



# Heritage

B I B L E C H U R C H

The Heritage Bible Church doctrinal statement is written from a Pastor's perspective. It was intentionally composed to communicate with more of a personal style. We want you to individualize the topics to yourself. It is thusly written in order that your reading of it may bring you greater understanding and passion for God! Doctrine is not boring and we hope that you will find this document to be an encouragement to you. Items of Doctrinal distinction and importance are emboldened for your benefit.

I think that everything begins with an understanding of a higher power. Most people acknowledge that there is, in fact, a higher power. From our perspective here on earth we as human beings have to acknowledge the questions of how we got here and what our purpose is. In my opinion, there are only two choices. You can either believe that we arrived into existence by sheer happenstance or you can believe that we are created by someone for a specific purpose. Now, as this is not a statement on creation, I will simply leave this thought by saying that I think it is crystal clear that we, complex people in a complex environment, were indeed created by a higher power for a specific purpose! That alone is very exciting!

Now, with this thought established, I would like to take you to the primary source of my understanding of the One true Higher Power who alone brought this world into existence. I believe in the God of the Bible! Many people throughout the world acknowledge The Holy Bible as a source of truth. I acknowledge the Bible as the source of truth. I believe that the God who created the world and who created me took the time to write a 'manual' in order to dictate truth to His creation. I believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God. That word 'inspired' literally means "God-breathed". In other words, God literally spoke His Words to chosen men who faithfully recorded them for us. (*II Peter 1:20-21*) He tells us of this plan in *II Timothy 3:16-17*. God has convinced me along with many others that the Bible truly is His own Words. God proclaims His Word to be 'alive and powerful' in a way that no other book can claim. I've seen God's truth change my life as well as other's lives in a supernatural way! The Bible has also been preserved in a way that no other book can claim. No book has endured over time and attack like the Bible. And yet today, we still have what I believe is the pure and unchanged Word of God. (*Isaiah 40:8*) Jesus Christ Himself promised to keep His Word purely preserved. (*Matt 5:17-19; 24:35*) The sixty-six books of the Bible are the complete and sufficient Word of God and they are indeed 'profitable'! Jesus Christ also issues stern warnings in regards to those who would attempt to change it or handle it loosely. (*Rev 22:18-19; James 3:1; Gal 1:6-9*) What an amazing privilege it is to be able to pick up a copy of the very Word of God, purely and accurately preserved, and read it in our own language!

So, I believe that the Higher Power noted as the One True God created the world and then literally

wrote a book called the Bible to reveal to us the living truth. So, what has God told us about Himself in the Bible? This is a question of utmost importance. Let's look now and see what God has revealed!

The Bible communicates (*although not in explicit details*) the fact that God exists in the form of three persons. The Tri-une God-head exists in the form of God the Father, God the Son (*Jesus Christ*), and God the Holy Spirit. Although I believe this to be an important and critical doctrine, I do not believe that we can fully understand exactly how the Three are One. I believe it and moreover feel that the best proof is found in the clear representation of the three Divine Person's in scripture. God the Father is usually most readily associated with the title of "God". His presence dominates the Old Testament where He is reverently noted as Yahweh. Jesus Christ is God who was made flesh. The Bible presents Jesus Christ to us as the very "Son of God" (*John 3:16*). Jesus Christ, although present and active in the Old Testament, is mostly seen and revealed in the New Testament. Jesus Christ was clearly demonstrated as God but unashamedly followed the will and plan of God the Father. The Holy Spirit of God was prophesied to come by Jesus Christ and is in fact the Person of God that resides in the heart of every believer (*John 14:16-17*). The Holy Spirit of God is active in the hearts and minds of the believer giving comfort, wisdom, and rebuke (*Acts 9:31; Rom 8:26; Eph 4:30; John 16:8-15*). I believe that the Tri-une God is eternal in form. The Three-In-One have always been and always will be.

The characteristics of this God are critically important doctrines to understand, know, and remember. God is first and foremost holy. (*Lev. 11:44, 19:2, 20:7; Isaiah 6; I Peter 1:15-16*) This word denotes something that is completely set apart and pure. In other words, God is not like us. He has never sinned, will never sin, and is completely incapable of any form of sin. He does not have flaws like you and I. The Bible teaches us that His perfection demands perfection from anyone who would approach Him. This does not prevent Him from loving us, though, but rather it compelled Him to make the greatest statement of love ever given. This fact is the premier reason the gospel is so precious, which we will discuss later.

God also describes Himself to us in many other important ways to help us know who He is. He is described as Love which is conveyed in everything He does. He is described as Omnipotent (*Job 42:2, Psalm 89:8, Matt 19:26, Eph 3:20, Rev 19:6*) which means that He has no limit to His power. He is described as Omnipresent (*Gen 28:16, Psalm 139:3-10*) which means that He has no boundaries in His presence. He is described as Immutable (*Job 23:13, Psalm 119:89-91, Hebrews 6:17*) which denotes the fact that He will never change. He is described as Omniscient (*Job 42:2, Psalm 139:1-4, Acts 1:24, Hebrews 4:13*) which explains His limitless knowledge. He is described as Patient (*Nahum 1:3 Psalm 103:8-12*), Kind, Gracious (*Eph 1:7*), Merciful (*II Peter 3:9*), Good (*Nahum 1:7*), and Guiding (*Prov. 3:5-6*).

All these attributes hardly begin to describe the amazing and incomprehensible Person of God! Ultimately it brings me back to the point of understanding that God is not like us. Although the bible tells us that we are created in God's image, we are utterly limited in so many ways. The awe-inspiring descriptions of God should immediately tell us that we are extremely inferior beings in His presence. But, that only tells part of the story. All created beings, including the angels, pale in comparison to this incomparable God. But, for us as human beings the picture is even worse because of what the Bible describes as "the fall".

In the book of Genesis, God describes how that He created the world including mankind. God tells us that He had wonderful fellowship with the first person created in the human race, Adam (*First man and head of human race*). Genesis goes on to describe that God created Eve (*the first woman*) to be a 'help-meet' or a partner for Adam. Adam and Eve, although inferior to God, had amazing and uninhibited fellowship with

God. In Genesis 3, though, God describes for us how that the fellowship He shared with them was broken by something called sin. God had given them a law or rule if you will. Eve and then Adam chose not to believe God but instead chose to submit to the temptation of Satan and thus fell into sin by breaking God's law.

God tells us in Romans 5:12 that because of Adam's sin we are all tainted with sin. I believe that because of the fall described for us in Genesis 3, every person is born with a sin nature. Romans 5:12 also tells us that because of Adam's sin we will all face the event called death. The Bible says that "it is appointed unto man once to die." The curse of sin broke fellowship with God and dooms all men to a certain death. Once again I must say that this doctrine, although depressing, is critical to understand and we must needs remember that it paves the way for God's amazing grace and love to shine through this curse of darkness!

It is at this juncture that we must consider the father of sin and the father of deception and lies...the one called Satan. Satan is also called 'the Devil' among other names. He is the enemy of God, the adversary to all human beings, and the nemesis to all who believe in Jesus Christ. He is finite, however, and was in fact created by God. He was created as one of the angels. Isaiah 14:12-15 details for us a possible sketch of the downfall and eventual doom of Satan as a result of his pride and his jealous/envious view of God. Satan, although limited in relation to God, is immensely powerful in this world. He is a master deceiver as is described in Genesis 3. (*John 8:44, Rev 12:10*) He hates God and all that He is and stands for. He is also violently opposed to anyone who would claim the name of Christ. He is not to be taken lightly and is constantly on the prowl to destroy lives. (*1 Peter 5:8*) Although Satan is the archenemy of God, he is never to be pictured as a rival to God. He is always under the control of God. The story of Job details a good picture of the relationship of Satan to God and the believer. In this story, Satan appears as the "accuser of the brethren". God allows Satan to weaken, harm, and tempt Job but only so that Job would be able to bring God glory! It is comforting to watch as God is in complete control of Satan. Satan could do nothing without the permission of God! So, although Satan is the father of sin and our chief adversary, we can have the victory over Him because "greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world"! James 4:6-9 encourages the believer that as he humbly submits to and draws close to God and actively resists the Devil, he (*the Devil*) must leave and can have no power over the believer.

You now understand that I believe in one God who is in control of everything. I believe that this God created everything that we know today as our world. I also believe that one of his created beings rebelled against him and is known by us today as Satan. Satan tempted Adam and Eve, God's first created humans, who succumbed to the temptation and thus cast all humans into sin. We know all of this because God wrote a book to tell us about Himself and us. This book is called the Bible. But, if it all stopped here, it would be rather discouraging. Because of sin, we as human beings are hopelessly separated from our Creator God and are doomed to a place called Hell. The Bible tells us that Hell is a place that God created for the Devil and his angels. It is a place of eternal torment and most notably a place of eternal separation from God (*Matthew 25:41-46; II Thess. 1:9; II Pet. 2:4; Rev. 19:20*). Nevertheless, I am so excited to say that the revelation of God goes on to tell us of His plan to redeem fallen humanness and to abolish sin forever!

In probably the most well known verse in the entire Bible, God tells us of His plan to redeem people to Himself. John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life." This brings us to a more in-depth study of the second person of the Tri-une God. Jesus Christ is God who became man so that "He might bring us to God". The word redeem literally means to 'buy back' to 'reclaim as one's own'. God sent Himself to us in the form of His Son

Jesus Christ so that He might reclaim fallen human beings to fellowship with Him.

In the Old Testament we are told of a sacrificial system that allowed the people of Israel to sacrifice a 'perfect' lamb (*a lamb without spot, blemish, or deformity-Lev 22:19*) to atone for the sins of the people. This system, set up by God, was a preview of what He would eventually provide as the ultimate, complete, and final sacrifice for sin. We established earlier that sin separates people from God. God in His holiness cannot relate with sin and thus cannot have fellowship with fallen people. Therefore atonement must be made for the sins of the world. This atonement must be made by a perfect, sinless, and blameless substitute. This Substitute was sent to us by God in the form of Jesus Christ the Righteous!

Jesus Christ was conceived in the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit of God. This was the fulfillment of prophecy. (*Isaiah 7:14*) It is critically important to understand that Jesus Christ was not a child conceived between a man and a woman. It would then be impossible for the child to be divine. Both Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1 tell us of the events that preceded the birth of Christ. The Virgin Mary was visited by the Angel of God and was told of her election to be the mother of the Christ-child. It is clear that she was indeed a virgin and it is even made more clear by the reaction recorded of Joseph, her soon to be husband. He too was visited by the Angel of God and was made aware of God's plan to use his fiancée Mary to be the mother of the Savior of the world. The birth of Christ, recorded so eloquently for us by Luke in chapter 2 of his gospel account, was an extraordinary event that would set in motion the humanly visible plan of God to save His people from their sins.

Jesus lived a normal life as a child although it was evident that He was far from normal. Even as a boy He amazed the scholars at His knowledge of the Word (*Luke 2:41-52*). He also made it clear to His earthly parents that He was on a heavenly mission. Although it may be difficult to understand, Jesus Christ was fully man while at the same time retaining His complete deity. This God-Man lived a sinless life in submission to the will of God the Father.

He officially began His public ministry when He was about 30 years of age. During this time He continued to prove His deity by performing vast amounts of miracles and by teaching with a power and authority not known to mere man. One story recorded for us in Mark 2:1-12 gives us an enlightening picture of His power to heal and to forgive—a power which only God could contain. Christ was teaching in a house and a crowd had amassed to hear Him. The crowd grew so large that there was no room at all inside the house and the scripture insinuates that people were standing around outside the house hoping to either get in or perhaps hear something from the outside. The story goes on to record that a group of men came to the house determined to have Jesus Christ take a look at their friend who was unable to walk. When confronted by the crowd they were undeterred and broke through the roof of the house and lowered their friend down through the excavation to see Jesus. Jesus' divine abilities are then put on display!

Jesus looks at the lame man and his friends and says "your sins are forgiven you." At the hearing of these words some Pharisees immediately became indignant about the claim of Christ to forgive sins. The scripture indicates, though, that they remained silent with their opinions of Christ. But Christ, with His full deity on display, literally read their minds and confronted them about their disbelief in Him. He said, "which is easier to say your sins are forgiven, or to say arise, take up your bed and walk?" He went on to prove His power to forgive and to heal by saying to the paralytic, "Arise take up your bed and walk!"

It is clear by the testimony of many witnesses as well as the record of Scripture that Jesus Christ was indeed the sinless Son of God who became flesh. He became as us in order to give us an example, to give us

truth, and ultimately to give us hope for eternal life. Jesus Christ willingly followed the will and plan of God to lay down His own life as the perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins (*Philippians 2:10-13*). The gospels record that He was betrayed and falsely accused. No fault was found in Him and yet He was condemned to die. He was beaten, battered, and bruised as was prophesied of by Isaiah 53. He was scourged and mocked. He was scarred beyond recognition. He was then crucified on a cross (*Matt. 27*). History tells us of this most awful and torturous death. It was both immensely painful and terribly embarrassing. It was truly a merciless way to die. This was the sacrifice that God made to take away the sins of the world. This is what He meant when He said in John 3:16 that 'He sent His only begotten Son'. This is the picture of God's amazing love for fallen human beings.

The crucifixion scene was not merely a physical pain that Christ had to endure. In fact, I believe that the physical pain, although immense, was not the worst of Christ's suffering. When Jesus Christ was on the cross He endured, for the first and last time, separation from the Father. God poured out His righteous wrath, stored up for the sins of mankind, on His Son Jesus Christ. Christ endured the weight and fury of God's righteous wrath for sin. Christ also endured the awfulness of separation from His Father. It was truly the worst death that has ever happened. But, He satisfied the wrath of God! He took upon Himself all of the penalty for sin. Because of this amazing act of love, fallen humanity has hope! God provided a way through which sins could be paid for. The cross was laid over the chasm of our sinfulness to bridge us to the glories of fellowship with God. "Jesus Paid it all"! "Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows and yet we did esteem Him smitten, stricken by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed!" "Halleluiah, What a Savior!"

The scripture goes on to record that Jesus was confirmed dead and then buried in a tomb near the place of His sacrifice (*John 19:31-42*). This is also important as there are those who would challenge the actual death of Christ. His death was indeed confirmed by Caesar and was made concrete by His burial (*Mark 15:42-46*). He was buried for three days before we are privileged to read about the most victorious event in human history. Christ arose from the dead (*Matthew 28*)! Having paid for the sins of the world by His atoning death, He rose again in victory over death, sin, and hell! Because of this work of Christ we can have victory over sin in our lives and victory over the sting of death (*I Cor. 15*)! Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy and is the fulfillment of God's plan to redeem fallen man back to Himself. Jesus Christ is not finished, however, as He continues to work on our behalf. He is the constant mediator between us as believers and God the Father (*Heb 10:11-22; I Tim 2:5*). He also told us that He is actively preparing dwelling places for us to inhabit when we finally reach our ultimate destination in heaven with the God-head (*John 14:2-3*).

The events that I have just described, although amazing and awe-inspiring, do not automatically bridge the gap for every fallen man. The Bible makes it clear that every man must be drawn by the Spirit of God to a decision to accept the gospel himself. God desires a personal relationship with man that is established only through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me." (*John 14:6*) The Bible goes on to say that every man must confess (*agree with God*) that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of all and that He alone can save! (*Roman 10:9a*)

God draws man to a place of repentance and faith. When God brings an individual to saving faith, a repentant heart is always present. To repent means to turn around—to make an about-face. The Scriptures make it clear in James 2, I John, and in many other places that a man who claims to have been saved and yet

continues to dwell in sin must be questioned. It is clear that no one can truly receive the Lord and continue unchanged! The affection that the individual used to have for the world and its alluring sins will be replaced with disdain. The individual now has a desire to please God by loving what He loves and hating what He hates. This person also begins to understand that sin and the flesh driven life is destructive and is in every way an insidious lie of Satan. Repentance is evidenced by an individual's repudiation of sin and increasing humility and gratitude at the great grace of God. (*It is important to note that repentance accompanies saving faith and is not to be understood as a requirement for salvation as though it is something to be done.*)

I want to be clear at this point to say that salvation can only be accomplished by the grace of God through faith. The Scriptures tell us that 'no man can come unless God draw Him'. Ephesians 2:8-9 takes it further by saying, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast." I believe that man has a choice to either receive or reject the glorious gospel. I also believe, however, that God enables us to choose Christ by granting us the saving faith necessary to believe! Salvation is a gift that must be received by man, but it is not man's ability to muster up great faith that accomplishes the work. The Bible is crystal clear that it is "not by works of righteousness that we have done but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." Salvation is a heavenly blend of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

At this point I would like to outline what I believe about the finer points of what it means to be saved. The Bible uses the term 'justification' to describe an aspect of this. Justification literally means that God declares one righteous at the point of salvation. When someone is granted saving faith, God declares them righteous and pure and able to approach God with boldness! This is a onetime declaration and is based solely and completely upon the work of Christ. (*Rom. 5:17-21; Gal 2:16*)

God is able to declare one righteous on the basis of the propitiatory work of Christ! 'Propitiation' is a beautiful term describing how that Christ literally exhausted the wrath of God. Jesus Christ suffered the wrath of God intended for sin as our substitute (*I John 2:1-2*)! Because of our Lord's substitutionary death, one can have his sins atoned for (*Rom 5:11*) and can then be redeemed. Redemption is the act whereby God literally releases us from our sin debt and 'buys us back' to be His child (*Eph 1:7; Rom. 3:24-25; I Cor. 6:19-20; Titus 2:14*).

The Bible also uses the term 'regeneration' in reference to salvation. Regeneration is probably the closest theological term to the phrase Jesus used when He told Nicodemus "you must be born-again". To be regenerated is to be completely changed. The Psalmist illustrates it beautifully when He says, "He put a new song in my mouth"! The Bible makes it clear that the things of God are unable to be understood by the 'natural' man and even says that they are foolishness to him (*I Cor. 2:14*). However, when regeneration takes place, the Spirit of God changes the heart and enlightens the mind of a man and makes him completely new (*Col. 2:13*)!

'Sanctification' is a term that refers to the continuing process of the believer's transformation into the image of Christ (*Phil. 1:6*). God uses the power of His word, the indwelling power of His Spirit, along with the immense power of prayer to change a person into the image of His Son (*Eph. 4:20-24; Rom. 12:1-2; James 1:22-25*). The Scripture tells us that God desires to use believers who are actively allowing Him to change them into pure vessels (*II Tim. 2:19-22*). The Scriptures make it clear that sanctification is something that will be happening in the life of the true believer. James 2:14-26 and I John 1:5-7 give stern warnings to those who would say that sanctification is unnecessary in regards to salvation. Jesus said "you will know them by their

fruits". I fully understand, though, that we must be patient with people as this process does not progress at the same pace in every life. Although I do believe that a believer will show forth his faith through his works (*fruit*), I do not believe that a believer can lose his salvation. Once a person trusts Christ for salvation there is no one (*including themselves*) who can take it away. Eternal security is a promise of God to the believer. I believe that once a sinner is justified by grace, he is held and preserved by Christ until the day of salvation (*II Tim. 1:12; John 10:27-28; I Pet. 1:3-7*). The process of sanctification will not be complete until the 'glorification' of the believer one day in heaven. On that day God will complete His salvation in us and will radically and completely transform us into the sinless image of His Son with Whom we will live forever in heaven (*Phil. 1:6; Phil. 3:20-21*)!

'Election' is an aspect of salvation that is often debated and misunderstood. The doctrine of election is found in scripture (*Rom 8:28-30; 9:14-29*). It is detailed for us most notably in Ephesians 1:3-8. The term 'election' refers to God's sovereign will to choose those who would bear His name. Although this is clear in scripture, it must not overshadow or trump man's responsibility to humbly receive God's free gift. It is clear that God has given human beings the privilege and the responsibility to make choices. It is also clear that man cannot choose God without the prompting of God through His Spirit, which we have already alluded to. Election is a beautiful doctrine that should inspire great joy and humility within the heart of a believer as he dwells on the fact that a Holy and Righteous God would choose us!

Having understood God's amazing plan to save fallen mankind through His Son Jesus Christ, we must now move on to discuss God's continuing plan for those who have been redeemed! After the four synoptic gospels conclude, the New Testament begins to detail for us God's establishment of the church. It is clear throughout the New Testament that God established the local church on the foundation of Christ. The church is God's plan to further the gospel of Jesus Christ and to disciple those redeemed of Him. What a blessing it is to know that God was never desirous for people to merely get saved and continue on alone. He was and is desirous for men and women to be saved and to join a local "assembly of called out ones". The church provides great comfort, stability, discipleship, encouragement, edification, and opportunity for the born-again believer. In Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus promised that He would build His church and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Although the church has been attacked from the beginning, it has not faltered and will not falter until the Lord Himself comes back to receive it to Himself. The church is an amazing gift to the believer and it should not be neglected (*Hebrews 12:10*).

The scripture elucidates several characteristics that should be a part of a healthy church. The church must always stand adamantly opposed to false teaching. Although false teaching can creep into the church in many areas, the primary area of concern to the New Testament writers was the area of the Gospel. The purity of the gospel of Jesus Christ must be maintained at all cost as this is the foundation upon which the church exists.

The church must also stand unapologetically separated from the world and its philosophies. This is immensely important in a world of cloudiness and confusion. I John says that we must not love the world and that if we have fellowship with darkness we lie about our connection to God! James says that if we maintain a close friendship with the world, we are in fact the enemy to God. The church must be so careful not to allow the philosophies of the world to creep into the church. When this happens, the church will begin to display a watered down version of the gospel and a weak and shallow version of the faith given to us by our forefathers. We must not be afraid to be different from the directions of the world! Light and dark don't mix and neither do

philosophies of God and the world. I must, however, make a point here that is certainly of practical importance. We must be careful how we define the 'world' in the arena of separation. First of all, the church is not to separate from sinners! God calls us to pursue and to love the sinner. We are to build relationships with those who are 'of the world' in order that we might let our gospel light shine to them (*Matt. 5:16*). Secondly, the church is not ever mandated to completely separate from its culture. Christ Himself ministered in His own culture and no doubt blended nicely with the people of His day. The difference was in His message. This is where the church should differ! Christ was adamantly opposed to the philosophies of the world and we should follow suit. He taught that one should love his enemy, respond to evil with kindness, leave off living for money, and to joyfully allow oneself to be diminished for the greater cause of His kingdom! All these teachings were (*and are still!*) diametrically opposed to the philosophies of the world. The church should be cautious to separate for the right reasons as some have been prone to separating from anyone and everyone who isn't exactly like them. Some have also ascribed to a philosophy of being 'peculiar' in the world merely for the sake of being peculiar. The church must separate from the world but in so doing it must be careful to do so consistent with scripture.

The church must also be separated from those inside the body of Christ who willfully and adamantly stand opposed to truth. God is jealous of His name and is unwilling to maintain fellowship with someone who claims to know Him and yet completely rejects His word and refuses to submit to its authority. In order to protect the integrity and unity of the church, the word demands that a separation be made (*Matt. 18:15-17; II Thess. 3:14-15*). Separation can be done in a kind and respectful manner. The separation from an individual must never be handled in a belligerent way. Later in this statement, I will discuss the importance and process of an aspect of this separation called church discipline.

The church should also be passionately given to the great commission (*Matthew 28:19-20*). The church is commanded to bring glory to God by evangelizing the lost and discipling those who come to know Christ! The church must be careful to maintain a balance in this area. Many churches go overboard in the area of evangelism to the detriment of discipleship and vice versa. The Pastor must constantly evaluate His flock and the programs that he is using in order to adequately fulfill this truly great commission. He must make sure that both are being done as this was our Lord's bottom line to the church.

In addition to the local fulfilling of the great commission, the church should endeavor to have a vibrant burden for missions work. The great commission is clear that the church is to spread the glorious gospel throughout the world! There are people in other parts of this planet who have never heard the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The church should never lose sight of this and should endeavor to aid in this harvest.

The church should be intensely devoted to its own people. The church as described for us in the book of Acts was so devoted to each other that they sometimes sold their possessions in order to take care of the needy in their assembly (*Acts 4:32-37*). The scriptures always honor a unified and loving assembly of believers (*Philippians 2:1-5*). The Pastoral staff along with the deacons of the church should be continually seeking to encourage, edify, help, and aid the people of the congregation. The 'chain of love' should not stop here, though, as each member should be encouraged to lovingly seek to meet the needs of the individual members of the body of Christ! Within this vein of thought, I must mention that although a 'membership' is not clearly marked out for us in scripture, it is in fact a necessary part of our church today. It is definitely clear that the epistles were written to bodies of believers. It also seems to indicate that there was indeed some way in which a membership was maintained. In this day and time a membership list is helpful for a number of reasons but especially in the

cases of church government and discipline.

Church discipline is a characteristic of the church that although commonly disregarded, is indeed clearly marked out for us in scripture. God demands that His church would seek to be pure. A church that is filled with sin and strife brings great dishonor and reproach to the name of Christ. It grieves the heart of God and gives Satan great pleasure. Matthew 18 details for us the process that a church should take in disciplining one of its members. I believe that this is a step that should be bathed in prayer. A pastor should not rush into something like this. He must be patient and discerning as this is a sensitive issue to deal with. He should make sure that he has all the facts and that he follows the first step of communication with the individual with love and respect. The goal should always be to restore a brother! We are only to bring discipline to a public level (*before the church*) as a last resort. I do not mean, however, to make excuses for not actually handling an issue of sin. Since sin is always an issue in the lives of flawed human beings, the presence of church discipline will be an absolute necessity and will be seen in a healthy church.

An exciting and positive characteristic of the church is the display of its believers' gifts. The Holy Spirit of God who dwells in the life of every believer is also a bearer of special and unique gifts. I Corinthians 12 tells us how that every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit in order that the body of Christ would be complete and fully functioning to display His glorious gospel. Every believer should be actively pursuing the use of his or her gifts in church. I believe that some gifts that are noted as 'sign gifts' have ceased. Gifts of healing, tongues, and future prophecies were given to the apostles and the early church for the purposes of the founding and validation of the church. These gifts gave support to the foundation and validation of the gospel and the ministers who proclaimed it. Today we have a sufficient, powerful, and proven word of God.

The scriptures point to two offices appointed for the leadership of the church: The Pastor/Elder and the Deacon. The following paragraph will briefly enunciate two different roles inside the first office of leadership (*Pastor/Elder*).

[A plurality of Elders is taught throughout the New Testament. Scripture repeatedly speaks of the elders (*plural*) of a local church (*singular*) (*Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14*). It is clear that God has set up authority structures for our benefit and His church is no different. We believe that the Scriptures teach the importance of having a plural form of leadership who would bear the ultimate responsibility for the direction of the church and for the shepherding of the flock. The heavy responsibilities and duties of Shepherding a flock of believers should not be left to one man. It is clear, both scripturally and practically, that the Sr. Pastor of a local church needs and in fact should desire support and accountability in the leading of the church. This is provided by equipped Elders who are selected from the congregation by the Pastor and the existing Elders. Having said that, we do recognize the importance, both scripturally and practically, of having a single leader among the leadership. The 'leader among equals' if you will. So, while a plurality of leadership will be employed, the Sr. Pastor's responsibilities of being the primary teacher, leader, and visionary will not be negated.]

The Pastor/Elder/Bishop (*These 3 words refer to the same office and yet represent a difference in functionality. This paragraph deals with the role of our Sr. Pastor.*) is set up as the leader or shepherd of the local church. The word 'Pastor' is synonymous with the word Shepherd. The pastor should better understand his role to be an "under-shepherd". This gives us the understanding that Jesus Christ is truly the head of the church and is the chief Shepherd (*1 Peter 5:1-4*). The Pastor is, however, set up as the one who must answer to the Lord for the human leadership of the church. The Bible says that if a man desires the office of a Bishop he desires a good

thing (*I Tim. 3:1*). Furthermore, the Bible also lays out specific requirements for any man who would be asked to fulfill that role for the church (*I Timothy 3:1-7*). I believe that it is vitally important that a man understand the importance of this call to the Pastorate. This role is not an open-audition! This is indeed the highest calling a man may receive. It is a monumental exercise in leadership. It is also a gigantic responsibility. The Pastor is to 'watch out for the souls of men' (*Heb. 13:17*). The Bible also teaches that this laborer is worthy of his hire and is in fact 'worthy of double honor'. Each assembly should take seriously the responsibility to provide physically for its Pastor.

The Pastoral duties are many but I will only mention the two that are primary. The Pastor must be given to the ministry of the Word and to prayer (*Acts 6:2-4*). Ephesians 4:11-12 tell us that the Pastor must be about equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry. He must be passionately delivering the Word to the people in order that they may be saved and disciplined into service for God! In *II Timothy 4:1-2* Paul urges young pastor Timothy to preach the Word and to do so endlessly and accurately. The power and necessity of prayer is also clearly demonstrated throughout the word. Apart from the faithful ministry of the word there is nothing more powerful and helpful that the Pastor can do than pray for his people and ministry. The Pastor is to be a man of prayer, declaring that he is dependent upon the power of God. The Pastor who does not pray is a Pastor who will be powerless and ineffective in ministry.

The lay Elders of the church are gifted with the ability to interpret, teach, and handle the word of God with accuracy and authority. They have also demonstrated maturity, discernment, and leadership in regards to the ministry of the church. The Elders will provide additional voices for the spiritual vision and direction of the church. They will additionally provide much needed accountability for the Sr. Pastor. They will minister in many functions but will primarily be involved with the ministries of equipping believers and preaching/teaching the Word of God.

The office of the deacon was instituted in *Acts 6* for the purpose of more efficiently fulfilling the great commission. The responsibilities were too great for the apostles to fulfill. They found it important to ordain deacons (*literally 'servants' or 'table waiters'*) to take care of certain ministry demands that kept the Apostles from focusing their attention on the main tasks of ministering the Word and spending time with God in prayer. The deacons were men chosen on the basis of their testimony and character. *Acts 6* tells us that they were to be men of 'good report' and strong in the faith. *I Timothy 3:8-13* goes on to lay out more specific requirements for a man that would fill this important office. Ultimately a deacon is to be a servant to God's people. He should be actively involved in seeking to lighten the load of the Pastor by actively serving and helping the people of the church. The primary difference between the elder and the deacon is not spirituality, but giftedness; that is, the elder must be 'apt to teach' (*I Tim 3:2*) and skillful in handling the Word, both for the encouragement of God's people and the refuting of those who speak against sound doctrine (*Titus 1:9*). Although the office of apostle has passed, the principle established in *Acts 6* is still applicable today; that is, deacons deal primarily (*though not exclusively*) with physical matters, enabling elders to "give [themselves] continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (*Acts 6:4*).

The church's polity or government should be rooted in scripture and should enable each church to fulfill God's purposes for its establishment. HBC exists under a biblical, congregational-style government (*Acts 6; I Tim. 3:1-11; Titus 1:1-9; Acts 14:23; 15:23*). We further believe in and appreciate the autonomy of the local church. I believe that each church is given the right and the responsibility to govern itself. Obviously this

would be under the shepherding influence of the leadership and ultimately under the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ. It is important to again note that Christ is the head of the church (*Eph. 5:23-24*). Each church is to follow His leadership through His given Word. Each church should seek to 'rightly divide the word of truth' and passionately follow the direction it gives. The Bible mandates that the Pastors/Elders/Deacons of the church lead in all business matters. Business decisions that require a Congregational quorum will be followed under the guidelines of this constitution.

God established two distinct ordinances to be a part of each local church. The two ordinances are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a commandment of God for those who have been redeemed. Psalms says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." In a way, God in the New Testament desires that the redeemed of the Lord show so! God is desirous that every genuine believer be baptized saying that he willingly identifies himself with Christ. Baptism is a picture or representation of what took place in the life of the individual at salvation. God never intended baptism to be included in or in any way a part of His act of redemption. Baptism is merely a step of obedience in commitment to Christ. Although baptism must not be elevated to be an ingredient for salvation, it also must not be devalued or taken lightly. The scriptures clearly mark it as an important step in the life of any new believer. HBC holds to the traditional method of immersion. I believe that an immersion baptism most accurately follows the true meaning of the word baptism and best represents the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that baptism is to be conducted in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to represent the Tri-une God.

Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper while with His disciples on the eve of His betrayal (*Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:17-20*). In these passages our Lord explains that this special time is to be observed as a symbolic remembrance of His sacrifice for us. I Corinthians 11 tells us that the unleavened bread is symbolic of His body that was broken for us. This passage further explains that the cup of wine is symbolic of His blood that was shed for the remission of our sins. I do not believe that the bread and wine literally becomes the body and blood of Christ as this is nowhere taught in scripture. It is always referred to symbolically. (*As a note I would like to say that we do not ascribe to using wine in our taking of communion today. The scriptures clearly command us to beware of alcoholic drinks...the wine that was used in Jesus' day was slightly fermented for the purpose of purification. I believe that it is fine to use non-alcoholic grape juice as the alcohol was not essential for the Lord's Supper to be authentic.*)

I believe that the scriptures teach us that both ordinances require sincerity and authenticity. Only a believer who has truly been born-again should be scripturally baptized. A church should be careful so as not to cheapen the ordinance by baptizing anyone who comes forward or prays a prayer. The Pastor should be wise in how he handles this. The scripture is explicitly clear about sincerity when it comes to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. I Corinthians 11 warns people to examine themselves that they eat and drink worthily. This elucidates that a person must be genuinely saved and living a life that is consistent with His salvation in order to participate in this ordinance. Once again, the Pastor should be wise in how he explains the ordinance and be faithful to expose his people to the truth of this passage. I want to be clear though to say that if the Pastor is clear, consistent, and discerning to these points I believe him to be free of responsibility in this matter. The context of I Corinthians 11 indicates that it is the believer's responsibility to examine himself/herself.

At the end of the Bible we find an amazing, intriguing, and challenging book called The Revelation. This book details a vision that the Apostle John received of future events. This is not the only book that contains

references to future things as the entire Bible points to the events that will come. We are often referred to the aspect that our souls will live somewhere forever. The eternal nature of our soul is an important point. The Bible is crystal clear in pointing to only two eternal destinations and it details how that every individual will live forever in either heaven or hell. The Great White Throne Judgment will be the final sealing of the fate of all unrepentant persons. All who have refused to believe in Jesus Christ with saving faith will face God's righteous judgment and will be cast into the lake of fire (*hell*). This will include the Devil and his angels (*Rev. 20:10-15*). The final judgments, although sure to come, are not first thing on the timeline given to us in the Bible.

I believe the Bible insinuates that the next thing to happen is the Rapture of the church. I Thessalonians 4:15-17 details for us a time in which Jesus Christ will return to call His children home to be with Him forever. This coming of Christ is described as imminent. In other words, Christ could come at any moment...He could come today! Those who know Christ are often urged to be ready and prepared for this day when Christ will return for His own (*Philippians 4:5; Titus 2:13*).

We hold to the pre-tribulational view of the rapture. In this view, the rapture will signify the beginning of a 7 year period called the Tribulation. The tribulational period will be most clearly consummated by a peace treaty that the Anti-Christ will make with Israel (*Dan 9:27*). The tribulation as described in Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 will be a period of great judgment upon the earth. It will be a period of great deception as there will be 3 ½ years of peace and prosperity immediately followed by 3 ½ years of devastation (*Dan 9*). This period will be dominated by Satan and his very powerful human servant known as the Anti-Christ. Although the rapture will have already taken place, there is an indication in scripture that people will have an opportunity to be saved during this time (*Matt 24:22*).

The Second Coming of Christ to the earth will be a dramatic scene. At the end of the tribulation period Jesus Christ will come in bodily form and will be riding a White horse. The scripture tells us that the believers already raptured or resurrected to heaven will return with Him! I can only imagine the majesty and power that will exude from our Lord as He returns to this earth on that White horse! Christ will confront the powers of darkness and will destroy all of His enemies by the very Word of His mouth! This confrontation is prophesied to take place in the valley called "Armageddon". After this immense battle is complete, our Lord will cast the Devil into a bottomless pit. The Beast and the false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire (*Rev 19:20*).

Having destroyed the forces and combatants of evil, our Lord will set up His Righteous Kingdom and will rule and reign here on this earth for 1,000 years (*Rev 20:1-6*). This is referred to as the Millennial Reign. Believers in Jesus Christ will have the distinct privilege of ruling with the Sovereign One during this period of complete peace on earth! After this period the Devil will be loosed by Christ and will be allowed to make one final sweep with his evil deception. Unfortunately we are told that even then some will be turned away and will be deceived. Satan will seek to make one final stand but will be utterly destroyed in the process. He will then be hurled into the lake of fire, never to be seen or heard from again! (*Rev 20:10*)

The "Word of God" the "King of Kings and Lord of Lord's" has won! Jesus Christ has completed his victory and has defeated evil forever! I believe that this is a precious promise that we must be quick to claim. Jesus Christ conquered death, hell, and sin for us through His precious gospel and will one day triumph over all that is evil in a battle for the ages. It will be a battle that will never really even be a battle. It will be a coronation of our God and His power! What a victorious message this is! What a mighty Savior is ours!

In summary, I have outlined the doctrines of our faith that start with a belief in a Higher Power, a

creator God who spoke this world into existence. This God did not leave us without a guide but wrote a Book called the Bible to reveal Himself and His plan to us. He tells us about His magnificent and perfect character. It is a character that is unlike ours in that He is so far superior to us it cannot be adequately put into words. This book tells us of His desire to receive glory and fellowship from His created ones, but it continues on to tell us how that fellowship was ruined by sin. We have learned that mankind rebelled against God's law of which we are participants. The Bible continues, though, to tell us of the glorious gospel that makes a way for sinners like us to be declared righteous by God.

God sent Himself to us in the form of His Son Jesus Christ who was the sinless substitute for us. He literally exhausted the wrath of God that you and I deserve. God takes great pains to explain to us the way in which we might receive this free gift of salvation as God is 'not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance'. Because of this we have the opportunity to receive eternal life in heaven and to enjoy an abundant life here on earth! God's Word goes on to tell us of another gift that He has planned to give to those who would accept His Son. It is the gift of the church!

We have seen that God desires that His children be engrossed in worship and service to Him along with other believers in a local assembly. God established His church in order to further His message of salvation around the world and to move His people towards maturity in the Spirit. The New Testament maps out the characteristics of a healthy, vibrant, Christ-centered, and God-honoring church. God in His Word then speaks to us in very powerful terms about our life in Him. He is passionate that His people represent Him here on this earth.

The Bible is filled with teachings that are sufficient to the day in which we live! God concludes with an intriguing summary of what we are to expect in future days. In this I realize that His people are on the winning side! Satan and all that His evil hand has wrought will one day bow at the power of Jesus Christ! How awesome is this! God tells us that this life is but a vapor and that eternity awaits us. He promises a home in heaven to those who accept His offer to redeem. He also promises judgment for those who reject this offer of grace. In the end, each man and woman is presented with a choice. Life on earth began with God and it will be brought to an end by God.

He is the Alpha and the Omega and His will is all that matters. What a travesty it is that many will not submit themselves to this Wonderful God of the Universe. Many have and will refuse His authority and will seek their own way. Sadly these poor souls will face the judgment that lies at the end of their chosen path of pride. Some, however, will bow their knee to the Savior and will humbly submit to Him and His will. O What wonderful days await those who have been chosen by God to dwell with Him for all eternity! What joy is in store for those who acknowledge that Jesus Christ is indeed the way, the truth, and the life! These rich souls are in awe of the fact that a holy God would stoop to love a sin-filled person.

This is indeed what makes God's grace so amazing!

**Amen**