member of the body of Christ (Mt 7:15-23; Act 20:28-30). We must determine if a person is a Christian by his belief and life, not by his profession or giftedness (Mt 7:22; 2Ths 2:9). A person may claim to be a believing Christian, yet teach heretical doctrine (2Pt 2:1). In Gal 1:8-9, Paul commands churches to reject anyone, even if they profess to be Christians, who preaches a "different" Gospel. While we should always be respectful to every individual, 2 John 7-11 makes it clear that a Christian must not support a false teacher's ministry or even give Christian recognition to him, because to do so is to participate in his sin. We must never endorse Satan's preachers, especially when they wear our title of "Christian" (II Cor. 11:13-15). If they do not respond to correction they should be "rejected" Titus 3:10.

**False Religions**

In 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 God forbids Christians to worship with or to have "Christian" fellowship with false religions or heretical Christians. We must bear in mind that the "Christian" cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, etc.), Roman Catholicism and modernistic Protestantism preach a "different gospel" (Gal 1:6 NASV) which is sending souls to hell. God's command in Rev. 18:4 is for Christians to come out of a "church" that has degenerated into a "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). These are the biblical principals that led to the Protestant reformation in the 16th century and the exodus from mainline Protestant churches in the 20th century.

**Perspective**

The disciplining of sin and heresy has often been labeled "unloving." Such actions should not be taken with a proud or hateful spirit (Gal 6:1). But if one has a love for God, for the testimony of His church and for the souls of others, then one has a responsibility to take up the scalpel of church discipline or separation to remove the cancer of sin and heresy from the church (Rev. 2:2,6). It would be unloving to let the cancer kill the patient for fear of offending him by pointing out his disease.

**Suggested Reading for Further Study**

Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*

Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster.*

G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapters 23-24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Chapters 1-2. PCA Constitution, The Book of Discipline, Form of Government

## LX. EXPECTATIONS OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS

### A. What you should expect of the church.

The things a church should be doing include: evangelism, discipleship, worship, fellowship and prayer. Our mission statement seeks to summarize these:

*Living out the Gospel by Gathering, Growing, Giving and Going!*

The church should also be a place where individuals can be trained and then given the opportunity to use their spiritual gifts to assist the church in reaching these goals. One of the distinctives of our church is the emphasis on "sound doctrine" yet with a respect for the individual's right to liberty regarding secondary and peripheral issues. We provide many studies for all ages that emphasize biblical content and personal application of God's Word. The church member should expect that the staff, elders, deacons and all others in leadership seek to have Christ and His Word preeminent in their own lives and are conscientiously seeking in their life and ministry to reach the stated goals of the church.

### B. What the Church should expect from it's members.

#### Involvement

Christians are exhorted to "Not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Heb. 10:25). God's plan for our growth in grace involves our assembling together. The preached Word, corporate worship, prayer and singing are all used by God to help us mature in the faith. As a "teaching church" we also provide many classes and small groups to facilitate your growth in Christ. For the sake your own soul, it is expected that you will be active at as many church functions as possible since these are opportunities for spiritual growth.

#### Financial Support

We do not think that a church's financial needs should be met by bake sales, suppers, bingo and the like, but rather by the free will offerings of God's people (Ex. 25:2; 35:22). Regular, proportionate giving seems to have been the normal way of financing the Lord's work in the New Testament (I Cor. 16:2). This probably followed the Old Testament pattern of "tithing." That was the bringing of one tenth, at least, of one's personal income to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-33; Dt. 12:5-6; Mal. 3:10). This proportionate giving was not merely a "social stipulation" for the Israelite nation, but was used as a standard of giving back in Abraham's day (Gen. 14:20; 28:22). Although the "tenth" is a good standard to determine how much to give, the actual amount is really up to the individual believer. Whatever we give, it should be done with willingness (II Cor. 8:12), generosity (II Cor. 9:6; 8:2,14), cheerfulness (II Cor. 9:7), and confidence in God's supply (II Cor 9:6,10,11). As New Covenant believers we are not longer under the tithe, but rather we are called to obedience by "grace giving" (2 Cor 9:13). It should go without saying that God does not expect us to give the same amount as the Old Covenant believers. We are to give in proportion to how He has blessed us (Deut 16:10,16). With that in mind it seems that a tithe should be the beginning point, not the ceiling, for New Covenant believers who have been blessed so richly and live in such a wealthy nation as ours.

#### Service

Every believer has some gift that God has given him to use to edify the church (I Cor. 12:7-10; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11). These gifts range from teaching to hospitality. Some are also talented musically or artistically. The main thing is for each person to be using his or her gifts. We are saved to serve! The church should be the primary arena for service and the exercise of our gifts. There is a place of ministry for you in the body of Christ here at Oak! Only as each member of the body does its part will the whole body grow and mature (Eph. 4:16). Those who join the church are expected to find some way they can serve the Lord through the ministries of Oak Community Church.

**Prayer**

Those who join this church are expected to uphold the church, its ministries, leadership and people in prayer. We realize the "the church must go forward on its knees." Unless the Lord builds the house we labor in vain (Ps. 127:1). As Paul desired the prayers of others for his ministry, we desire and need your prayers for this ministry (I Thes. 5:25; II Thes. 3:1). Each member is encouraged to pray for the leadership, ministries and people of this church. This can be done through the corporate prayer times, small clusters of praying believers or as individuals in private devotions but whatever the format, it must be a vital part of the life of the church.

**Submission to Biblical Authority**

By joining a church you are voluntarily putting yourself under the authority of Christ through the leadership of the church. Christians are expected to be subject to the loving oversight of those called to shepherd the church (Heb. 13:17; I Pt. 5:5; I Cor. 16:16). Most of the work of pastors and elders is declaring and teaching the Word (Jn. 21:15; Acts 6:4, 20:27,28) but at times it includes disciplining wayward sheep (Tit. 1:13, 3:10; I Cor. 5:4,5). When you join a church you are inviting the oversight and, if necessary, the discipline of the church administered through the leadership (pastors and elders) of the Church (Mt. 18:17,18).

## VI. INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP

If you have read this booklet you should have a good idea of what our church believes, our history, our purpose, our operation and what is expected of members. We now extend to you an invitation to "join" the church. You do not have to agree with every detail of what we do and believe to be a member, but you should be in general agreement with the major doctrine of the church and acknowledge that in those areas where we disagree the church is seeking to honor the Scriptures as we understand them. In order to maintain the peace of the church we expect those who join with reservations about certain areas of doctrine or practice not to sow discord by promoting positions contrary to those of the church.

When you join the church, you are expected to make a public profession of faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior. This often involves a "word of testimony" regarding your salvation and/or walk with Christ. After being interviewed by the session you then participate in a "joining ceremony" before the whole church body.

If you feel that this is the place God wants you to fellowship, worship, get fed and serve, then we invite you to officially and intentionally join with us in church membership.

*"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"*  
(Ephesians 3:20,21).

### **How to Become a Member of Oak Community Church (PCA):**

- Trust in Christ's work alone for your salvation
- Meet with the Session to share why you believe you are a Christian (testimony)

Here is are examples of the questions the Session will ask you concerning your Salvation:

1. Why should God let you into heaven?
  2. What are some evidences in your life that you are a child of God?
  3. Briefly describe your Christian experience.
- Affirm that you have been baptized as an infant or at the time of your profession of faith or be baptized now.
  - Publicly affirm the membership vows:
    1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
    2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
    3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
    4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
    5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

If you are currently a member of a like-minded Bible believing church then please ask the Session or Pastor to request a letter of transfer from your current church stating that you are a member in good standing.