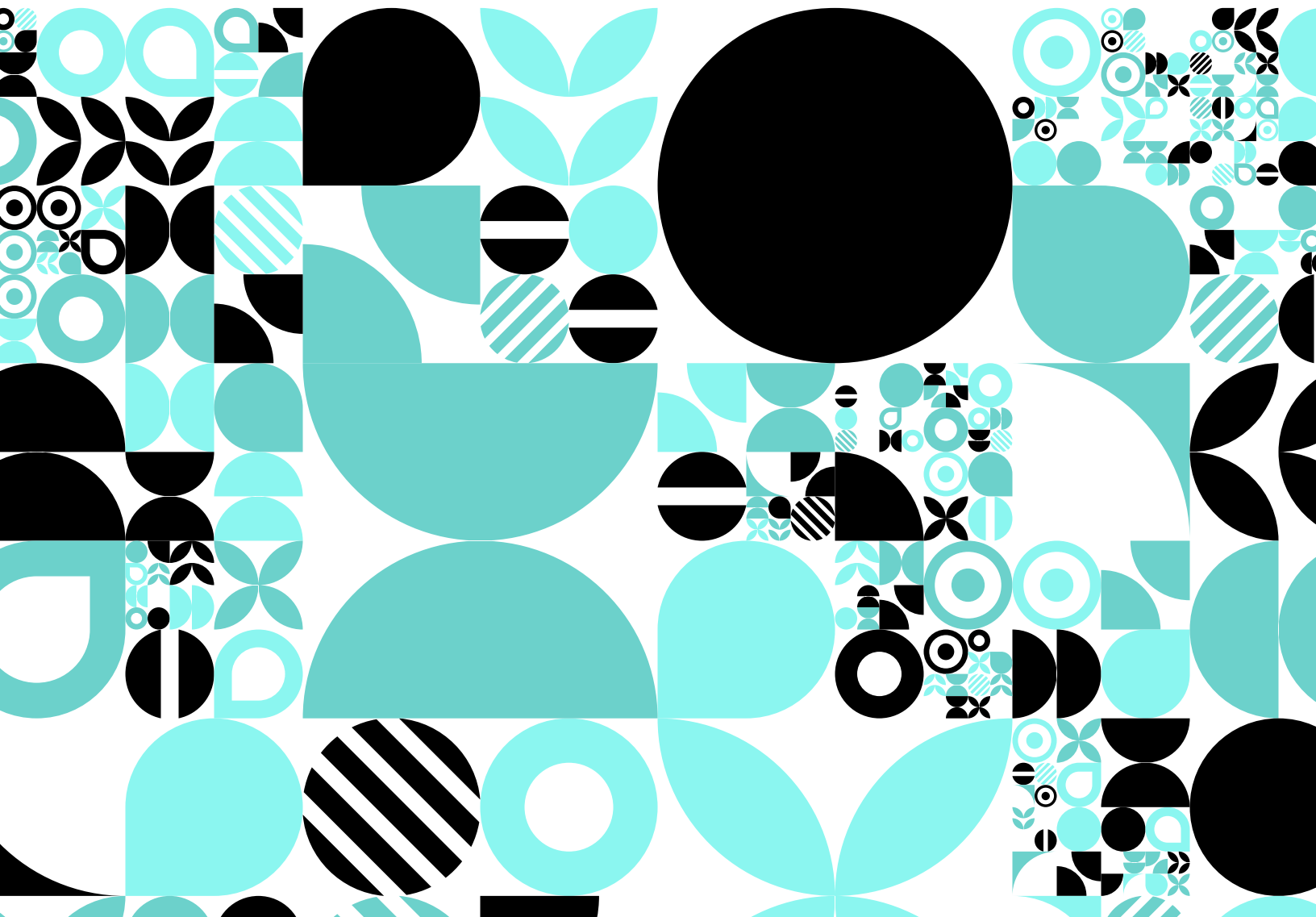


# ONE COMMUNITY CHURCH

## POSITION PAPERS



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# Position Papers

## **What is a Position Paper?**

**Position Papers provide an analysis of topics and issues and seek to provide Biblical reasons for why we do what we do as a church community. Not only do these papers show the biblical basing for our structure as a church, but they also show the way we operate in our daily lives.**

**We recognize that these are debated issues and it is our hope that as you read through our convictions about these issues, you will better understand our heart behind why we do what we do and believe what we believe.**

# Role of the Elder in the Church

## The Meaning of Elder

The New Testament uses three key terms that all point to the same office & role of the elder.

Presbuteros = elder

Episkopos = overseer, bishop

Poimen = pastor

Essentially, they represent different qualities & roles of the position. "Elder" represents spiritual maturity & wisdom. "Pastor" is a shepherding term referring to how they care for people. "Bishop" or "Overseer" refers to the oversight or rulership that comes with the office.

## The Office of Elder

- The New Testament only refers to the office of pastor one time (Ephesians 4:11)
- The New Testament firmly established the office of pastor in Ephesians 4:11. Anytime the terms elder, overseer, or bishop occurred, it was referring to the same office.
- Elders are encouraged in the "pastoral" duties of overseeing & shepherding (Acts 20:28)
- Elders are exhorted to "shepherd" the flock of God that is in their charge, which is role of pastor (1 Peter 5:1-2)
- This suggests that the chief role of the pastor is to feed the flock through teaching, which is a primary role of the elders. Therefore, the NT seems to indicate that "pastor" is another name for "elder". An elder is a pastor, and the pastor is an elder (Titus 1:9).
- The consistent pattern throughout the NT is that each local body of believers is shepherded by a plurality of elders. In other words, nowhere in scripture do we find one local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by a single pastor. (Titus 1:5; James 5:14; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17)

## Qualifications of an Elder

- The character & effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That's why scripture stresses the importance of qualified church leadership & delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position.
- An imperative qualification of an elder is to be above reproach (not perfect), for it's the bedrock for the rest of the qualifications to stand on. In other words, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. (1 Tim. 3:2-7 & Titus 1:6-8)
- An elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, social life, business life, & his spiritual life. In this way, he is to be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call the congregation to follow his example (Phil. 3:17).
- The office of elder is limited to men only (1 Tim 2:11-12).

## Responsibilities of Elders toward the Church

- Elders the Church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2)
- Teach & preach the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9)
- Protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31)
- Exhort & admonish believers in sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:13-17; Titus 1:9).
- Visit the sick (James 5:14; Acts 6:4).
- Judge doctrinal issues (Acts 15:6)

In summary, the elders shepherd, oversee, lead, & care for the local church for they will give an account to God on how they served in the position (Heb. 13:17).

# Role of the Elder in the Church (Cont.)

## Responsibilities of the Church toward Elders

- While elders have weighty responsibilities toward the church family, likewise, the church family has the obligation to respond willingly & joyfully to the leaders God has set in place (Heb. 13:17).
- Like leaders in any context, church elders will sometimes be exposed to criticism & opposition. They need to be afforded honor & protected from unjust attack (1 Tim. 5:17-19).
- Apart from the church's general obligation to respond willingly to the elders' leadership. Also, the church has a responsibility to provide materially for those who labor in the ministry of the word. Paul's instruction to give a "double honor" means rewarding good service well, recognizing that the work, if done diligently, is true labor & worthy of honorable treatment (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:1-14).
- The church has an obligation to pray for its leaders (Heb. 13:18; 1 Thess. 5:25; Col. 4:3-4).

## Biblical Roles of Deacons

### The Meaning of Deacon

The New Testament uses three primary words to refer to deacons:

Diakonos = servant

Diakonia = service

Diakones = serve

Each of these words is broad in their usage & can refer to a large variety of activities which supplies the need of others. This includes the serving of food (John 12:2; Luke 10:40, 17:8), spiritual service to God (Acts 20:19), & sacrificial giving (2 Cor. 8:3-4). The responsibility of service is expected of all Christians (Eph. 4:12).

### The Office of Deacon

- It is clear that deacons were an official office in the church. They were recognized with the official overseers in Paul's greeting to the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:1).
- The clearest reference to deacons as an official office of the church is 1 Tim. 3:8. Paul uses the word "likewise" to introduce his argument that deacons in the church of Ephesus must be as spiritually qualified as elders. Since the role of the elder is specially designated as an office in vs. 1, the role of the deacon must be an office.
- If the leaders appointed to serve the neglected widows in Acts 6:1-6 were the first deacons in the NT, then this would again affirm the official nature of the function since they were formally appointed to their service responsibilities.
- The term "diakonos" has no feminine form. the same form of the word is both masculine & feminine. Thus, to refer to women who serve, Paul needed to identify them specifically. He does this through the use of "gunaikos" – women (1 Tim. 3:11).
- According to Paul in 1 Tim. 3:11, women can serve in the office of deacons (deaconess) even though no such provision is made for them to serve as elders. Phoebe seems to have been an official deaconess in the church of Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1).

# Biblical Roles of Deacons (Cont.)

- The absence of any pronoun to refer to the women in 1 Tim. 3:11 ("their" women) indicates Paul was not thinking of wives as deacons. Since, he made no reference to wives as elders, it would be highly unlikely he would do so with regard to deacons

## Qualifications of Deacons

- It is crucial to note that deacons are to be equally qualified with the elders in terms of personal character & spiritual life since both elders & deacons have similar personal & spiritual requirements given to them such as dignity, not addicted to wine, not lovers of money, able to manage their own families, maintain moral purity, & being blameless in lifestyle (1 Tim. 3:1-13).
- The only substantial distinction between elders & deacons is that the elder must be able to teach while there is no such requirement made of the deacons (1 Tim. 3:2).

## Role of the Deacons

- The role of the deacons is to assist the elders by overseeing the application of God's word, as taught by the elders to the congregation through the ministries of the church. This explains why the term for deacons is broadly applied in scripture. They function in light of the needs of the people. That is, whatever ministry the church needs to effectively care for the flock & accomplish the ministries of the church, the deacons oversee. They assure proper application & implementation of God's truth in the life of the congregation. (A church where no one walks alone)

- The role of the deacons reflects the ultimate in spiritual greatness since Jesus said the true measure of greatness is in one being the greatest servant of all. It is this spirit that should mark the attitude of the deacon (Matt. 20:26-28).
- The deacon, as chief servant, organizationally & administratively coordinates the service of the members of the congregation by assuring the effective operation of the various programs in which they are serving. This is why the term is also translated administration (1 Cor. 12:5; 2 Cor. 9:12)

## The Application of the Role of Deacons

- Each ministry will be overseen by a team of elders who will be assigned deacons to oversee the various departments & care groups under each ministry area.
- Each department will be assigned two deacons to oversee the administration of the programs of that department. One deacon will head the department while the second deacon will serve as their assistant.
- Each ministry area will have deacons assigned to a group of church families in their geographical vicinity. The deacons will minister to the needs of the families under his care.

# Spiritual Authority & Accountability

## The Definition

Spiritual authority & accountability refers to the mutual & hierarchical responsibility of Christians to lovingly stimulate one another to faithful conformity to the rule of God in & through their lives so that He is glorified, & His kingdom is promoted in the world.

## The Seriousness of Biblical Authority & Accountability

- Failure to obey God leads to universal sin & death (Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 5:12).
- Priests in Israel were killed for failing to worship God under proper authority (Lev. 10:1-2).
- Moses' brothers & sister were judged with leprosy because they spoke evil against the representative of God's authority (Num. 12).
- Collective groups were destroyed for rebelling against the representative of God's authority (Num. 16).
- God consigns physical death for rebellion against His authority in the church (1 Cor. 5:5; 11:28-30).
- God expects people to respect His ordained authorities & not resort to unbiblical means to accomplish biblical goals (1 Sam. 24:4-6; 26:9, 11).

## The Perspective

- Believers are to see themselves as members of one another (Rom. 12:5).
- Believers are to be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:20).
- Believers are to honor one another (Rom. 12:10; 1 Tim. 5:1-2).
- Believers are to be of the same mind with one another (Rom. 5:5).
- Believers are to accept one another (Rom. 15:7).
- Believers are to admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
- Believers are to greet one another (Rom. 16: 3-6; 16)
- Believers are to serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
- Believers are to bear with one another (Eph. 4:2)
- Believers are to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)
- Believers are to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11)
- Believers are to correct one another (1 Thess. 5:11)

## The Sphere of Biblical Authority

- Authority & Accountability in the Trinity
  - All members in the trinity are equally God yet there is a line of authority (Phil. 2:5-11)
  - The Son willingly submitted himself to the authority of the Father (John 10:18; Luke 22:42; Heb. 4:2-9)
  - The Spirit submits himself to the authority of the Son (John 14:16-17; 16:5-15)
  - The Father holds the Son accountable for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom 3:25; 4:25; 8:3)
- Authority & Accountability in the Angelic Realms
  - Angels (good & bad) function under a chain of command (Eph 13:10; 6:12)
  - Good angels are not to disregard the position of fallen angels (2 Peter 2:10-11; Jude 1:9)
- Authority & Accountability of the Family
  - Wives are to submit themselves to the authority of their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Titus 2:4-5)
  - Husbands are accountable for the welfare of their wives (Eph. 5:23-29; Peter 3:5)
  - Children are to submit themselves to the authority of parents (Eph. 6:1-2)
  - Husbands & wives are to mutually submit themselves to one another (1 Cor. 7:1-5)
- Authority & Accountability in the Church
  - Believers are mutually responsible to one another (Phil. 2:3-4)
  - Believers are to obey church leadership (Heb. 13:17)
  - Deacons are to obey elders (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13)
  - Elders are to follow their Senior Pastor's leadership
  - The pastor-teachers oversees the orderly operation of the church (Titus 1:5)

# Spiritual Authority & Accountability (Cont.)

## The Sphere of Biblical Authority (Cont.)

- The pastor-teacher oversees the appointment of the church (Titus 1:5)
- The pastor-teacher oversees the financial welfare of the elders (1 Tim 5:17-18)
- The pastor-teacher oversees the discipline of the elders (1 Tim. 2:2) (a church where no one walks alone)
- The pastor-teacher oversees the discipleship of the elders (2 Tim. 5:19-20)
- The pastor-teacher provides leadership in decision making (Acts 15:13-22)
- The pastor is to follow the collective wisdom of the elders (1 Tim. 4:14)
- The pastor is accountable for the welfare of the elders (1 Tim. 5:17-20)
- The congregation is accountable for pastoral care (Gal. 6:6)
- Authority & Accountability in Society
  - Employees are to obey their employers (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9-10; Eph. 6:5-7)
  - Christians are to submit themselves to the authority of government (Rom. 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14)
  - Government is to hold lawbreakers accountable for punishment (Rom. 13:2)
  - Government is to hold law abiders accountable for reward (Rom. 13:3)

## The Goal of Biblical Authority & Accountability

- To establish & reflect the rule of God on Earth through the church (Eph. 1:18-23; 3-10)
- To assure that church order is maintained (1 Cor. 6:1-11; Titus 1:5)
- To encourage a biblical lifestyle (1 Cor. 5:6-7)
- To assure the effective execution of the ministry of the church through the use of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-16)
- To promote a strong sense of family within the church (Eph. 5:22-6:3)
- to promote a context for responsible discipleship to occur (2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 2:3-5)

## The Maintaining of Biblical Authority & Accountability

- By providing benefits for those who are faithful & responsible (1 Tim. 3:13; 5:9-10, 17)
- By withholding benefits from those who are unfaithful & irresponsible (2 Thess 3:10)
- By providing a relational context for accountability for all members (Ex. 18:3-27; Det. 1:12-18)
- By insisting the biblical process of church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-11)

### The Facts

- 1 Cor. 11:3
- Eph 6:1-3)

### The Issues

- Isaiah 14: 12-14
- Eph 6:10-12
- Matt 4:1-12

### The Illustration

- 1 Cor. 12



# The Christian & Divine Healing

## Healing and the Atonement (Isaiah 53:4-6)

- The earthly ministry of Christ fulfills the prophesy of Isaiah 53:4 through His identification with our life sufferings regarding the Messiah's healing ministry. (Matt 8:17)
- In Isaiah 53:5, there is a movement from the physical to the spiritual. 1 Peter 2:24 confirms the fact that the cross' spiritual healing was provided by Christ.
- However, since the Bible teaches that Christ still identifies with our sufferings, healing is available although not necessarily guaranteed in this life. The criteria are whether the healing will bring God the greatest good and glory in expressing His kingdom rule. (Note: Healing and even death may be God's means of receiving the greatest glory.)

## The Gift of Healing (The Biblical Gift)

### Definition:

The gift was the miraculously healing of diseases in order to confirm the message and the messenger (John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4).

### Recipient:

The groups given this gift were the Apostles (Luke 9:1-2), the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1-9) and a few associates of the Apostles.

- Healing was instantaneous (Mark 1:42; Acts 3:2-8).
- Healing was complete (Matt. 14:36; Acts 9:34).
- Healing was of constitutional and organic illnesses (Mark 1:40).
- Healing includes the ability to raise the dead (Mark 5:39-43; Acts 9:40).
- Healing included everyone (Luke 4:40; Acts 5:12-Everyone who came to be healed was healed.

## Longevity: Does the Gift have continuity?

- Paul could not always use the gift (Phil. 2:25-27; 2 Tim 4:20).
- Paul advocated Timothy to use medicine for his stomach ailment

## The Contemporary Use of the Gift (1 Tim. 5:23)

- Primarily to relieve illness
- Generally unverifiable
- Does not include everyone
- Does not include raising the dead
- Does not keep the healer himself from getting sick

## Healing and the Will of God

- Sometimes it is God's will to directly cause illness (Ex. 4:11).
- Sometimes it is God's will to indirectly allow illness for His glory (Job 1; 2 Cor. 12:9; John 9:1-4).
- Sometimes it is God's will to heal (Phil. 2:25-27).
- Sometimes it is not God's will to heal (2 Cor. 12:7-9).
- Sometimes God prefers the death of His children (Psalm 116:15).

## Practical Questions in Divine Healing

- Why do Christians get sick?
  - Because God's sovereignty allows them to be sick (Ex 4:11).
  - Because of the Devil's oppression (Job 1; Luke 13:11-13, 2 Cor 12:27).
  - Because unaddressed sin in their life (Deut 28:20-22; 1 Cor 11:27-30; James 5:15).
- Do spiritual Christians get sick?
  - Epaphroditus was a devoted servant to the Lord and yet was allowed to get sick (Phil 2:25-30).
  - Job was perfect before the Lord and was allowed to get sick (Job 1).
  - Paul was a spiritual man and was allowed to get sick (1 Cor 12:7-9).

# The Christian & Divine Healing (Cont.)

## Practical Questions in Divine Healing Cont.

- What should sick Christians do today?
  - Recognize God does heal and wants to heal his children.
  - Seek divine healing, not divine healers.
  - Call on spiritual Christians and leaders to intercede in unity to God on your behalf (The church is God's present agency for healing).
  - Trust God unwaveringly for divine healing.
  - Confess and forsake any known sin in one's life.
  - Submit to God's will as you pursue your desire for healing.
- How do you explain the contemporary healings?
  - God may miraculously heal some people in spite of the methods used, which could give the impression that the healer had the gift.
  - Some who claim to be healed discover that the healing was not permanent.
  - Some supposed cures are purely fraud.
  - Some are psychological healing.
- Should Christians go to physicians?
  - God healed King Hezekiah from death through the use of medications (Isaiah 38).
  - Jesus acknowledged that sick people need a physician (Matt. 9:12).
  - Paul exhorted Timothy to take medication (wine) for a stomach illness (1 Tim. 5:23).
  - One of Christ's disciples was a medical doctor (Col. 4:14).
  - The anointing of oil in James 5:14 probably refers to a medical usage.
- What is the relationship between faith, prayer and God's healing?
  - Faith and prayer are the means of personally tapping in on God's promises and power (James 1:5-8; 5:13-18).
  - Faith and prayer can affect change in the plans of God without altering His ultimate purposes (Num. 14:11-20).
  - Faith and prayer must always be subject to the highest good for the glory of God.

# Baptism in the Holy Spirit & Speaking in Tongues

9

## The Definition

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit may be properly defined as the activity of God whereby through His Spirit He brings the believer at salvation into a relationship with Christ & simultaneously into a relationship with the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13)

## The Issue

Is there a post-salvation baptism by the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues for the purpose of providing the believer with a deeper spiritual power? The answer is no.

## The Gifts of Tongues

- Tongues are the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-8, 10:46, 11:17)
- Tongues are unknown to the speaker (1 Cor. 14:2, 4, 13-14).
  - The Greek term used for tongues in the New Testament means another language.
  - In Acts 2:6, tongues were identifiable languages, as is also the case in Acts 10:44-47, 11:17.
- Tongues were given as a sign to the nations (1 Cor. 14:21 cf. Isaiah 28:11-12; 1 Cor. 1:22).
  - Believers walk by faith, not by signs (1 Cor. 1:22).
  - Tongues authenticated the message of salvation in Christ to the Jews (Acts 2, 10, 18-19).
- Tongues are not proof of spirituality.
  - Tongues were most of all prevalent in the Corinthian church, a carnal church (1 Cor. 1:7, 3:1-4).
  - The command to be filled with the Spirit does not include tongues (Eph. 5:18-20)
- Tongues are not for every Believer.
  - Because not all believers speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:19, 29-30).
  - Because it is among the least important gifts (1 Cor. 12:28).
- Because it is a less profitable gift (1 Cor. 14:19, 39).
  - If Mark 16:17 teaches all believers must speak in tongues, then all believers could be commanded to complete the test which included drinking poison without being harmed.
- Tongues are distributed sovereignly by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

- Tongues are not for self-edification.
- Tongues, like all other gifts, are for the common good of the Church (1 Cor. 12:7).
- Tongues are to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:26).
- Tongues are to evangelize the unsaved (1 Cor. 14:21-22).
- Tongues were to operate along these guidelines (1 Cor. 14).
  - No more than three people could speak at a service & only one at a time (v. 27).
  - Tongues could not be spoken without an interpreter (v. 27-28).
  - Tongues had to operate in an orderly fashion (v. 33).
  - Women could not use the gift in a service (v. 34).
- Why are tongues used today?
  - Tongues can be genuine if they meet biblical criteria.
  - Tongues can be a learned behavior.
- Why are tongues so popular?
  - Tongues are often a result of spiritual hunger.
  - Tongues often express a need for spiritual expression.
  - Tongues are also a reaction to the cold & impersonalized society, as well as lifeless American Christianity.
  - Tongues are often viewed as a means to quick spirituality.

## The Conclusion

- There is no post-salvation spiritual baptism.
- There is the ongoing "filling" ministry of the Spirit's power.
- Tongues are not a sign of spiritual power.
- Believers are not to feel less spiritual because they have not had a charismatic experience.
- Tongues are to be used in decency and in order to edify the Church, & to be followed by interpretation.
- Although many Christians do not share these views on tongues, they are our brothers & sisters in Christ worthy of love & respect regardless of their stance.

# Why Doesn't OCC Do Alter Calls?

(Adapted from Geoff Ashley – The Village Church)

*Summary: While One does offer a time for members and attendees to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit after a church service, we do not call it an altar call due to theological confusion surrounding the practice.*

## **The Origin of Alter Calls**

The practice of the altar call is relatively new in Christian history. Though it existed in a limited scope within the 1700s, it was within the 19th century 2nd Great Awakening that the activity began to flourish. Charles G. Finney, a prominent evangelist of the American revivals, was a leading proponent of altar calls. For Finney, the practice served as one of a number of coercive techniques used to influence the will of man to decisively respond to the gospel.

To understand Finney's use of the altar call, we must consider his underlying theological convictions. According to Finney's anthropology, 'man existed in a state of moral neutrality even after Genesis 3. Therefore, man's will is not radically and naturally predisposed to sin, but rather can be persuaded toward either righteousness or sin. While he emphasized that all men did in fact sin, he maintained that they were neither depraved by nature nor unable to overcome this tendency upon their own volition.

In light of man's neutrality, Finney viewed his job as a preacher as employing various means to overcoming obstacles and hindrances to belief. For Finney it was only a matter of breaking through to the neutral nature of man in order to bring one to salvation. With the proper techniques and methods, the preacher could practically produce revival according to Finney. The altar call served as one of these coercive techniques.

## **The Problem**

Historic Christian orthodoxy has disagreed with Finney's anthropological convictions. Put simply, man is not morally neutral. He is radically and terribly sinful, and this depravity extends universally through his heart, mind, and will. Our problem is not merely environmental, but intrinsic.

# Why Doesn't OCC Do Alter Calls? (Cont.)

## The Problem (Cont.)

To overcome this inherent wickedness, we need something much more radical than influential techniques. Only the Spirit working through the Word can effectually break mans' natural resistance to God and His gospel.

This gospel is not "reasonable," but is rather perceived as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18–31) by the unconverted mind (1 Corinthians 2:14). Therefore no amount of passion, proficiency, or preparation by the preacher can decisively overcome mans' hardened heart. The duty of the preacher is not to influence and coerce a neutral will, but rather to clearly articulate the gospel message as a means through which the Spirit will work to grant new life.

In addition to the altar call's misleading theological foundation, it is sometimes viewed as a means of assurance of salvation and a public profession of faith. However, the biblical ground for assurance is not that one has once stood in church, but rather that one is currently loving, trusting, and obeying Christ. Furthermore, the biblically-prescribed public profession of faith is not walking down an aisle, but being immersed in the baptismal waters.

## The Solution

Our hope each week is that the Holy Spirit would prompt our people to respond to the preached word. For many of us, our response will consist of singing, confessing, repenting, standing, sitting, contemplating, or some combination of the above.

For some, the desire to respond will lead to a longing to come forward and talk to one of the men and women who are available for prayer and counsel. Whether an unbeliever who wants to know more, a new Christian facing some hardship, or a more mature believer who simply needs prayer or counsel, we desire to minister to all who are convicted by the Spirit's ministry.

# Buying, Selling, & Solicitation in the Church

## The Issue

Is it biblically legitimate for the church to raise money for programs and ministries beyond just offering? If so, to what extent? How do we handle people using church relationships to develop their own business?

## The Problem

The Bible does not directly address the issue in precept, thus we must draw from attendants to arrive at a solution.

## The Principles

- The ministry of the church is to be supported by the offerings of God's people in response to His grace in their lives (1 Cor. 6:1-2; Malachi 3:8-10).
- God expects His children to invest and multiply the resources He provides for the kingdom (Matt. 25:14-30).
- God allows for the selling of personal goods and the use of profits for charitable purposes. In fact, He even rewards such activity (Luke 12:33).
- God condemns the unjust use of buying and selling in the church. Unjust is measured by the fact that the temple had become a place of business rather than a place of worship and ministry. In other words, the temple served as a cover for profiteering (James 2:13-16; Luke 19:46).
- Christians must be careful to be above board in every area of life. Our integrity must be beyond question.
- Leaders in the church must then be careful to not use relationships developed in the church as means of making money or fundraising (James 2:13-16).

## The Proposal

Buying and selling from the membership should be limited to materials and activities they directly benefit from and/or participate in (i.e. books, cds, dvds, or events hosted by the church).

## External Funding

The fundraising at One can be more relaxed because the community nature of external ministry. However, all fundraising activity on and off the church site must be approved by the ministry leader and the Lead Pastor to assure that it passes the credibility test.

- Is the activity replacing what should be provided by the giving body (the church budget)?
- Will this fundraising activity, as legitimate as it may be, cause a negative reflection to be cast upon the ministry?



# Buying, Selling, & Solicitation in the Church (Cont.)

## Buying and Selling in the Church

### Overall Statement

We will follow the biblical principle of grace giving that's taught in our Partnership Class. Buying and selling should never replace that previously stated grace giving as outlined in the first section of this document.

...a church where no one walks alone

### Practice of Buying and Selling as Allowed by One

In light of the fact that buying and selling in the local church is normal, the following guidelines will govern the church practice of buying and selling.

Church Worship (internal)

Buying and selling directly related to the accepted worship of our church will be allowable (i.e. tapes and book sales, publications, etc.)

### Church ministries, departments and leadership teams

Must be in line with the overall goals and objectives of the church, department, and leadership teams.

Must not have negative connotations within the church or within the community.

Must have approval of the ministry leaders and the Lead Pastor.

### Outside the Church (external)

Generally, it is assumed that outside activities will be conducted off site.

No leader is to use relationships built at the church to their personal advantage for fundraising, personal profiteering, or building their personal business unless they have the expressed written approval of the elders at One.

### Strategy for Fundraising

Goal: To develop a comprehensive plan for raising funds to support the vision of One as it seeks to impact the Collin County community.

# Church Discipline: When Should it Be Used?

## Scenario

Sheryl is a 30 year-old single woman who is now four months pregnant. Sheryl and her boyfriend Ricky have been attending your church for the past 15 years. Both have been in fellowship for the past 8 years. Sheryl accepted Christ as her Savior at the age of 13 and has been attending church ever since. She teaches Sunday school and currently sings in the choir.

She is very well respected and liked in the community. Ricky serves in the Youth ministry. He is a very articulate and gifted young man. He and Sheryl have been dating for a year and a half. They have approached you and the elder board to share with you the problem. They are both repentant and have asked God to forgive them. They have also asked for each other's forgiveness. They now approach the elders asking for their forgiveness. They are willing to submit to the guidance of the elders.

## Questions to Ponder

1. When is church discipline (removal from the fellowship of the saints) necessary?
2. What would be your response to Ricky and Sheryl's situation?
3. What would be your consistent, systematic, and biblical defense of your position?
4. How will you handle Sheryl's visibility in the community?
5. Is it more important to protect the church's reputation or demonstrate the grace of God in a sinful situation?
6. Should both parties have to step down from ministry? Why or why not? Should they be asked to leave the fellowship for a while? Why or why not?
7. How does this sin differ from the sin of willful and unrepentant pride and arrogance often demonstrated by many of us leaders?
8. What proactive steps should be taken to prevent such activities in the future?



# Divorce & Remarriage

## **God never prefers divorce.**

- God meant for there to be one man and one woman for life (Matt. 19:6–8; Rom. 7:1–4).
- God directly states he hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).
- God pronounces punishment on those who illegitimately get divorced (Malachi 2:10–16).
- Since marriage is a divine covenant, it should not be dissolved without divine permission (Malachi 2:13–14; Matt. 19:6).

## **God permits divorce for certain limited reasons.**

- God allowed Moses to write a bill of divorce (Deut. 24:1–4)
- People cannot get a divorce for just any reason (Matt. 19:3–6).
- Immorality is the only grounds given by Jesus as acceptable for divorce (Matt. 19:9). Immorality includes a broad list of sexual sins (Lev. 18:3–29).
- Abandonment is given by Paul as grounds for not being bound by the marriage vow (I Cor. 7:15).
- God allows believers who do not have a biblical ground for divorce to separate if living together becomes impossible; but they cannot marry another because they are still married to each other before God (I Cor. 7:10–11).
- A person who divorces illegitimately is still married in God's sight because to remarry is to commit adultery (Matt. 19:9), and cause the other mate to do the same (Matt. 5:31–32)

## **Legitimate divorce equals the right to remarry.**

- Remarriage is allowed if there was a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1–4).
- Jesus recognized that divorced people would be placed in the posture of remarriage (Matt. 5:31–32).
- God recognized marriage relationships outside of His ideal (II Sam. 12:24–25).
- If abandoned persons cannot remarry, they are still under the bondage of the previous relationship (I Cor. 7:15)
- God allows for remarriage in the case of death (Rom. 7:1–3). Death can be either physical or spiritual (covenantal). When the church excommunicates a professing believer then they can be treated like an unbeliever (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:5; I Cor. 7:39; I Tim. 5:8) who is then operating in the realm of spiritual death.

# Divorce & Remarriage (Cont.)

## Divorce & Reconciliation

The offended party has three options when they have biblically justified grounds for divorce.

- The first option is to promote forgiveness and reconciliation between the partners based on repentance and restoration (Ex. 21:28–31; Lev. 6:1–7; Matt. 18:33–35).
- The second option is to divorce the covenantally dead mate (Matt. 1:19). This may involve forgiving the sin without necessarily alleviating the consequences (II Sam. 12:13–14).
- The third option is to live with the covenantally dead mate who wishes to stay in the relationship (I Cor. 7:12–13).

## The Church & Divorce

- God established courts to make judicial judgment among His people (Deut. 17:8–10).
- Priest acted as God's judges in matters of marital disputes (Num. 5:11–31).
- The church is to act as God's duly appointed agency to representatively mediate judgements between His people (I Cor. 6:1–7).
- The church can determine the covenantally life and death status of its members (Matt. 18:15–20; I Cor. 5:5), which determines the legitimacy of the divorce and remarriage.

## The Posture of One

- Divorce should be discouraged at all costs since it is not God's ideal.
- Reconciliation should be encouraged at all costs since it is God's ideal.
- Divorces and/or remarriages based on one's unfaithfulness, desertion, declaration or spiritual death should be recognized by the church through the granting of a certificate of divorce.
- Divorce and remarriage for any other reason should be viewed as sin and then disciplined as such in accordance with the church's procedures.
- Reconciliation and restoration of improperly divorced persons must also occur when the sin has been made, because the church's job is to act as God's healing agent.
- A mate who desires to separate for a period of time should do so under the approval, guidance and direction of the church with the goal of reconciliation.

# Suicide

## The Issue

Historically the Catholic Church erroneously considered suicide a mortal sin—a sin that led to eternal condemnation. Others falsely believe suicide is “the unpardonable sin” that cannot be forgiven (Mark 3:29). These unfounded beliefs merely compound the agony and sadness of those left to mourn the loss of a family member or friend who has committed suicide. Both views of suicide place blame on the person who dies by suicide. Moreover, they only focus on the spiritual dimension, not the mental, physical, and relational contributors to suicide.

## Suicide is a Sin

Suicide is a sin against God. The Bible equates suicide to murder. When someone kills themselves, it is “self-murder.” Because God is the Creator and giver of all life (Rev. 4:11), it is He alone who should determine its end (Job 14:5, Psalm 31:15). Suicide, the taking of one’s own life, is ungodly because it rejects God’s gift of life. No man or woman should presume to take God’s authority upon themselves to end his or her own life.

## Suicide is Not the Unpardonable Sin

Though a believer in a moment of weakness may ultimately succumb to this temptation, their sin against their body and their sin against God is still covered by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). It is not the “unforgivable sin” (Mark 3:29; Matt. 12:31–32), nor is it any worse than another sin. God sees all sin the same way and there is no sin more powerful than the blood of Christ (Rev 1:5, 1 John 2:2). The “unpardonable sin” is not putting faith in Christ.

Once a Believer puts their trust in Christ all their sins are forgiven; past, present, and future (1 John 2:1, 1 John 1:9). Those who believe in Christ are guaranteed eternal life (1 John 5:13). Suicide is not what determines whether a person gains entrance into heaven.

According to the Bible, Christians can know beyond any doubt that they possess eternal life (1 John 5:13). Nothing can separate a Christian from God’s love (Rom. 8:38–39). No “created thing” can separate a Christian from God’s love. Since a Christian who commits suicide is a “created thing” not even suicide can separate a Christian from God’s love.

# Suicide (Cont.)

## The Causes of Suicide

Many factors lead to suicide. A person who attempts to take their own life may be suffering physically, mentally, or emotionally. Suicide is often the result of untreated depression, pain, or physical suffering. Anyone can struggle with despair and entertain suicidal thoughts.

## Mental Illness

- Clinical depression is classified as a mental illness. Because anxiety and stress significantly increase the risk of suicide, depression by far is the most common condition associated with suicide. Yet it is often undiagnosed or untreated.

## Spiritual Aspects

- The Scriptures are clear, those who are unsaved can be demon-possessed (Matthew 5:5) and Christians can be tormented by demons (Job 1:6-12). In both cases, a person can be led toward self-destructive behaviors. However, we have confidence in the power of Jesus over the enemy. Those under spiritual attack can overcome through prayer and faith in Christ (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29).

## Physical Aspects

- Studies show that clinical depression can be the result of genetic traits and brain chemistry which can be treated with medication. Therefore, someone who succumbs to depression by committing suicide may be a victim of this disease rather than a person seeking to harm themselves for sinful reasons.

## Relational Aspects

- Because clinical depression can be the result of early childhood exposure to stress, suicide may be the consequence of a person who does not have the coping mechanisms to deal with stress, emotional pain, relational crisis, bullying, loneliness, health issues, and feelings of hopelessness and despair. Some people expressing suicidal tendencies can be best helped with counseling.

# Suicide (Cont.)

## The Signs of Suicide

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to end their lives, such as searching online for methods
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Aggression
- Fatigue
- Moodiness
- Helpless feelings
- Feeling like they are a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain
- Unhealthy reactions to a painful event, loss, or change

## The Conclusion

God is the giver and sustainer of life. He gives, and He takes away (Job 1:21). Only He should determine the end of a person's life. Suicide, the taking of one's own life, is a sin because it is a rejection of God's gift of life, and it places the created being in the place of God. No man or woman should presume to take God's authority upon themselves to end his or her own life.

Christians however should not place more emotional pain on those grieving the loss of a loved one who has committed suicide by believing that their final sinful act determined their eternal destiny. If we put our faith in Christ, we know with confidence that God has graciously forgiven all our sins (Col. 2:13).

- The prophets of Baal slashed themselves before their God (1 Kings 18:28).
- The man inhabited by demons injured himself while he lived alone among the tombs (Mark 5:1–20).
- Catherine of Siena, a 14th century nun, whipped herself with chains and deprived herself of food and sleep. She died of starvation but was revered for her holiness.

All these scenarios are considered to be forms of Self-Harm. It's important to recognize that any person from any background can struggle with this issue. So, it's important to properly see self-harm in a proper light and see what the Scripture say about it.

## What is Self Harm?

Self-harm is “an act which involves deliberately inflicting pain and/or injury to one's own body, but without suicidal intent” (Babiker, The Language of Injury). Self-harm has links to suicide, but the two are not the same. Those who attempt suicide are trying to end their life.

## Common Reasons for Self- Harm:

- Some describe feeling numb and harming themselves to at least feel something.
- For some the physical pain induced by self-injury functions as a brief release of emotional pain or other emotional energy.
- For some the physical pain is a distraction from the emotional pain they are feeling.
- Some punish themselves for a perceived fault; for others, the harm is related to feeling a sense of control over one's body, emotions, or life circumstances

## Why do people Self-Harm?

- Deep sense of shame and guilt (Gen. 3:8–10)
- Self – Medication – They are treating one sort of pain (emotional) with another (physical) but this ultimately is destructive. In other words, those who self-harm are trying to heal themselves — through punishing themselves. (Prov. 14:12)
- We live in a fallen world. We are all tempted, like Adam, to deal with shame in unhealthy and ungodly ways. And while some of us vent our anger on others, some turn it upon themselves. (James 1:14)
- Seeking to live. It's not their scars that are so crippling, but the fact that they're trying to make life work outside of Christ. (Gal. 2:20)

## How does God feel towards the person who Self – Harms?

- God sees the pain, and He can help us through. (Psalm 34:18, 147:3; Rev. 21:4)
- He values our bodies and sees them as beautiful creations – we are to honor God with our bodies; our bodies are a temple, a house for the Holy Spirit, a beautiful culmination of God's creation. (1 Cor. 6:19–20; 3:16–17; Psalm 139: 13–18; Rom. 6:13)
- God offers abundant life – Jesus offers life (John 10:10; Psalm 16:11)
- He care deeply for them and their affliction (1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 55:22; Matt. 11:28–30; 2 Cor. 1:3–4)
- Jesus was bruised for your transgressions so you can be made whole – (Isaiah 53:5; John 3:16)
- God covers our shame once and for all through the sacrifice of His Son. (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:11–14, Revelation 3:18)

## Anyone struggling with Self-Harm:

- We need to remind ourselves of who God is and who we are in Him. (Gen. 1:1, Gen. 16:13, Exodus 3:14, Psalm 103, Psalm 136, Psalm 139, Heb. 13:5–6, 8, Isaiah 40, James 1:16–17, 1 John 4:8–10, and Rev. 4)
- We can pour out our emotions to God. We can bring our pain to Him in prayer. (Psalm 42, Psalm 46, Psalm 62,) the book of Job, the book of Lamentations, 1 Kings 19, Habakkuk 3, Luke 11:9–13, Heb. 4:14–16, and 1 Peter 5:7, for example.
- God also gives us the family of believers to encourage us and walk alongside us (Gal. 6:2, 9–10; Heb. 10:19–25; Rom. 12:15; James 5:13–16; John 13:34–35).



## The Definition of Abortion

**Abortion is the humanly initiated procedure of expulsion of the human fetus before it was capable of surviving outside of the womb.**

- Therapeutic Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated for the sake of the mother's physical health.
- Psychiatric Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated for the sake of the mother's mental health.
- Eugenic Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated as a means of keeping the retarded or deformed child from being born.
- Social Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated to ease the economic pressure on the family.
- Ethical Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated in cases of rape or incest.
- General Abortion: The pregnancy is terminated for any or no reason.

## The Biblical Case Against Abortion

- Psalm 139:13–15 It is clearly stated in Scripture that God's protection and possession extends to the unborn. This scripture argues that the fetus is more than mere tissue; the fetus is viewed as a human being with potential that is valuable and sacred to God in light of His personal involvement.
- Psalm 51:5 David is viewed as guilty before God prior to his birth. If the fetus is able to possess guilt, then humanness is established since only humans and angels can be guilty of sin.
- John 9:3 God allows people to be born with deformities for the express purpose of bringing glory to Himself. Thus, to abort a fetus due to the potential of deformity, may be to interfere with the direct purpose of God to bring greater glory to Himself.
- Jeremiah 1:5 God deals with people while they are still in the womb (see also Luke 1:15,44).

## The Logical Case Against Abortion

- Even if one argues that no one is sure when life begins, it might begin at conception. If so, then abortion is murder. Can we justify abortion if there is even the slightest question?
- While the mother feeds the baby, the baby is not part of her body but rather the baby is just in her body to receive benefits from it. Just as the mother does not have the right to stop feeding her baby after it is born -- which would be murder by starvation -- she does not have the right to stop feeding her baby before it is born.

- Just as no one has a problem identifying the unborn dog as a dog, cat as a cat, horse as a horse; so the unborn human should be identified as a human. The nature of the unborn fetus does not change after birth, only its size and location.
- Babies are conscious before they are born. By one-and-a-half months after conception, babies have their own brain waves. Since the absence of a brain wave is considered to be a sign of death, why is the presence of a brain wave in the unborn fetus not considered a sign of life? Even during the period that would be thought of as unconscious, why would it be thought of as unconscious, why would it be any different than a sleeping adult or coma victim whom we call human?
- Taking the life of an unborn human being removes the only chance that this person will ever have to live or even get a better chance at life. The logic that deformed human beings lose the right to a meaningful life is illogical. The choice is not between a projected imperfect life and a better one. It is between the life they actually have and none at all. Such logic naturally leads to infanticide and euthanasia since deformity outside the womb can be verified.

- If unborn fetuses are destroyed to avoid potential abuse in a hostile world, then why not destroy children who are actually being abused? If society protects the born who are undergoing child abuse, how much more should we protect the unborn who are even more defenseless?
- While pregnancies from rape and incest are horrible crimes to commit, a second crime does not diminish the first, but rather adds to it. The abortion of a baby conceived as the result of rape still does not negate the rape. Justice is not served by punishing the unborn baby -- punish the rapist instead.
- Legalizing abortion does not curb its abuse. Statistics show that most abortions still occur outside of hospitals.

## **The Churches Response to Abortion**

- The church's position against the evil of abortion should clearly and emphatically be voiced.
- The church should show greater care for unwed mothers who desire to give birth to their children or who need guidance in the decision making process.
- The church must provide counseling to young people regarding God's standards of morality.
- Those who have had abortions and have repented for this sin, should be restored by the church.



# Gender Fluidity

Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic rise in social awareness and public discussion of the phenomenon of gender fluidity. This has been driven by two distinct developments:

- An increased acknowledgement of the fact that some people experience a profound sense of gender incongruence (that is, a mismatch between their biological sex and their psychological sense of gender identity).
- The ideological discussion about the nature and reality of gender itself, has intertwined into fields as genetics, fashion, medicine, law, education, entertainment, athletics, and religious liberty.

We as One Community Church want to be able to help our people and others to think through, and talk to these issues. We want to state our position on the matter. And prayerfully this will help. Christians patiently love, counsel, and befriend those who identify and/or struggle with gender fluidity.

## Key Terms (this list is not exhaustive)

- **Biological sex:** This refers to the physical or physiological characteristics that help us differentiate between what is male and what is female: chromosomes, hormones, gonads, genitals, and secondary sex characteristics – e.g., body shape, voice pitch and hair distribution. Biological sex is often simply referred to as sex.
- **Gender:** Historically, the terms sex and gender have often been used interchangeably. Now there's a distinction made, social and cultural aspect, as opposed to the biological distinctions between the sexes.
- **Gender identity:** This refers to the way individuals perceive themselves and wish to name and identify themselves.
- **Gender expression:** This refers to the psychological and social aspects of how masculinity and femininity are presented in things like dress and demeanor, social roles and conventions and other cultural gender norms. These vary from culture to culture, if not from person to person.
- **Gender dysphoria:** This is the latest diagnostic term for the distress experienced by those whose psychological or emotional gender identity differs from their biological sex.
  - Harvard Health Publishing says "Gender fluid means that a person is flexible in regard to the gender with which they identify. Their gender identity or expression is not fixed and may encompass one gender, multiple genders, or no gender. Their gender identity and expression may also change over time."
  - "The term is an acknowledgment that there is a spectrum and that gender is not binary. How you experience your gender can change over time or depending on the situation." says Margaret Seide, MD, a Board-certified psychiatrist."

# Gender Fluidity (Cont.)

## What does the Bible say about Gender Fluidity?

The Bible teaches that God made us male or female, and no matter our own feelings or confusion, we should act in accordance with the biological reality of God's good design. Gender Fluidity falls short of the glory of God and is not the way to walk in obedience to Christ.

How does the Bible present Gender?

- The gender categories of male and female are a part of God's design for humanity.
- God created the first human pair in his image, he created them male and female (Gen. 1:27).
- He made the woman to be a complement and help to the man (Gen. 2:18-22).
- Gender is neither identical nor interchangeable.

## What about the feelings and emotions of a person that feels gender is on a spectrum?

- The feelings and emotions of that person are very real but do those feelings and emotions equal to "ought" of God's design and will.
- Most Christians reject this thinking in other areas of life (eating disorders, celibacy, and unbiblical divorces, etc.)
- We understand that following Jesus Christ means dying to ourselves, being renewed in our minds, and no longer walking as we once did (Matt. 16:24, Eph. 4:17-18, Rom. 12:2).
- Being "true to ourselves" is always a false choice when it means going against God's Word. (Proverbs 14:12)

## How does the Bible Discuss Gender Confusion?

If the binary of male and female is God's idea, and if we are meant to embrace, by divine design, our biological and creational difference as men and women, then it stands to reason that the confusion of these realities would be displeasing to God.

The Bible teaches that men should not act sexually as women, that men should not dress like women, and that when men and women embrace obviously other-gendered expressions of identity it is a disgrace (Deut. 22:5; Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15)

# Transgenderism

Transgender is an umbrella term for the various ways in which some people experience incongruence between their biological sex and their gender identity. In layperson's terms, a transgender person often feels like they're trapped in the wrong body.

## Here are some key terms in dealing with transgenderism:

- Intersex – a term that describes conditions in which a person is born with ambiguous sex characteristics or anatomy – chromosomal, gonadal or genital
- Gender Dysphoria – the experience of distress associated with incongruence between one's biological sex and one's psychological and emotional gender identity. The degree of dysphoria and the effectiveness of coping strategies vary from person to person
- Transsexual – a person who has concluded that he/she was born in the 'wrong' body and wishes to transition (or already has transitioned) through hormone treatment and/or reassignment surgery
- Cross-dressing – dressing in the clothing, or adopting a presentation, of the other sex. Motivations vary
- Transvestism – dressing or adopting the presentation of the other sex, often for the purpose of sexual arousal. Not generally associated with gender dysphoria and may not identify as transgender.

We believe the most prudent way to address this growing topic of transgenderism in our society is to affirm what God affirms about the human body, behaviors and heart. However before we do so, it's important to note that every case and/or scenario of transgenderism is highly nuanced and needs to be treated with the utmost respect, grace and truth from our Lord Jesus Christ.

## What does the Scriptures say about about our body:

- Humans are created in the "image of God" as male and female and they are made in "His image". (Gen.1:26)
- God intends for humans to identify as male and female, and that one's sexed body is an essential part of this identity.
- Along with every other aspect of God's creation, the human body is declared by the Creator to be "good." (Gen. 1:31)
- The biblical recognition of two distinct human sexes, female and male, from the creation of humanity as male and female in Genesis 1:26–27, is affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6.
- The body has great significance in the Scriptures and Christian understanding from creation, through incarnation to the resurrection and ascension.
- Bodies are not simply things we inhabit, but an integral part of our 'being in the world', of who we are. As Christians, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

# Transgenderism (Cont.)

## What does the Scriptures say about our behaviors:

- Cross-gender identification distorts God's creational order of male and female. (Deuteronomy 22:5, 1 Corinthians 11:14-15)
- While acting on transgender urges is usually seen as sinful, being tempted to live as the opposite sex is not, as temptation by itself is not sinful (Heb. 4:15).

## What do the Scriptures say about the heart in reference to transgenderism?

- Transgenderism is related to the sin of envy. Specifically, transgenderism is at root, sinful envy of the sexual anatomy of another or something you do not possess. (Proverbs 14:30, Romans 1: 18-31)
- We live in a fallen world where not every biological or psychological experience is a reflection of God's will. Therefore, all of us ought to be very skeptical about what our hearts are telling us about who we are, what is right for us, how we should find fulfillment, etc. (Jeremiah 17:9)

## How should we act towards transgender individual(s)?

- Grace should characterize our response (John 1:14)
- Clearly teach the truth to all age groups, that God made mankind in his own image, male and female (John 1:14, Gen. 1:26-27)
- Helping gender-conflicted people experience welcome, identity and community.

One Community Church should help transgender people seeking to navigate their way as disciples of Jesus with integrity amidst complexity.

# Homosexuality

## The Definition of Homosexuality

An act of the will that refers to sexual intercourse between members of the same sex.

What it is not – An alternative lifestyle. It only involves illegitimate circumstances (fornication and adultery). It also involves sexual acts that in themselves are perverted and grotesque. It cannot be an alternative lifestyle because a husband/wife type of relationship is set up between two who cannot be, by creation intent, husband and wife.

## The Bible and Homosexuality

- Homosexuality in the Old Testament
  - Genesis 19: Sodom is destroyed because of homosexuality (Jude 7; Ezekiel 16:49–50). The word “know” in the Old Testament is regularly used for sexual intercourse (Genesis 19:8). The fact that Lot offered female substitutes showed that sexual intent was involved.
  - Judges 19: Similar to the above, this incident involved a bisexual man who sought homosexual satisfaction, but instead the occasion became a violent rape.
  - Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 – Homosexuality is called an abomination punishable by death.
- Homosexuality in the New Testament
  - Romans 1:24–27 – The rejection of God brings sexual sins. The greatest expression of the depravity of man, sexually speaking, is people leaving the natural use of sex in a loving relationship between husband and wife and turning to homosexual relationships. Homosexuality is viewed as a clear movement to suppress the truth of God. When man’s standard, which is no standard at all, becomes the criteria of truth perverted, unnatural, sexual involvement is the result. The presence of homosexuality that is publicly accepted is symptomatic of a society under judgment; a society that is at the point of impending collapse.
  - 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 – Homosexuals are said to be among those who do not inherit the Kingdom of God.
  - 1 Timothy 1:8–11 – In this passage, Paul made a comparison with the Ten Commandments and included homosexuality as a part of the command not to commit adultery.

# Homosexuality (Cont.)

## The Nature and Purpose of Sex

- Sexual intercourse as relational – Eve was created for Adam to provide completeness. Another Adam for Adam would not have sufficed. Sameness does not bring completeness and unity just as two left shoes do not contribute to comfortable walking. Unity is like that – it is to be seen in and derived from male and female differences. Only a woman could provide man that which he needs to fully express himself emotionally, intellectually, and sexually.
- Sexual intercourse as procreational – Since sex is also created for procreational purposes, homosexual relationships are wrong because they cannot fulfill that aim. Thus, the only way that homosexual numbers can grow is through recruitment as opposed to heterosexuals who naturally produce more of their kind.

## The Christian Response of Homosexuality

- The sin must be abhorred, yet the homosexual must be loved.
- The church should provide an environment of acceptance where the homosexual can find help in dealing with his/her sin.
- There should be clear teaching about homosexuality as well as other sexual sins i.e. adultery and fornication.
- Christians should seek to help those who show early homosexual tendencies and not make light of those tendencies.

## Questions and Answers

Q. "Are homosexual temptations wrong?"

A. No. James 1 teaches that temptation becomes sin only when there is a decision to act on it either mentally or physically.

Q. "Can a Christian become a homosexual?"

A. Yes. A Christian can commit any sin that a non-Christian commits, i.e. 1 Corinthians 5. However, when a sin becomes a pattern, they open themselves up to God's judgment.

Q. "How does a person become a homosexual?"

A. There are two primary ways. First, the home environment plays a major role. Often the father is detached, passive, and hostile and/or provides little-to-no leadership. On the other hand, the mother is aggressive, smothering, dominating, and over protective.

Secondly, homosexuality is considered the new "in" thing to do. It has been elevated to a state of acceptability and thereby it draws attention.

Q. "Are people born homosexuals?"

A. No. It is learned behavior based on one's will not one's genes.

Q. "What if two people of the same sex love each other?"

A. Love does not abolish moral law. Love is the fulfillment not the abrogation of the law. Just as a man's love for "another woman" does not justify unfaithfulness to his wife, so a person's love for someone of the same sex does not justify homosexuality.



## The Issue:

Is witchcraft real? The answer is yes, and it warrants our attention because witchcraft is increasingly becoming more mainstream. So, let's properly define and understand what witchcraft entails then see what God has to say about it.

## What is witchcraft?

Witches (men/women) are people who seek both the God and the Goddess. They seek a relationship with their natural environment, endeavoring to recognize the sacredness of all of nature. Witches, further, seek to utilize cosmic or psychic forces to do their bidding in the natural world. To this end, the practice of witchcraft involves knowledge and skill in appropriating the rituals that are believed to harness and focus these energies.

## Some Key Aspects of Witchcraft:

- Witchcraft is known by many names – The Craft, Wicca, paganism, Neo-Paganism
- Witchcraft is a religion
- Witchcraft is a worldview – naturalism, occultism, and humanism

Witchcraft is a practice – they perform various rituals and activities that can be perfected to manipulate and utilize this cosmic or psychic force to do one's bidding.

## What does Scripture say about witchcraft?

- Witchcraft is the Devil's counterfeits to holy spirituality.
- There are only two sources of spiritual power: God and Satan. Satan has only the power that God allows him to have, but it is considerable (Job 1:12; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:2).
- To seek spirituality, knowledge, or power apart from God is idolatry.
- At the heart of witchcraft is the desire to know the future and control events that are not ours to control. Those abilities belong only to the Lord. This desire has its roots in Satan's first temptation to Eve: "You can be like God" (Gen. 3:5).
- Witchcraft (Witches) in a list of those who will not inherit eternal life (Rev. 22:15)

## Examples of witchcraft in OT and NT?

- Moses and the Egyptians Magicians (Ex. 7:10–12)
- Saul consulted a medium for guidance (1 Sam. 28:7–20)
- Philip and Simon the Witch (Acts 8:9–20)

## Can a believer be involved in witchcraft?

Absolutely! Anyone can open themselves to the influences of witchcraft. Most of the time it's in seemingly "harmless" modern ways like tarot cards, horoscopes, Ouija boards, Eastern meditation rituals, etc.

## How should Christians handle witchcraft?

- We don't need to fear Satan's power, but we should respect it and stay away from it because Satan can create much havoc, harm, and destruction, even in the lives of believers (1 John 4:4; 1 Thess. 2:18; Job 1:12–18; 1 Cor. 5:5).
- Seek the Lord for help and significance (Isaiah 8:19; Micah 5:12; Gal. 5:19–21)

# Crystals & Smudging

## The Issue:

What does the Bible say about the use of smudging and crystals? Is it biblical?

## What is Smudging?

- Smudging imitates a Native American ceremony in which certain herbs are burned to purify or “bless” a home in order to rid it of negative energy and restore positive, healing energy. People can be “smudged,” too.
- Smudging is usually done with smudge sticks, bundles of herbs that can be purchased or made with sage, cedar, sweetgrass, lavender, etc. During the smudging ceremony of a home, the person smudging is encouraged to focus his or her energy and control breathing. The thought is to cleanse them of negative or stagnant energy. After the ceremony, many believe it has protective powers over the person and household.
- The practice of smudging is not mentioned in the Bible.
- There is nothing inherently wrong with burning incense or using herbs to beautify the fragrance of one’s home, but that is not what smudging is about.

## What are the Crystals?

- Crystals of different types are mentioned in the Bible a few times. (Prov. 8:11, Lam. 4:7, Job 28:19, Ex. 39:10–13, Rev. 22:1)
- Crystals are used in the practice of crystal healing, a pseudoscience that purports to heal various ailments

## Is the use of Smudging and Crystals Biblical?

- The Bible never assigns any mystical properties to crystals and smudging.
- The Bible does not say that crystals are beneficial for attracting wealth, rekindling romance, or warding off evil spirits; neither does it say that crystals are needed to connect to God’s Spirit.
- The Bible tells us that God protects His children from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- The Bible warns strongly against engaging in anything related to superstition and the occult. God declares the practice of the occult detestable (Deuteronomy 18:10–12)

## Conclusion:

- The Bible classifies the use of crystals as charms, smudging along with witchcraft, which is idolatry and ungodly behavior (Gal. 5:19–21).
- Anything that seeks to manipulate the spirit world can be categorized as witchcraft.
- We do not trust in pagan rituals but in God our Savior. God is the source of life, of all that is good and true. God promises, “The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Ps. 121:7–8).
- He will provide the strength and peace we need to make it through any test.



# Marijuana & Alcohol

How are we to think about recreational marijuana and alcohol use in the church? Does God, then, also permit the recreational use of Marijuana? Should we treat Marijuana like alcohol in the church?

## Similarities and Dissimilarities of Marijuana and Alcohol

- Ways that Marijuana is like alcohol:
  - Marijuana, like alcohol, is an organic substance.
  - Marijuana, like alcohol, has the potential to intoxicate and distort reality.
  - Marijuana, like alcohol, has different effects on someone who uses it regularly than someone who uses it occasionally.
  - Marijuana, like alcohol, can be habit-forming (Timothy 3:8).
- Ways that Marijuana is unlike alcohol:
  - Unlike alcohol, you can't blackout or die from an overdose of Marijuana.
  - Unlike alcohol, there are many different strains of Marijuana. The same amount of Marijuana smoked or ingested from two different Marijuana plants can have different effects on an individual.
  - Unlike alcohol, marijuana has many different effects on an individual due to its complex chemical makeup.
  - And perhaps most importantly, unlike alcohol, Marijuana is not directly addressed in the Bible.

It is unhelpful to make direct correlations between Marijuana and alcohol. However, the Bible gives us clear and direct permission for the moderate use of alcohol while never directly referencing other psychoactive agents such as marijuana.

## What is the endgame for the Christian life?

- As Christians, our goal is knowing and experiencing the full and undistorted reality of the glory of God (1 Cor. 15:12–49; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Cor. 13:12).
- The Christian use of any kind of psychoactive substance should always align with this gospel goal of looking to see things clearer. We do not want our vision of reality distorted. (1 Peter 4:7, 5:8)

# Marijuana & Alcohol (Cont.)

## What about marijuana use for medicinal use?

- Marijuana is touted as a cure for a lot of vague issues such as chronic pain, stopping muscle spasms, treatment for depression or anxiety, alleviating PTSD, plus a whole host of other medical conditions.
- These ill-defined categories could present a major problem with medical marijuana: People without a clear diagnosis may find a friendly physician to fill out the paperwork for a medical marijuana card, which in many cases is nothing more than a way to purchase pot for recreational use.
- Furthermore, when some people say they smoke marijuana to get relief from pain, what they have in mind is relational or emotional pain, but getting high on marijuana is a terrible coping mechanism for psychological distress and grief.
- The appropriate use of medications is morally permissible for Christians. However, at this stage, it is still unclear exactly how marijuana or products derived from it can be appropriately used.

## Conclusion

- The Bible gives us two principles which should guide our reflection on medicinal marijuana.
- Seek wisdom and understanding and we also commanded, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them." (Prov. 4:7, Eph. 5:11)
- Wisdom dictates Christians wait for the best research and only use medication derived from marijuana under guidance of a physician and pharmacist so that dosage and timing can be controlled for the most efficacious result.
- The recreational use of marijuana is in the same category as drunkenness of alcohol thus has no place in a Christian's life. In this light, carelessly smoking marijuana as a cure-all is not only foolish, but sinful. (Eph. 5:18; Rom. 13:13-14)

# Tattoos & Body Piercings

Tattoos and piercings have become more popular and an increasing trend over the years. A lot of that has to do with the changing perception of once being labeled rebellious and some would say sinful to socially cool and artistic. So how should Christians approach the subject of tattoos, piercings and other type body modifications?

## What does the Bible say about tattoos and piercings?

- The Bible does not specifically address body piercings as a sin.
- God bestowed blessing and ascribed beauty in the accessories of earrings for Hebrew women. (Ezekiel 16:12; Song of Solomon 1:10–11)
- In Old Testament law that prohibited tattoos: “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:28).
- It was common for the pagans to mark their skin with the name of a false god or with a symbol honoring some idol. God commanded that His children be different. The Israelites belonged to Him and they should not bear the name of a false god on their bodies.
- The New Testament is relatively silent on the issue of tattoos. And regarding piercings, God used it as a symbol of blessing and beauty. It is safe to say that having tattoos or piercings is not a sin.

## How should Christians respond to the topic of tattoos and piercings?

- Believers should follow their convictions in the matter, respecting those who may have different convictions. (Rom. 14: 13–22)
- Godly wisdom and principles to pray through before getting a tattoo, body piercing or any body modification:
- What is my motivation? (Prov. 16:2) – Our motives are important in any decision we make, especially something as permanent and potentially life-changing as a body piercing.
- Where’s my identity? – As believers, our identity is in Christ not any subculture or communities: “You died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).
- The inside counts more than the outside – The majority of our effort should be directed at increasing in godliness and character, not grooming a particular look. (1 Peter 3:3–4).
- Will this tattoo/body piercing be a hindrance to ministry? – We are Christ’s ambassadors, delivering God’s message to the world. We must consider what message the tattoos/body piercing sends and whether it will aid or detract from representing Christ and sharing the gospel. (2 Cor. 5:20)
- Children are to honor and obey their parents – For a minor to get a tattoo in violation of his or her parents’ wishes is sin. Tattoos born of rebellion are sinful. (Eph. 6:1–2)
- Honor your body – Our bodies are not our own but belong to God for we were bought at a price. Consider your (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

# Pornography

## The Issue

Accessibility–The internet has made pornography more accessible now than in any prior time in history. What once had numerous natural, circumstantial and social barriers in order to access has now become available any time, any where, at any price, or no price at all.

Addictive Nature– Pornography triggers chemical responses in the brain that are much like those of drugs. The brain in turn builds up a tolerance that then requires a higher frequency and more extreme content to achieve the same level of experience.

Combined with accessibility, it's addictive nature makes porn much like a free drug that can be accessed with as few as 3 touches on the screen of a phone.

Stigma and Culture– Whereas it was once somewhat taboo, and certainly more difficult to access, porn has not only become normal and accepted, there are those who promote its use as natural, healthy and even beneficial.

The Facts– Pornography is detrimental to the human psyche, physiology, spirit and body. It is known to damage mental health, relational health, marriage and finances. Statistics abound to support that there is no good long term benefit to pornography. Any pretense to suggest otherwise is ignoring the facts.

Pornography is Sin– While the bible does not use the word Pornography directly, the word porneia literally means fornication. And on that, the bible is abundantly clear:

Matthew 5:28 “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Proverbs 5:18–19 “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times, and always be enraptured with her love.”

The implication could not be more clear, the only person we can healthfully enjoy in the space of sexual intimacy is our own spouse. Any person, in picture or video, person or online, that we engage with in a sexual manner outside of the context of marriage (one man married to one woman) is not just sin, it is destructive, unsatisfying and costly.

## The Definition

Visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings.

# Pornography (Cont.)

## **The Challenge**

Secrecy– A more powerful attribute about the grip of pornography is that for the most part is consumed in secrecy. In addition to that, it can take place in the secrecy of the mind without great aid from outside influence.

Shame– Any forbidden activity will carry with it shame. From a spiritual, and psychological standpoint, one of the most important components of guaranteeing future sin is a sense of shame over a current one. Therefore, shame plays a major role in perpetuating the power of pornography in a person's life. Romans 7.

Support– In the vast majority of cases, overcoming an addiction or predisposition to pornography is most likely found in the context of good community. Programs and groups coupled with a life giving devotional routine are typically indispensable components of an individuals likeness of overcoming a propensity toward pornography. Galatians 6:1–3.

## **The Church's position**

Pornography is Sin (see references above)

Porn and Redemption– Sin can be forgiven and overcome.

Jesus Christ paid for our sin with his own body on the cross. Incurring the punishment that had been reserved for humanity through his death, burial and resurrection. Because pornography is sin, it can be forgiven. 1 John 1:9. Not only that, the promise found in scripture tells us that by the work of God's Holy Spirit, and the power of the blood of Jesus, we can experience victory over the power and the habit of pornography. 2 Cor 2:18, Hebrews 10:1–3, Romans 7:14.

## **Conclusion**

Pornography is addictive, accessible and pervasive. The culture would strongly promote that pornography is natural and even beneficial. The scriptures are clear that pornography is sin, it is also destructive and costly. More importantly, a propensity toward consuming pornography can be overcome by the power grace found through the redemptive work of Jesus and inworking of the Holy Spirit and Godly Community.

## The Issue

Pew Research says, "eight-in-ten Christians say they believe in the God of the Bible, six-in-ten believe in one or more of four predominant New Age beliefs, including the belief in psychics, reincarnation, astrology or spiritual energy can be found in objects."

Here's the question, 'Should a Christian participate in any form of the New Age Beliefs? Or should Christians reject it?'

## What is New Age Spirituality?

The New Age movement, or New Age spirituality, is a collection of beliefs rooted in Eastern mysticism. Things ranging from meditation to occult practices can all fall under the umbrella of New Ageism. The main thrust of New Age philosophy as they see it is centered around inner divinity and self awareness.

### Here are some common New Age practices:

- Spiritual self/consciousness
- Mysticism
- Meditation
- Psychic Readings/Tarot Cards
- Reincarnation
- Burning Sage/Smudging
- Crystals
- Energy Healing
- Sacred nature
- Chakras

### What are some New Age Spirituality beliefs?

- **God is everything and everything is God** – All is God. If all is one, including God, then one must conclude that all is God which means there is no distinction between the Creator and creation. This is classic pantheism where all creation and people are all of one divine essence.
  - We believe God is the Almighty Creator of all things, and hold things together by His power. (Genesis 1:1, Colossians 1:17)
- **Sin is not real** – Sin is absolutely real for humankind and it has separated us from God. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ to save us from our sin and connect us back to God. (Gen 3; Romans 1:18–3; 3:10,23)
- **Man is His own God** – They believe that each of us has forgotten his or her own divinity.
  - We believe that God is eternal, preexistent, and our Almighty Creator and we are His creation, made in His image. Therefore the creation is not and cannot be the Creator (Gen 1:26, Exodus 3:14)



- **Jesus Christ Was Just an Enlightened Man** – New Age Spirituality believes that Jesus Christ is a man who reached “Christ consciousness” which every person is meant to reach and attain in their spiritual journey.
  - We believe Jesus was not just another man who reached enlightenment but the unique Son of God, born of a virgin, who was raised from the dead on the third day. Jesus isn’t ‘like’ God or ‘become’ God, He is God. (Colossians 1: 15–17; John 8:58)
- **Seek higher consciousness** – Seek “higher consciousness” through meditation, breathing exercises, burn, crystals, channeling spirit guides, etc. because New Age Spirituality is all about getting your power back. When connecting to their higher consciousness they unleash the divine energy (good/bad vibes) into the world.
  - The Scriptures are clear that we should never seek spirituality apart from God for it is idolatry. Also Jesus Christ has given full access to God by faith through His life, death, burial and resurrection. (Ephesians 2:18, John 10:9)
- **There are Many Ways To Heaven** – New Age believes that there are many spiritual or religious paths to God and heaven.
  - When we read the Gospel of Matthew, we see that Jesus is very clear that we must enter through the narrow gate to receive salvation. The wide gate leads to destruction. The only path to heaven is through Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and no one can come to God except through him. (Matthew 7:13, John 14:6)

## Conclusion

Christians need to use discernment and wisdom in the areas of using some New Age practices like yoga, holistic medicine, meditation, etc. for these bring lots of benefits to a person's life.

However, the use of these practices can subtly lead into seeking spirituality and healing outside of God, which is idolatry.

Christians have no need to look to the world for truth, guidance, protection or a sense of deeper spirituality through other means. Our Father has provided us with everything we need to know to live a righteous and God-honoring life. Keep your eyes and heart fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

We must remember Paul’s warning, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,” (2 Timothy 4:3)

