

Pleasant Valley Community Church

Confession of Faith

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Preface

The grace of God displayed in the body of Pleasant Valley Community Church (PVCC) has been unprecedented and undeniable. He has marvelously glorified His Son, Jesus Christ, by showing time and again that His Gospel is one that is powerful and that saves.¹ It is our hope and prayer that we have only begun, that we have merely scratched the surface of seeing the wonderful things that God has in store for PVCC in the years and generations to come. It is our desire as a church to leave a legacy—not merely one whose influence will dwindle over time—but one that will stand the tests of time and will grow in grace, strength and maturity. We want to build a church that makes an impact until the return of our Lord Jesus. It is our desire that our grandchildren and their grandchildren will carry on the work of Christ at PVCC and that she will become an enduring pillar—both in the Owensboro community and across the nations. It is with this commitment to longevity and a passion to lay an everlasting foundation, that under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and after much prayer and counsel, we adopt the PVCC Confession of Faith. This step, we are fully persuaded in the Holy Spirit, is one of great significance and one that will strategically contribute to immutable truth for the faithful generations to follow.²

¹ Romans 1:16

² 2 Timothy 2:2

Introduction

Why Establish a Confession of Faith?

Nine Reasons for a Confession of Faith:

1) Doctrine Matters

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers.”³ It is perhaps these statements that provide the most accurate summary of all of the Apostle Paul’s instructions to young pastor Timothy. Paul’s dual concern for his mentee—the man who would pastor the church at Ephesus—included both Timothy’s life and his “teaching.”

Interestingly enough, Paul saw an inevitable link between the two. Here, and in other places in Paul’s writings, he points out the profound truth that what we believe about God (our “teaching”) directly impacts our actions, what we do (our “lives”).

For Timothy, and all believers who will read Paul’s letter, it is not enough for us to simply “watch our lives.” It is not enough for us to simply attempt to bear the fruits of the Spirit in an effort to live in such a way that brings honor and glory to Christ. In addition to this close observance of our lives and willingness to examine ourselves on a consistent basis, we must at the same time, Paul says, “Watch our teaching.”

The point is clear: Timothy served as a pastor, a shepherd to the people of God at Ephesus. By watching his life and teaching closely he

³ 1 Timothy 4:16

became better equipped to watch, or guard, his congregation—the recipients of his “teaching.”

It is this initial understanding of the importance of doctrine that compels the pastors of PVCC to construct the PVCC Confession of Faith. God has called us to shepherd the flock of God at PVCC. However, shepherding does not simply imply that the pastors at PVCC are to live as role models for the sheep under their care (although living lives that honor God is certainly commanded in Scripture).⁴ Shepherding involves more than this. It must include “following good doctrine”⁵ and “teaching sound doctrine.”⁶ It is preaching sound doctrine even when people “will not endure” it.⁷ It is remaining aware that some individuals will come into the church seeking to teach what is “different” from sound doctrine.⁸ It is refuting those who “contradict sound doctrine.”⁹ It is “guarding” and protecting sound doctrine.¹⁰ It is passing along and “entrusting to faithful men” sound doctrine so that, they too, can teach it.¹¹

And so it goes, verse after verse after verse. If Paul’s instruction to Timothy and Titus has any implications on today’s pastors and today’s churches, then a keen awareness and commitment to “sound doctrine” remains fundamentally non-negotiable in the life of any New Testament church. However, this commitment to sound doctrine

⁴ 1 Peter 5:3

⁵ 1 Timothy 4:6, 2 Timothy 1:13

⁶ Titus 2:1, 1 Timothy 4:11

⁷ 2 Timothy 4:2-3

⁸ 1 Timothy 1:3

⁹ Titus 1:9, 2 Timothy 2:25

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 1:14

¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:2

cannot simply be subjective. PVCC, or any New Testament church, cannot simply say, "We believe in sound doctrine." We must objectively define and articulate sound doctrine.

In introducing the confession of faith for Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Pastor Mark Dever says, "From the time of the Apostles to today, Christians have laid out doctrine (beliefs) in brief, definitive statements. As those who know God, we believe it is necessary to set forth in a concise fashion the cornerstone truths of our church as guided by Scripture."

The pastors of PVCC agree with Dever. We deem it a necessary step in the health and long-term vitality of PVCC to set forth clearly and objectively definitive statements of sound doctrine: The kind of doctrine Paul explicitly refers to no less than eight times in his letters to Timothy and Titus.¹²

2) To serve as a guide in Scriptural interpretation in effort to distinguish between truth and error

The Apostle James makes a fascinating observation in chapter 2:19 when he says, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!" In other words, it is not enough to simply say that we believe in God. After all, James argues, even the demons are monotheistic and recognize only one God. In fact, not only do they believe in Him, they shudder at the recognition of His being. However, James' point is clear: It is not enough to simply say

¹² 1 Timothy 1:10, 4:6, 6:3, 2 Timothy 1:13, 4:3-4, Titus 1:9, 2:1

that we “believe” in something, it is what we believe about that something that is equally—if not more—important.

The same is true with God’s Word. It is simply not enough for a church to profess a loyalty to the Bible. Furthermore, it is not even enough for a church to be inerrantists; that is, to believe that the Bible is inspired by God and without error. The assumption for members at PVCC is that yes, we believe in the inspired, inerrant Word of God. With this assumption, the question for PVCC is not merely “Do we believe in the Bible?” The even more important question is “What do we believe the Bible teaches?”

The most radical denials of biblical truth frequently coexist with a professed regard for the authority and testimony of the Bible.¹³ For example, Mormons profess to believe in the Bible; in fact, along with the Book of Mormon, they use the Bible and quote from it frequently and without reservation. However, it is their interpretation of Scripture that has led them into heresy. It is their twisting of John 1:1 that has led them to deny the truth that Jesus Christ was in fact the God-Man.

Perhaps coming a bit closer to basic biblical beliefs, a number of denominations state very unapologetically that they believe in the Bible and that it is without error. However, it is their faulty interpretation of the Bible that has brought about to teaching that baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

Pentecostals have primarily maintained the belief that the Bible is the Word of God; however, it is their interpretation of Scripture that has

¹³ 1 Timothy 1:7

led some of them to wrongly teach that speaking in tongues is the necessary evidence of one who has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Baptists across the board have historically believed in the authority of Scripture; however, it is some Baptists' interpretation of Scripture that has led them to the misunderstanding of the Gospel that a true child of God can "lose" his or her salvation.¹⁴

Example after example could be provided, but the point is clear: We must say more than "We believe in the Bible." We must say what we believe about the Bible and we must clarify and carefully articulate what we believe to be sound doctrine.¹⁵ We must not simply be prepared to "handle" God's Word; we must be committed to "rightly handle the Word of Truth."¹⁶ When men use the very words of the Bible to promote false teaching, when the Word of Truth is perverted to serve error, nothing less than a confession of faith will serve publicly to draw clear lines between truth and error.

3) To guard the pastors and other teachers in the church from slipping into doctrinal error

No pastor or teacher is beyond the possibility of falling into doctrinal error. In studying the doctrine and theology of many men throughout history, one will quickly see how many of them—at some point—dramatically shifted from sound doctrine to quite the opposite.

¹⁴ John 10:28-29

¹⁵ Titus 2:1

¹⁶ 2 Timothy 2:15

A move away from doctrinal truth is probably what happened in the church at Ephesus and provided the motivation for Paul's opening words to Timothy, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions."¹⁷ Paul tells us later in chapter four of the same letter that some of these teachers had actually devoted themselves to the teachings of demons.¹⁸ It is extremely unlikely that upon these men's initial appointment as teachers in the church at Ephesus they held to such false teachings. Almost certainly, it was over time that they "swerved"¹⁹ from the sound doctrine to which at one time they were seemingly committed.

None are exempt from such a vulnerability to swerve and deviate from sound doctrine. Thus, it is a church's confession of faith that clearly sets forth boundaries for sound doctrine. If a pastor or teacher at PVCC steps outside of these doctrinal boundaries, and could not be brought back within them after much counsel and encouragement from his fellow pastors, he would willfully disqualify himself from serving in leadership at PVCC.

4) To serve as a test of doctrinal fidelity and to assure unanimity among pastors and teachers

¹⁷ 1 Timothy 1:3, 7

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 4:1

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 1:6

Paul is clear in his instruction as it relates to the New Testament office of pastor/elder/overseer (we believe these three terms to be synonymous). These men must be “able to teach.”²⁰ However, what must they be able to teach? The context in all of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus is clear. They must not simply be able to teach from the Bible. They must be able to teach “sound doctrine” and they must be able to “rightly divide the Word of Truth.”²¹ Paul’s instruction to Pastor Titus is not to simply “teach doctrine.” Paul commands Titus to “...teach what accords with sound doctrine.”²²

The implication is evident: If “sound doctrine” exists, then by definition, “unsound doctrine” also exists.²³ Pastors and teachers at PVCC must meet the requirements set forth by Paul as it relates to sound doctrine. Only a definitive confession of faith can clearly identify such doctrines in an objective fashion.

Furthermore, while personalities, ideas, passions, and to some degree philosophy of ministry will certainly be diverse among a plurality of pastors, it seems apparent that doctrinal unity in critical matters remains necessary. Certainly, no Christian thinks identically on every single issue. For this reason, it is understood and expected that some variations on minor and obviously grey doctrinal issues may exist (example, such as the “age of the earth” or the details of the “end times.” The key words in the preceding sentence are minor in comparison to some beliefs. For this reason the PVCC Confession of

²⁰ 1 Timothy 3:2

²¹ 2 Timothy 2:15

²² Titus 2:1

²³ 1 Timothy 1:3, 4:1

Faith will only address with certainty the major doctrines of Scripture—the ones we consider to be more straightforward.

5) To serve the cause of strengthening and promoting unity among the body at PVCC

In Ephesians 4:12-14, Paul seems to indicate a clear connection between a church's unity and her response to doctrine. Paul states, "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

Instead of weakening the church, a recognition of and adherence to sound doctrine stabilizes the church against the "winds" of confusion; it strengthens and enables her to grow in unity and to contend for the faith²⁴—especially in the midst of false teaching.

Additionally, we concur with Bethlehem Baptist Church in the following statement, taken from the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith:

We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine,

²⁴ Jude 3

around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of church or school or mission or ministry, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders.

6) To establish the identity of PVCC

Every church is uniquely different. PVCC's church sign and a few sermons simply are not sufficient to accurately and comprehensively identify who we are as a church. Our confession of faith will serve as a clear and concise statement of just that—who we are. Again, this statement assumes that what we believe directly impacts what we do when we gather together as a body or represent our church in the community. PVCC's Confession of Faith makes an obvious statement to our community as to those truths that we hold most dearly and unapologetically. Furthermore, our confession gives us an objective, doctrinal identity and is practically helpful for those trying to discern the church God would lead them to join. Additionally, if a person is shocked to hear a particular doctrine taught from the pulpit after attending for an extended length of time, the Confession should have already introduced them to the teaching. It is not the agenda of PVCC to hide or be ashamed of what we believe. Our agenda in this Confession is not to promote theological systems. Our goal is to

concisely present, in general, a summary of the foundational doctrines that Scripture presents as the most prevalent and crucial.

7) To show wisdom in recognizing and embracing the sound doctrine of our forefathers

Essentially, PVCC's Confession of Faith is an eclectic blend of many other confessions. Some were written as recently as 2000, while others have existed for hundreds of years. As a result, only a small portion of the subject matter is "original" to PVCC. In many instances the vocabulary, sentence and paragraph structure, examples and emphases have been personalized, but the foundation and majority of the content came from like-minded churches, seminaries and alliances.

W. Hetherington is right when he said, "A confession of faith is not the very voice of Divine Truth, but the echo of that Truth from souls that have heard its utterance, felt its power, and are answering to its call."

Furthermore, we agree with the words of Robert Rayburn in his article "Creeds and Confessions". In referring to previously written and historical confessions of faith, Rayburn says:

"Of course, each one, and especially each minister, must judge them (the confessions) with Bible in hand. But it is one thing to receive these dogmas "with great eagerness and examine the Scriptures ... to see if they be true;" another thing altogether to imagine that one can, by oneself, without recourse to or dependence upon the creeds, come to an equally sure

understanding of the Divine Mind. Creeds and confessions are voices from the church's past. They are the distillation of the church's discoveries of the meaning and the implications of the truth as God has revealed it in Holy Scripture and confirmed it in the experience and the conscience of his people. They are the witness our fathers bear to us across the ages regarding what they considered to be of supreme importance and essential to be conveyed to the rising generations. It is in this sense that creeds are, in its most compressed and authoritative form, the church's "tradition," what is "handed down" from one generation to the next."

We would be arrogant and unwise to negate the conclusions of nearly 2,000 years of church history. However, we do recognize that over hundreds of years (culturally-speaking) times have changed.

Therefore, confessions are not beyond revision and improvement.

Additionally, church history did not stop in the seventeenth century.

We are faced with a multitude of doctrinal errors and cultural crises today that did not previously exist. Consequently, similar to what Southern Baptists did in updating the Baptist Faith and Message from 1963 to 2000 (due to a changing culture with varying issues), so we maintain the right and openness to revising the PVCC Confession of Faith if necessary, yet only with extreme caution.

8) To identify the church's convictions in the hour of tribulation

We live in a world that continues to place less emphasis on traditional values. One hundred years ago, the idea of same-sex marriage was

unthinkable. The idea of tax dollars funding abortions would have been unthinkable. The imprisonment of a Christian the United States for speaking out against particular sins would have been beyond imagination. Therefore, it is necessary that in such a time as this, as Paul warned us of in these “difficult last days,”²⁵ that PVCC states clearly where we stand on all relevant cultural issues. For example, if a woman decides to join PVCC, it must be clearly articulated to her that if she chooses to have an abortion we would confront her with the sinfulness of her intention and follow through with church discipline if she pursued the abortion.

9) To establish PVCC doctrinally and to guard her from future doctrinal error

Like any church, the leadership of PVCC will change over time. As pastors and leaders come and go, the commitment to sound doctrine at PVCC must not vary. Apart from a church-supported confession of faith clearly outlining PVCC’s doctrinal positions, the possibility exists that liberal-minded men could enter into leadership and introduce unsound doctrine. It has happened in many churches before and we would be unwise and naïve to think that it could not happen to us. However, if PVCC is committed to such a document as this confession, and if all incoming leaders must agree to it, then such a deviation from orthodoxy would be far more difficult, if not impossible. Thus, this confession is not simply for those who are members of PVCC today; it is for our children and our grandchildren—for generations to come—as long as the Lord so tarries.

²⁵ 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Finally, we do not equate this Confession with Scripture. The authority for teaching, preaching, and Christian living is the Word of God. We believe that Scripture is sufficient to teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness.²⁶ This confession serves not as our authority but as our guide in interpreting the authoritative teachings of the Old and New Testaments. Does the PVCC Confession of Faith in anyway assume the authority of Scripture? Absolutely not. One of the common objections to a confession of faith says that the Bible is enough. What right does a church have to interpose its authority to define and articulate the Bible for others?

In response to this objection, we consider the words of Samuel Miller in Creeds and Confessions,

"I answer, this reasoning would prove too much, and therefore proves nothing. For, if admitted, it would prove that all preaching of the gospel is presumptuous and criminal; because preaching always consisted in explaining and enforcing Scripture, and that, for the most part, in the words of the preacher himself. Nay, further; upon the principle of this objection, it not only follows, that no minister of the gospel ought ever do more in the pulpit than simply to read or repeat the very words of Scripture; but it is equally evident that he must read or repeat Scripture to his hearers only in the language in which they were given to the Church. For, as has been often observed, it cannot be said that the very words of any translation of the Bible are the very words of the Holy Spirit. They are only the words which uninspired men

²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16

have chosen, in which to express, as nearly as they were able, the sense of the original. If, therefore, the objection before us be admitted, no man is at liberty to teach the great truths of revelation in any other way than by literally repeating the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New, in the hearing of the people. So extreme is the absurdity to which an erroneous principle will not fail to lead those who are weak enough, or bold enough, to follow it to its legitimate consequences!"

We do not believe that we are in any way stepping out of bounds or minimizing the authority of Scripture. If we believed this, we would not construct such a confession. Instead, we agree with the words of Baptist historian and seminary professor Tom Nettles, "In actuality, history demonstrates that those who value their confessions also give the most intense attention to Scripture and have the greatest regard for the purity and consistency of its doctrines. A loss in confidence in the inerrancy and consistency of the Bible naturally produces a skeptical attitude toward confessions of faith."

Chapter 1

Revelation

General Revelation

God is not silent.²⁷ He has not simply created all things and then taken a backseat to merely watch His creation wonder around aimlessly without a hint or clue of who He is or what He is thinking. There are few ways that God has chosen to show His grace to creation other than in what He has spoken in a general sense through His creation. When we see the sun, moon, and stars, we can clearly perceive elements of His glory.²⁸ He manifests His glory in creation so clearly to us that even apart from any additional revelation of Him, we would be without excuse on the Day of Judgment.²⁹ However, while the revelation of God in creation and our conscience³⁰ is enough to leave us without excuse before God, it is not enough to give us that knowledge of God, which is necessary for our salvation.³¹

Special Revelation

For this reason, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God has graciously and specifically revealed His character, His will, and His plan to us in human words³² in what we call the Bible. The Bible is the sole authority for the church and is the final and supreme standard by which we test all claims about what is true and right. All Scripture (the 66 books of

²⁷ Psalm 50:3

²⁸ Psalm 19:1

²⁹ Romans 1:19-21

³⁰ Romans 2:12-16

³¹ Romans 1:16

³² 2 Peter 1:21

the Old and New testaments) was literally breathed out by God³³ and as a result became a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction. Because God cannot lie,³⁴ the Bible contains no errors or contradictions.³⁵ We deny that any portion of the Bible may legitimately be used in an effort to find contradiction or to undermine the truthfulness of another portion. The words of Paul, Matthew, Luke, Moses, or any other biblical writer are just as authoritative and God-breathed as are the very words of Christ Himself.³⁶

It is the 66 books of the Bible—and these alone—that constitute the written Word of God. The books commonly called the Apocrypha, (that appear in some versions of Scripture and most notably used by the Roman Catholic Church) are not inspired by God and thus have no authority in the church. Furthermore, we believe that the canon of Scripture is closed. This means that no other books or writings are to be added to Scripture or are to be considered of equal or superseding authority with Scripture.³⁷ It is for this reason that we assert that the Book of Mormon, the Koran, and any other religious writings that claim heavenly authority are false. Upon careful study, it is found that such writings are in direct contradiction to Scripture.

We concede and humbly admit, like the Apostle Peter, that some things in the Bible that are difficult to understand.³⁸ Although the Word of God is written in ordinary human language,, our finite minds,

³³ 2 Timothy 3:16

³⁴ Numbers 23:19, Hebrews 6:18

³⁵ Proverbs 30:5, Psalm 12:6

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Timothy 3:16, Luke 24:27, 44

³⁷ Revelation 22:18

³⁸ 2 Peter 3:16

traditional biases, personal sin and cultural assumptions hinder us from mastering the biblical text. It is for this reason that the work and illumination of the Holy Spirit is essential for an accurate understanding of God's Word.³⁹ While reading and studying the Word of God, we must pray like the Psalmist, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law... Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes."⁴⁰

If after pleading with the Holy Spirit to grant us discernment into a right understanding of God's Word—and we continue to wrestle with difficult or seemingly "grey" doctrine—we must adhere to the principle of interpretation known as the "analogy of faith." In other words, the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. In the instance where a question exists about the true or full sense of a particular passage of Scripture, we must search for other passages in the Bible that speak more clearly to the same topic⁴¹ without disregarding the original text in dispute.

In summary, we concur with the "Foundation Documents" of The Gospel Coalition:

The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the Gospel.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:12-16

⁴⁰ Psalm 119:18, 12

⁴¹ Acts 15:15-16

Chapter 2

The Nature and Character of God

Introduction

It is the temptation and instinct of mankind to create in our own sinful minds a “god” that is the figment of our imagination. While Scripture teaches that we are made in the image of God,⁴² we tend to want to create gods made in our image. As a result, the God of the universe is often wrongly depicted and understood in a way that is dreadfully contrary to His true being. It is for this reason that we began Chapter One by addressing the Word of God. The primary and only infallible basis (besides the general revelation of creation) that we have for understanding the person and character of God is what He has clearly told us about Himself in Scripture. At PVCC, we are careful to make sure that we, independent of Scripture, are not defining God. God and God alone is capable of defining Himself.

Accordingly, everything that we say and believe about the character of God is rooted in Scripture alone. One of the greatest mistakes in the modern identity of God is to either over- or under-emphasize any number of His attributes. For example, it is true that God is love,⁴³ but we fear that often the love of God is emphasized in such a way that His other and equally important attributes are dismissed, denied, or overlooked. Additionally, we understand that the love of God can only

⁴² Genesis 1:27

⁴³ 1 John 4:16

truly be grasped when it is joined to His holiness,⁴⁴ righteousness,⁴⁵ and justice.⁴⁶ God hates sin⁴⁷ and will by no means clear the guilty.⁴⁸ Additionally, God is all-powerful,⁴⁹ all-knowing,⁵⁰ everywhere present,⁵¹ and He does not change.⁵² At the same time, He is gracious, merciful, patient, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving sin⁵³ and a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.⁵⁴

One God In Three Persons

In a careful study of Scripture, we quickly learn that one of the most important things that God has revealed about Himself is that while He is the one and only true God,⁵⁵ He uniquely exists in three persons.⁵⁶ This doctrine is most commonly referred to as the doctrine of the Trinity. In the Trinity, we see God the Father,⁵⁷ God the Son⁵⁸ and God the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹

In the Trinity, we also see equality of deity; that is, each Person of the Godhead is fully and completely God.⁶⁰ Jesus Himself claimed that He

⁴⁴ Exodus 15:11, Psalm 29:2, Isaiah 6:3

⁴⁵ Psalm 9:8, Psalm 89:14, Romans 1:17

⁴⁶ Isaiah 30:18

⁴⁷ Psalm 5:5-6

⁴⁸ Exodus 34:7, Nahum 1:2-3

⁴⁹ Genesis 17:1

⁵⁰ Ezekiel 11:5, Acts 15:18

⁵¹ Jeremiah 23:23-24, Psalm 139:7-12, Amos 9:2-3

⁵² Malachi 3:6

⁵³ Exodus 34:6-7

⁵⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:6

⁵⁶ Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14

⁵⁷ John 6:46, John 20:17, Romans 15:6

⁵⁸ John 20:31, John 5:18, Matthew 11:27, John 10:30

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, Romans 8:27, Genesis 1:2, John 14:16-17

⁶⁰ John 1:18, John 1:1, Colossians 2:9, Acts 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 3:16

was one with His Father⁶¹; Paul asserts Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.⁶² Likewise, even Christ Himself was active in the creation of the world, thus indicating his eternity.⁶³ At the same time, the Spirit of God is not merely an inferior Person in the Trinity. He is fully God, even as is the Father and the Son. At PVCC, we are committed to worshipping and glorifying all three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit.

While we see equality in terms of deity, we see a distinction in terms of the roles among members of the Trinity. For example, in terms of God's plan for the salvation of sinners, God the Father chose those whom He would save;⁶⁴ He gave His chosen ones to His Son,⁶⁵ and then sent the Son to die on their behalf.⁶⁶ However, it was Christ the Son who obeyed His Father,⁶⁷ took the form of a Servant,⁶⁸ bore our sins on the cross,⁶⁹ and in so doing absorbed the wrath of His Father as our substitute.⁷⁰ Following the resurrection of Christ,⁷¹ it is the Spirit of God who has come to apply redemption to us by convicting us of our sin⁷² and giving us the new birth⁷³ whereby we are enabled to repent of sin and place our faith in Christ.

⁶¹ John 10:30

⁶² Colossians 1:15

⁶³ Colossians 1:16

⁶⁴ Ephesians 1:4

⁶⁵ John 6:37, 39

⁶⁶ John 3:16, John 6:38

⁶⁷ John 6:38,

⁶⁸ Philippians 2:8, Isaiah 52:13 – Isaiah 53:10

⁶⁹ 1 Peter 2:24, 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁷⁰ Isaiah 53:10

⁷¹ Matthew 28:1-10

⁷² John 16:8

⁷³ John 3:3-8

Here in our salvation, and in many other places in Scripture (such as in creation)⁷⁴ we see all three persons of the Trinity present, performing different roles. Within the Trinity, we see the perfect display of love and relationship.⁷⁵ As a result, we must humbly recognize that God did not create mankind because He was lonely or needy. The fact is, prior to the creation of man, God was supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity.⁷⁶ Before creation he was not deprived⁷⁷ of any additional glory that was not already present in Himself.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Genesis 1:1-2, Colossians 1:16

⁷⁵ John 17:26

⁷⁶ Proverbs 8:27-30

⁷⁷ Psalm 50:9-15, Acts 17:25

⁷⁸ John 17:1

Chapter 3

The Sovereignty of God

From beginning to end, Scripture is clear that God remains in absolute control of the world and its inhabitants—all that He created.⁷⁹ From the casting of the lot,⁸⁰ to the bird falling from the sky,⁸¹ to the activities of the nations,⁸² to the plans of politicians,⁸³ to the secret acts of individuals,⁸⁴ to what will happen to us tomorrow,⁸⁵ to scheduling the very day that we will die,⁸⁶ God has written the stories of our lives and the story of the entire universe. Thus, we deny the theology held by some known as “open theism,” which asserts that God is both inactive and unable to predict the future occurrences of His creation.⁸⁷

It is important to note that God has not made any determination based upon any conditions that He foresaw in us or decisions that we would make.⁸⁸ Instead, God has decreed all things by the perfect and holy counsel of His will alone.⁸⁹

We deny that the doctrine of God’s sovereignty implies that human beings are without responsibility—that we are merely pre-

⁷⁹ Isaiah 40:28

⁸⁰ Acts 1:24-26, Proverbs 16:33

⁸¹ Matthew 10:29-30

⁸² Psalm 33:10-11, Amos 3:6, Lamentations 3:37-38, Genesis 50:20

⁸³ Revelation 17:16-17, Proverbs 21:1

⁸⁴ Proverbs 20:24, 16:9

⁸⁵ Psalm 139:16

⁸⁶ Hebrews 9:12

⁸⁷ Isaiah 46:10

⁸⁸ Romans 9:11, 13, 16, 18

⁸⁹ Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 46:10-11

programmed to act and behave in certain ways. Here we venture into one of the great mysteries of Scripture: The mysterious relationship between the absolute sovereignty of God and the total responsibility of man. We humbly admit that these two truths are hard to grasp⁹⁰ and that there are simply some questions that our finite minds will never have the ability to fully answer in this life.⁹¹ However, we know by faith that the sovereignty of God is perfectly compatible with the responsibility of man, and that in Scripture we see that man is always morally accountable for his actions.⁹² At the same time, we recognize that God has acted in such a sovereign way that He is neither the author of sin nor is capable of sinning,⁹³ and that He never condemns a person unjustly.⁹⁴

The Doctrine of Election

If God has ordained all things that come to pass, this includes the results of His plan of salvation as set forth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that God's election of sinners is unconditional. That is, from before the foundation of the world,⁹⁵ God chose in His grace⁹⁶ to save for Himself an elect⁹⁷ people through Jesus Christ. God's choice of His elect was in no way affected, or conditioned by, some merit or deed that He foreknew these individuals would possess.⁹⁸ Neither (as many

⁹⁰ 2 Peter 3:16

⁹¹ Isaiah 55:8-9

⁹² Romans 3:19, John 5:39-40

⁹³ Deuteronomy 32:4, 1 John 1:5, James 1:13

⁹⁴ Romans 1:20, Romans 2:11-12, Daniel 4:37

⁹⁵ Ephesians 1:4-5

⁹⁶ Romans 11:5-8

⁹⁷ 1 Peter 1:1

⁹⁸ Romans 9:11

argue) did God make His choice based upon those whom He foreknew “would” have chosen Him of their own will and accord.⁹⁹

At this point we must rightly recognize that some have taken this beautiful doctrine of divine election and abused it by altogether negating human responsibility. Again, although it is difficult for our human minds to grasp, man does have the responsibility to knowingly and consciously repent of his sin and turn to faith in Jesus Christ; otherwise he will perish eternally in hell.¹⁰⁰ Any gospel that renounces the necessity of human faith and repentance is not the true gospel found in Scripture. The Scriptural teaching is that man must turn from his sin and come to faith in Christ. However, we recognize that the only reason that man is capable of doing these things is because God in His grace has enabled man to do so.¹⁰¹ Man must repent, but man can only repent after God grants him repentance.¹⁰² Man must place faith in Christ, but He can only do so after God has given him the gift of faith.¹⁰³ Man does not receive God’s election because he first believed in Christ. Instead, man believes in Christ because God has elected him and because God previously appointed him to eternal life.¹⁰⁴ Thus, genuine and fruit-bearing faith in Christ is the evidence of one’s election.

At PVCC, we recognize that the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and His unconditional election are deep and sometimes difficult to fully grasp. So, it is with humility and patience that we teach these truths.

⁹⁹ John 1:12-13, Romans 3:11

¹⁰⁰ Luke 13:3, John 5:39-40, John 3:16-18

¹⁰¹ John 6:44, 65

¹⁰² Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:24-25

¹⁰³ Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 1:29, Romans 12:3, Acts 14:27

¹⁰⁴ Acts 13:48

We will not refuse membership to individuals who do not fully agree with the arguments of these doctrines. However, we respectfully require that prospective members have teachable spirits and a commitment not to willfully undermine the teaching of PVCC. We strongly encourage all members to prayerfully, humbly, and thoroughly search the Scriptures to see if these things are not so.¹⁰⁵ The leaders of PVCC will embrace the wisdom of the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 and commit to handling these doctrines with “special prudence and care.”

¹⁰⁵ Acts 17:11

Chapter 4

Creation and Fall

We believe that God created the universe¹⁰⁶ and everything in it¹⁰⁷ out of nothing.¹⁰⁸ We believe that God created man in his own image¹⁰⁹ in an instant, as He did the rest of creation, thus negating the “scientific” theory of evolution.

The first two human beings, Adam¹¹⁰ and Eve,¹¹¹ were created in the image of God and were morally upright, and “very good,” like the rest of creation.¹¹² However, by their own wills (instead of obeying God)¹¹³ they chose to listen to Satan and as a result sinned against God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹¹⁴

Consequently, Adam and Eve plunged themselves and all of humanity into sin and death, having fallen from their original innocence and communion with God.¹¹⁵ Because Adam is the head of the human race, his fall and spiritual death became the fall and spiritual death of every single human being. As a result, we all inherited a disease that will ultimately kill us,¹¹⁶ the disease of sin.¹¹⁷ Having inherited this sin disease, otherwise known as “original sin,” all human beings are now

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 1:1

¹⁰⁷ Psalm 24:1-2

¹⁰⁸ Hebrews 11:3, Hebrews 1:2, John 1:1-3

¹⁰⁹ Genesis 1:27

¹¹⁰ Genesis 2:20

¹¹¹ Genesis 3:20

¹¹² Genesis 1:31

¹¹³ Genesis 2:17

¹¹⁴ Genesis 3:6

¹¹⁵ Genesis 3:7-8, Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:21

¹¹⁶ Genesis 3:19

¹¹⁷ Romans 5:12-19

corrupt by nature,¹¹⁸ enslaved¹¹⁹ and dead to sin¹²⁰ even from their conception.¹²¹ As a result, we are totally depraved and morally unable to please God apart from His grace,¹²² possessing no ability to perform any truly righteous deed in His sight.¹²³ Additionally, we are by nature children of God's wrath¹²⁴ and remain his enemies until rescued by Christ.¹²⁵ Furthermore, because of our spiritually dead condition apart from Christ,¹²⁶ we remain powerless to and completely incapable of coming to Christ on our own.¹²⁷ God Himself must draw us.¹²⁸

Not only was mankind affected by sin, but also the entire creation now bears the curse of man's sin.¹²⁹ It is for this reason that the creation is presently plagued by sickness, decay, tragedy, and loss and longs for the day when it too, will be redeemed.¹³⁰

¹¹⁸ Ephesians 2:2-3

¹¹⁹ Romans 6:16, 20

¹²⁰ Ephesians 2:1

¹²¹ Psalm 51:5

¹²² 1 Corinthians 2:14, Romans 8:7-8, Deuteronomy 29:4

¹²³ Isaiah 64:6

¹²⁴ Ephesians 2:3

¹²⁵ Romans 5:10

¹²⁶ Ephesians 2:1

¹²⁷ Romans 3:10-11

¹²⁸ John 6:44

¹²⁹ Genesis 3:14, 17-18

¹³⁰ Romans 8:20-22, Revelation 22:3

Chapter 5

Jesus Christ, The Savior Of The World

More than 2,000 years ago, God became a Man in the person of Jesus Christ.¹³¹ Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.¹³² He was fully God¹³³ and fully human,¹³⁴ one Person with two natures. By maintaining the nature of both God and Man, it was Jesus Christ who was the Chosen One of God—the one and only Mediator between God and fallen man.¹³⁵

Although Christ experienced the temptations and difficulties that all humans face, He never sinned.¹³⁶ In his earthly ministry, Christ preached, taught, showed power and authority over evil, and worked countless miracles.¹³⁷ Furthermore, He came to walk in perfect obedience to His Father, fulfilling his role as the second Adam; where the first Adam failed, Christ succeeded.¹³⁸ As He marched toward the cross at Golgotha,¹³⁹ it became clear that He was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies and that He was indeed the Messiah of God,¹⁴⁰ the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.¹⁴¹ He proved Himself also to be the Prophet like Moses,¹⁴² the

¹³¹ John 1:1, 14

¹³² Luke 1:34-35

¹³³ Matthew 1:23

¹³⁴ Luke 2:52

¹³⁵ 1 Timothy 2:5

¹³⁶ Hebrews 4:15

¹³⁷ Matthew 4:23-24

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:45

¹³⁹ Matthew 27:33

¹⁴⁰ John 1:41

¹⁴¹ Genesis 3:15

Priest after the order of Melchizedek,¹⁴³ the Son of David,¹⁴⁴ and the Suffering Servant.¹⁴⁵ He was in fact the Promised One that Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms had said would come.¹⁴⁶

We believe that Christ both voluntarily¹⁴⁷ and in accordance with the predetermined plan of God¹⁴⁸ suffered and died on the cross as a substitute for sinners.¹⁴⁹ He did this so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.¹⁵⁰ On the cross He canceled sin,¹⁵¹ satisfied the wrath of God that we deserved,¹⁵² and by bearing the full penalty for our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe in Christ.¹⁵³

Because the wrath and condemnation of God was fully satisfied in the death of Christ, and because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us by faith, we now stand justified in the presence of God.¹⁵⁴ There is therefore now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.¹⁵⁵

This is only part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we were to end with the death of Jesus, then the "Gospel," which literally means "good news," would not be good news at all. We believe that not only did

¹⁴² Deuteronomy 18:18

¹⁴³ Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:5-6

¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 9:7, Matthew 1:1

¹⁴⁵ Isaiah 52:13, 53:3-6

¹⁴⁶ Luke 24:27, 44

¹⁴⁷ John 10:18

¹⁴⁸ Acts 2:23

¹⁴⁹ Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24

¹⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁵¹ Colossians 2:14

¹⁵² 1 John 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:9

¹⁵³ Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18, Colossians 1:22

¹⁵⁴ Romans 5:1

¹⁵⁵ Romans 8:1

Christ die, but that He was buried and on the third day, rose from the dead. After His resurrection many witnesses, as prophesied in Scripture, saw Christ.¹⁵⁶ By His resurrection, Christ broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it.¹⁵⁷ Through this death and resurrection, Christ has become the only means of salvation. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,¹⁵⁸ thereby making Jesus Christ the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life. No man is able to come to God except through Him.¹⁵⁹ All other religions, alleged saviors, and so-called roads to heaven are false and lead to hell. What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

¹⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:4

¹⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

¹⁵⁸ Acts 4:12

¹⁵⁹ John 14:6

Chapter 6

Faith and the Gospel That Saves

It is through the believing of this message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that God saves sinners.¹⁶⁰ We believe that upon hearing and believing this Gospel message, God justifies the ungodly by faith alone (apart from works).¹⁶¹ Our faith, which is a gift from God,¹⁶² is the sole instrument by which we are united to Christ; we then become righteous and acceptable to God. This righteousness is not anything that we have done or earned. Neither is it imparted to us at baptism or over time. Instead, it is imputed, or given, to us when we believe and it is the very righteousness of Christ Himself.¹⁶³

While it is faith alone that initially saves, we believe that genuine saving faith is never alone. It necessarily produces the fruits of the Spirit.¹⁶⁴ If one claims to have faith in Christ but demonstrates no evidence of Christian fruit, that person's supposed faith is dead and does not save.¹⁶⁵ Again, it is not works that save,¹⁶⁶ but works are the guaranteed by-product of authentic faith in Christ. Grace is the root; works are the fruit. PVCC believes that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

¹⁶⁰ Romans 1:16

¹⁶¹ Titus 3:5-7, Romans 3:28, 4:4-5, Galatians 2:16, Romans 5:1, Galatians 3:24

¹⁶² Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 1:27, Romans 12:3

¹⁶³ 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:18-19

¹⁶⁴ Galatians 5:22-23, Matthew 7:16-20

¹⁶⁵ James 2:14

¹⁶⁶ Ephesians 2:8-9

This powerful Gospel message that saves is to be proclaimed to every tongue, tribe, and nation.¹⁶⁷ People everywhere, without exception, are commanded to repent and believe in the Gospel.¹⁶⁸ We believe that the Scripture teaches that we must proclaim a universal offer of the Gospel to all persons and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the Gospel.¹⁶⁹ It is not our responsibility to try to discern who are the elect and those who are not. Only God knows those who are His own. So we, with compassionate and broken hearts, beg and plead with sinners to come to Christ,¹⁷⁰ believing what the Gospel promises: Namely, that whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.¹⁷¹ Because God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,¹⁷² we too should not be willing that any should perish but that all should be saved. If one's view of the sovereignty of God quenches his passion for souls and the desire to preach the Gospel to all sinners, then this person's theology is not from God. We reject any theological posture or disposition that does not passionately preach the Gospel to all people, or that does not boldly demand men and women to repent and believe. In some form of invitation, we, like Paul, see it biblically appropriate to persuade,¹⁷³ beg, and compel sinners to be reconciled to God.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁶⁸ Acts 17:30

¹⁶⁹ John 5:40, Matthew 23:27, Romans 9:32, Proverbs 1:24, Acts 13:46

¹⁷⁰ Matthew 23:27, Romans 9:1-3

¹⁷¹ John 3:16, Romans 10:13

¹⁷² 2 Peter 3:9

¹⁷³ 2 Corinthians 5:11

¹⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:20

One might naturally ask this question: If God has already determined those He is going to save, then what is our motivation for preaching the Gospel? While it is true that God has chosen those whom He will save, it is equally true that He has chosen us as His instruments and the means by which people will hear and embrace the saving message of the Gospel. A lost world cannot believe in a Christ of whom they have never heard; we have been set apart by God to proclaim His saving message.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the doctrine of election should not quench our desire to share the Gospel. Rather, it should motivate and inspire us all the more. Scripture says that Christ has redeemed people from every tongue, tribe and nation and has appointed them to eternal life. When they hear the Gospel, they will eventually believe.¹⁷⁶ The Word of God is powerful and when it reaches the hearts of God's chosen ones, it will not return to Him void, but will accomplish its saving purpose for which God sent it.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Romans 10:14-17, Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁷⁶ Acts 13:48

¹⁷⁷ Isaiah 55:11

Chapter 7

Sanctification and Perseverance

Upon conversion, the believer is ushered into the process of sanctification where he is made a partaker of Christ's holiness and over time becomes increasingly conformed to His image.¹⁷⁸ This process of sanctification manifests itself not only as Christians produce more fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit,¹⁷⁹ but also as the believer continues to grow in Christ.¹⁸⁰ By degrees sin is "put off" and righteousness is "put on." This process of sanctification continues throughout the life of the believer, and although it may likely be characterized by "ups and downs" and the inevitable fall into sin on occasion,¹⁸¹ God always finishes what He starts in the life of His children.¹⁸²

PVCC also believes in the doctrine of glorification,¹⁸³ that is, that on the Last Day, God will raise our lowly bodies from the dead and transform them to be like Christ's glorious body.¹⁸⁴ So, there is a real sense in which the salvation of the believer is not yet fully completed. After all, we are like the rest of creation in that we are groaning for the day when we will receive the redemption of our bodies.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps one of the greatest shortcomings of man's understanding of the Gospel is that we have limited the power and scope of the cross. On the cross,

¹⁷⁸ Romans 8:29, John 17:17, Ephesians 5:26, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

¹⁷⁹ Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁸⁰ 1 John 3:6, 9, 2:1

¹⁸¹ 1 John 1:8

¹⁸² Philippians 1:6

¹⁸³ Romans 8:30

¹⁸⁴ Philippians 3:21

¹⁸⁵ Romans 8:23

Christ did not merely die to save our souls; He died to save our bodies.¹⁸⁶

Yet, two fundamental questions must be answered: “Can believers rest assured that they will be saved on the last day?” And, is it possible for a true believer to permanently and eternally fall away from the faith? We believe the power of God¹⁸⁷ preserves His children and prevents them from ever losing their salvation.¹⁸⁸ However, since the Bible also teaches the responsibility of man, believers must continue on in faith. For our encouragement and the Lord’s glory, Peter tells us that it is only “God’s power” that “guards” us and allows us to maintain this faith.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, Paul tells us that we must “work out our own salvation.” Again, however, for our encouragement and the Lord’s glory the Apostle tells us that our ability to work out our own salvation is only possible because it is “God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”¹⁹⁰

Additionally, we recognize the great danger in the commonly known teaching of “once saved, always saved.” Theologically, this phrase is true. None of God’s true children can lose their salvation. However, this doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is often presented in a way that is both dangerous and unbiblical. So, we choose not to use the language of “once saved, always saved,” but instead we refer to this biblical teaching as the “perseverance of the saints,” which asserts the following: all of those who have truly been born again will be kept by

¹⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

¹⁸⁷ 1 Peter 1:5

¹⁸⁸ John 10:28-29, John 6:37-39, Philippians 1:6

¹⁸⁹ 1 Peter 1:3-7

¹⁹⁰ Philippians 2:12-13

God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have truly been born again. The evidence of one's conversion is not the fact that they prayed to receive Christ (sometimes called the sinner's prayer) at some point.¹⁹¹ The evidence of one's conversion is perseverance in faith and obedience to Christ until the end of life.¹⁹² Scripture does not teach that one may simply make a profession of faith and then continue to live in sin and expect to be granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven.¹⁹³ If one does not endure to the end, then he or she will not be saved.¹⁹⁴ Such falling away is simply proof that someone who does not persist in the faith was never truly a child of God.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, those who fall away do not lose their salvation because they never possessed any salvation to lose.

How then, can we know if we are truly children of God? Peter tells us that there is a way to make our "calling and election sure." We can make these things sure by working out and demonstrating the fruits of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, and brotherly affection. If we continue to practice and cultivate these qualities, while still maintaining faith in Christ,¹⁹⁶ then Peter assures us that we have every reason to believe that we are the elect of God¹⁹⁷ and that we will surely be saved on the last day.

¹⁹¹ Matthew 7:21-23

¹⁹² John 8:31-32, Colossians 1:22-23, Hebrews 3:14

¹⁹³ 1 John 3:9-10

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 10:22

¹⁹⁵ 1 John 2:19

¹⁹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, John 10:27, Acts 13:48

¹⁹⁷ 2 Peter 1:5-11

Chapter 8

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity,¹⁹⁸ is fully God¹⁹⁹ and that He has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation,²⁰⁰ creating faith in God's people,²⁰¹ performing signs and wonders,²⁰² giving triumphs in battle,²⁰³ empowering the preaching of prophets,²⁰⁴ and inspiring the writing of Scripture.²⁰⁵ However, when Christ accomplished His work on the cross and ascended to the right hand of His Father, He initiated a more glorious era of the Holy Spirit by pouring out the promise of the Father on His church.²⁰⁶

In this age, the most distinct role of the Spirit is to glorify the crucified and risen Christ.²⁰⁷ He does this by empowering the people of God to preach the Gospel of Christ,²⁰⁸ by opening the hearts of sinners that they might see and trust in Christ,²⁰⁹ by revealing the beauty of Christ in His Word and by transforming His people from glory to glory as they increase in Christ-likeness.²¹⁰ Additionally, the Spirit honors Christ by

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁹⁹ Acts 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

²⁰⁰ Genesis 1:2

²⁰¹ Romans 8:7-9

²⁰² Judges 14:6

²⁰³ Judges 3:10

²⁰⁴ 1 Samuel 10:6

²⁰⁵ 2 Peter 1:21

²⁰⁶ Luke 24:49, Acts 2:33

²⁰⁷ John 16:13-14, John 7:39

²⁰⁸ Acts 1:8

²⁰⁹ Romans 15:18-19, Acts 16:14, John 3:8

²¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

strengthening His church²¹¹ through His distribution of the spiritual gifts.²¹² The gifts serve the primary function of building up and edifying the body of Christ, not seeking to bring attention those sharing their gifts with the body.²¹³

We acknowledge in humility that the study and nature of spiritual gifts have caused dispute and controversy among God's people. However, we are resolved that this will not be the case at PVCC. We are comfortable with the fact that in our body there will be varying views on the gifts. Some will be cessationists: Those who believe that some of the gifts, namely the miraculous gifts of tongues and prophecy, have ceased and no longer exists in today's church. Others in our body are continuationists, meaning they have not been convinced from Scripture that any of the gifts have ceased. In our fellowship, believers adhering to both views have respected one another—serving together in harmony and peace—and we expect nothing different in the future.

However, by way of caution, we will warn against three dangers as it relates to the study of the spiritual gifts. Of these three dangers, two of them are essentially "extreme" views as it relates to the Spirit—views that we are convinced are false and seriously harmful to Christ's church. They are as follows:

1) We must never teach or believe that any true child of God (regardless of his "level" of giftedness) does not have the Holy Spirit.

²¹¹ Matthew 16:18

²¹² 1 Corinthians 12:7-10

²¹³ 1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:5, 14:12, 14:19, 14:26, 14:31

In other words, we reject the historical Pentecostal view that the evidence of having been baptized in the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues (or other languages). We believe that every true child of God receives the Holy Spirit upon conversion.²¹⁴ Furthermore, Scripture does not identify speaking in tongues as the necessary evidence of the Holy Spirit; rather, it identifies love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as the fruit or the evidences of the Spirit.²¹⁵

2) We must never allow our affections toward the Holy Spirit to take priority over or take away from our worship of Christ.

Again, the primary mission of the Spirit is to promote the glory of Jesus Christ.²¹⁶ Any activity or worship that emphasizes the Spirit in a way that is contrary to His role in the godhead—that is, to emphasize primarily the glory of Christ—is dangerous and not from God. At the same time, we recognize that it is also dangerous and unbiblical to underemphasize the Holy Spirit and to not worship Him as though He were not equal to God.

3) We can be spiritually gifted, and yet still be spiritually immature.

The church at Corinth was not lacking in any spiritual gift,²¹⁷ yet their lifestyles and behaviors were reflective of the fact that they were spiritually immature, even to the point where Paul referred to them as

²¹⁴ Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9, 11, 14, 16

²¹⁵ Ephesians 5:22-23

²¹⁶ John 14:25-26, John 16:13-14, John 7:39, John 15:26

²¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:7

"infants."²¹⁸ One's apparent giftedness on Sundays or in the context of the local church is meaningless if he or she is not living a life that is pleasing to Jesus Christ the other six days of the week. PVCC's primary concern is not to be a church known for our giftedness, but a church known for our holiness, humility, love for our fellow man and passion for the Gospel.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:1

²¹⁹ Ephesians 5:27, Colossians 1:22

Chapter 9

The Church

We believe in one universal church that consists of all of those from the beginning of human history who have been called by God, saved by the blood of Christ, and united to Him by faith. Jesus Christ is the head of the church²²⁰ and guards and empowers her in such a way that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.²²¹ The universal church manifests itself in local, independent churches, such as Pleasant Valley Community Church.

Membership

Membership of each local church is to be consistent only of those who have professed faith in Christ, evidently repented of sin and been baptized by immersion following, not prior to, conversion.

Unfortunately, one can be a part of a "local church" and have his or her name on a church role, but this does not mean that he or she is a part of the true church, covered by the blood of Christ. It is far too often that religiosity, baptism, church attendance and membership are equated with salvation. While it is our hope that our church will grow numerically with committed followers of Christ, we are not willing to sacrifice the Truth for church growth. We believe that we can be seeker-accommodating, friendly and hospitable without being driven to compromise the unapologetic preaching of God's Word or succumb to other tactics aimed primarily at simply "attracting" more people.

²²⁰ Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22, 4:15-16, 5:23

²²¹ Matthew 16:18

Whomever God leads to PVCC, it is our commitment to strive with all excellence to maintain a church membership that is regenerate: That is, to make sure that only those who are truly born again become members of PVCC.

While the requirement of church membership is not explicitly stated in Scripture, we do believe that it is implied—and for several reasons. First, multiple times in Scripture, local churches are called to “remove” a person from among them. We actually see this same command given four times in one passage by Paul while dealing with a sexually immoral man in the church at Corinth. Paul commands the church at Corinth to “remove him,” “deliver him to Satan,” “cleanse him out,” and to “purge him” from among them.²²² The idea is that one can only be “removed” from a particular group of people if he is an official part of a group of people.

Later, in speaking to the same church at Corinth, Paul speaks of how the church disciplined a man by a “majority vote.”²²³ A “majority” vote is only sensible in the case where this majority is taken from a recognized whole. So the natural question one must ask Paul is, “The majority of what?” Certainly it was not simply the majority of any random persons who may decide to attend a particular church business meeting. Rather, Paul was obviously referring to the “majority” of those voting church members.

²²² 1 Corinthians 5:2, 5, 7, 13

²²³ 2 Corinthians 2:6-7

Additionally, in Paul's first letter to Timothy, he encourages Timothy to keep an "enrollment" of all widows that met specific requirements.²²⁴ If the local churches were to keep lists of widows, it seems natural to assume that they also kept lists of members.

Lastly, it seems inherent in the very nature of God to "keep lists." Multiple times in Scripture we see references to "books" kept by God in heaven, namely of those who are His children.²²⁵ Because God Himself keeps records, it seems natural that His church would also keep records such as ones enlisting its members.

In summary, PVCC values church membership because we believe that Scripture values church membership. With church membership comes both blessing and responsibility. As members of the body of Christ, we are to build each other's faith through love, encouragement, and the use of our divinely appointed spiritual gifts.²²⁶ At the same time, we believe that church membership requires a commitment to one's local body, which is most recognizably manifested through regular attendance.²²⁷ Such commitment also includes serving in the church according to one's spiritual giftedness,²²⁸ intentional fellowship with other believers,²²⁹ and consistent,²³⁰ cheerful,²³¹ and sacrificial²³²

²²⁴ 1 Timothy 5:9

²²⁵ Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 20:15, 21:27

²²⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 14:26, 14:31, Romans 12:6-8, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

²²⁷ Hebrews 10:24-25

²²⁸ Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

²²⁹ Acts 2:42, 46

²³⁰ 1 Corinthians 16:2

²³¹ 2 Corinthians 9:7

²³² 2 Corinthians 8:3

financial contribution in order to support the ministry and expenses of the church, to relieve the poor, and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world.

Church Discipline

Christ's goal for His church is that she someday be presented to Him holy and without blemish.²³³ We recognize that as long as a church is comprised of sinners, she will never be perfect this side of eternity. However, in order to honor Christ and to be obedient to His commands regarding His church,²³⁴ we must make every conscious effort to rebuke, confront—and in rare cases—eliminate unrepentant sinners from our membership. If and when this is done, it must be done in a spirit of gentleness and humility,²³⁵ not out of anger or wrath, but out of a sincere concern for one's soul and with the hope that such discipline will lead him to repentance.²³⁶ The instruction of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 will serve as our guide in this process and one's final removal will only be by the authority of a majority vote of the congregation (75%).²³⁷ Upon a person's removal from the church membership, while this person is welcome to continue to attend services, he or she is to be viewed as and treated as a non-believer who is in need of repentance and salvation.²³⁸

Church Government

²³³ Ephesians 5:27

²³⁴ Matthew 18:15-20

²³⁵ Galatians 6:1

²³⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:5, James 5:19-20

²³⁷ Matthew 18:17, 2 Corinthians 2:6-7

²³⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, Matthew 18:17

The New Testament church is one that consists of three groups of people: overseers, deacons, and members who hold no official office.²³⁹ Thus, the only two church offices set forth in Scripture are that of the overseer and the deacon. It is our belief that the terms "overseer," "elder," "pastor," and "bishop" refer to the same office.²⁴⁰ PVCC chooses to primarily use the term "pastor," simply because the majority of our congregation is most familiar with this vocabulary. Each church should ideally consist of multiple pastors,²⁴¹ all of which must meet the same qualifications set forth in Scripture.²⁴² These men are to be equal in authority, yet varying in roles and ministerial function. The ministry of the Word,²⁴³ prayer,²⁴⁴ and exercising oversight to the flock should characterize the pastors' ministries. They are not to come across as harsh dictators, but as humble examples.²⁴⁵

The primary role of the deacon is to assist the pastors and serve the church in whatever ways necessary, in order that the pastors might be freed to concentrate more fully on teaching and preaching God's Word.²⁴⁶ These men must meet the qualifications set forth in Scripture.²⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that moral qualifications for deacons are the same as those for pastors. The fundamental difference between

²³⁹ Philippians 1:1

²⁴⁰ Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5, 7, 1 Peter 5:1-2, Ephesians 4:11

²⁴¹ Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5

²⁴² 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9

²⁴³ Acts 6:4, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9

²⁴⁴ Acts 6:4

²⁴⁵ 1 Peter 5:2-3

²⁴⁶ Acts 6:1-7

²⁴⁷ 1 Timothy 3:8-12

the two offices is that pastors must be able to teach,²⁴⁸ while deacons are not required to possess that gift.

Both pastors and deacons are to be affirmed by the elders, recognized and voted upon by the congregation,²⁴⁹ and set apart by what is commonly called “ordination” by prayer and the laying on of hands.²⁵⁰

Mission

The church is to be devoted to a consistent feeding upon the Word of God.²⁵¹ Paul teaches that this equipping of the sheep is necessary so that they will be equipped to do the work of the ministry.²⁵² This duty involves not only the discipleship of younger believers in the congregation,²⁵³ but also necessitates an outward focus that is driven by the commission given by Christ to make disciples of all nations.²⁵⁴ This task involves preaching the Gospel to every tongue, tribe, and nation,²⁵⁵ baptizing and teaching them in the name of the Lord,²⁵⁶ and gathering them into churches,²⁵⁷ enabling them to fulfill their Christian calling among their own people. The ultimate goal of world missions is not to simply save as many as possible from hell. The ultimate goal is to see God create for Himself (via the power of His Gospel) a group of

²⁴⁸ 1 Timothy 3:2

²⁴⁹ Acts 14:23, Acts 6:3-6

²⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 4:14, Acts 6:3, 5-6

²⁵¹ Acts 2:42

²⁵² Ephesians 4:12

²⁵³ Titus 2:4

²⁵⁴ Matthew 28:18-20

²⁵⁵ Revelation 5:9

²⁵⁶ See note 219.

²⁵⁷ Acts 14:23

worshippers who will glorify His name through all of eternity.²⁵⁸

Missions are a temporary necessity until the second coming of Christ.

“Missions exists because worship does not,” says pastor and author

John Piper. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal of missions.

The Ordinances

We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those

who have repented and come to faith²⁵⁹ signify their union with

Christ²⁶⁰ in His death, burial, and resurrection. This union is symbolized

when a believer is immersed in water²⁶¹ in the name of the Father and

the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁶² Baptism does not save, but is rather a

sign of belonging to the people of God— an emblem that the old life

has gone and new life has come.²⁶³ Thus, one’s “profession of faith” in

the New Testament is not merely based on a sign such as “walking an

aisle.” Rather, one’s profession of faith is baptism.

One must not necessarily be baptized only in a Baptist church in order

to be received for membership at PVCC. So long as one’s baptism has

come after conversion, and is by immersion in a credible, Gospel-

preaching church, that baptism will be recognized for membership at

PVCC.

We do not believe in baptismal regeneration, that is, that baptism

causes one to be born again. Neither do we baptize infants or anyone

²⁵⁸ Isaiah 43:7, Revelation 7:9-12

²⁵⁹ Colossians 2:12, Galatians 3:26-27, Acts 2:38, Acts 18:8

²⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:13

²⁶¹ Acts 8:36-39, John 3:23, Romans 6:4

²⁶² Matthew 28:19

²⁶³ Romans 6:4

else who has not first come to a credible saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.²⁶⁴ We do not believe that “sprinkling” is biblical baptism. Therefore, we will not practice sprinkling or accept into membership anyone who has not been baptized by immersion.

The Lord’s Supper is the church ordinance in which baptized believers²⁶⁵ eat bread, signifying Christ’s body broken for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the blood of the New Covenant.²⁶⁶ We observe this supper in remembrance of our Savior, and in effort to proclaim His death until He comes,²⁶⁷ all the while longing for the day when we will eat and drink with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁶⁸

We deny the Roman Catholic Church practice of the Mass, and insist that the Lord’s Supper is in no way a sacrifice. Furthermore, we deny the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Christ. Lastly, we humbly recognize that there may be times when some believers cannot partake in the Lord’s Supper due to unrepented sin.²⁶⁹ All believers should be mindful to only participate only after having first examined themselves and discerned any unrepented sin in their lives—especially as it relates to other members of the body of Christ.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ Acts 2:38

²⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:17-20, 22

²⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

²⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:26

²⁶⁸ Matthew 26:29

²⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:27

²⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:28-29

Chapter 10

The Christian Life

We believe that genuine biblical Christianity is marked not merely by a one-time “profession of faith” or fairly routine church attendance. We deny the legitimacy of one simply being a “Sunday-only Christian.” Instead, we believe that the genuine evidence of one’s saving faith in Christ is that his life is characterized by continually walking in obedience²⁷¹ to the commands of Christ. This walk is empowered by the Spirit of God,²⁷² and characterized by dying to sin on a consistent basis,²⁷³ and continually praying²⁷⁴ and abiding in the Word of God.²⁷⁵ To be sure, none of these things in and of themselves “save” a sinner; rather, they are the indicators of one who has truly been united to Christ by faith.

While there are a number of spiritual disciplines that are helpful in aiding a believer to grow in his or her relationship to Christ, we believe that the two that Scripture emphasize as the most vital include prayer and the reading of God’s Word. The Christian life is energized and sustained primarily by reading and meditating upon the Word of God²⁷⁶ and praying²⁷⁷ so that God would apply His Word to our souls. We believe that the promises of God recorded in Scripture are sufficient to rescue us from the deception of sin by laying out before

²⁷¹ 1 John 5:2, 1 Peter 1:14, Acts 5:29

²⁷² Galatians 5:16-18

²⁷³ 1 Peter 2:24, Romans 6:2, 1 John 2:1

²⁷⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

²⁷⁵ John 8:31-32

²⁷⁶ Ephesians 6:17-18, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 1:1-3

²⁷⁷ Psalm 119:36, Psalm 119:18, Psalm 86:11

us vastly superior pleasures in the protection, provision, and presence of God.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, we believe that reading,²⁷⁹ understanding,²⁸⁰ pondering,²⁸¹ and memorizing²⁸² all that God promises for those who are in Christ is the ordained and effectual means used by the Holy Spirit to break the power of sin's deceptive promises in our lives.

In addition, we believe that prayer is the ordained means of God by which He blesses,²⁸³ sustains,²⁸⁴ and empowers us to do His work.²⁸⁵ However, the driving emphasis of God-honoring prayer is not selfish in nature, but directed toward the worship and uplifting of the name of God,²⁸⁶ longing more than anything for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done.²⁸⁷ We believe that God's sovereignty is not in any way a hindrance to prayer, but rather a motivation to pray and to have faith that our prayers will prevail.²⁸⁸ We understand that in our flesh we often do not understand how and what to pray, but it is during these times that we must always rely on the indwelling Spirit of God to help us to pray as we ought.²⁸⁹ Even when we fail in our flesh and feel as though our prayers are meaningless and in vain, we rest in the

²⁷⁸ 2 Peter 1:3-4, Hebrews 10:34, 11:24-26, 13:13-14

²⁷⁹ Ephesians 3:4

²⁸⁰ Ephesians 5:17

²⁸¹ 2 Timothy 2:7

²⁸² Psalm 119:11

²⁸³ Matthew 7:7-11

²⁸⁴ Philippians 4:6-7

²⁸⁵ Romans 15:30-31, Ephesians 6:19, Matthew 9:38

²⁸⁶ Matthew 6:9

²⁸⁷ Matthew 6:10

²⁸⁸ Ezekiel 36:37-38

²⁸⁹ Romans 8:26

promise of God that the Spirit will still intercede for us according to the perfect will of God.²⁹⁰

Furthermore, as has already been indicated, we believe that the Christian life is one that should be characterized by discipline and obedience to the commands of God. At the same time, however, we recognize the dangers of a spirit of legalism²⁹¹ that so often plagues believers. We encourage all Christians to recognize that Christ has set us free²⁹² and that our standing before God is not based upon our ability or inability to perform in a certain way. We are not in bondage to do or not do certain things. Our standing before God is secure and blameless because we are under the blood and clothed in the righteousness of Christ.²⁹³

Two extremes exist as it relates to our Christian liberty—both dangerous and displeasing to God. The first extreme is legalism, or requiring from ourselves or other Christians something that God's Word does not require.²⁹⁴ Examples would include such things as forbidding another Christian to marry or to eat certain foods, as in the case at the church at Ephesus.²⁹⁵ At PVCC, we are committed to abstain from legalism and to ask of our members only what Christ requires in His Word.

²⁹⁰ Romans 8:27

²⁹¹ 1 Timothy 4:3

²⁹² Galatians 5:1, 13, 2 Corinthians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 9:1-6

²⁹³ 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 8:1

²⁹⁴ Acts 15:1, 5

²⁹⁵ 1 Timothy 4:3

The second extreme is an abuse of the blood-bought freedom given to us in Christ. In our flesh, a frequent temptation is to use our freedom in order to justify or cover-up our sin.²⁹⁶ Mistreating our Christian liberty that leads us into sin is forbidden in Scripture.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ 1 Peter 2:16

²⁹⁷ Romans 6:1-2

Chapter 11

Christians in Culture

We believe that this world is not our home, but that our citizenship is in heaven²⁹⁸ and we are temporarily strangers and aliens²⁹⁹ passing through. We should remain careful to not become too comfortable in this world, but pray and long for the day when we will be with our Lord.³⁰⁰ Although this life is difficult, filled with trials and evil, we must always be of good courage³⁰¹ --not complaining³⁰² but giving thanks in all circumstances.³⁰³

We understand that we are living in a dark world that is ruled by the Devil himself,³⁰⁴ and that we must in turn be the salt³⁰⁵ and light³⁰⁶ of the world, allowing others to see our good deeds so that they will give glory to our Father in heaven.³⁰⁷ We are to love our neighbor³⁰⁸ as ourselves and do good³⁰⁹ to all, even when they do not do good to us.³¹⁰ Therefore, we try not to be narrower in our thinking than the Bible. We must not simply withdraw into seclusion and isolate ourselves from the world, having nothing to do with those outside of Christ.

²⁹⁸ Philippians 3:20

²⁹⁹ Hebrews 11:13

³⁰⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:8

³⁰¹ 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8

³⁰² Philippians 2:14

³⁰³ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

³⁰⁴ John 12:31, Ephesians 2:2, 1 John 5:19, 2 Corinthians 4:4

³⁰⁵ Matthew 5:13

³⁰⁶ Matthew 5:14

³⁰⁷ Matthew 5:16

³⁰⁸ Galatians 5:14

³⁰⁹ Luke 6:27

³¹⁰ Matthew 5:43-48

Instead, we must become the friends of sinners and love them with the power of the Gospel.³¹¹ We will be in the world (in that we will love and care for those without Christ), but we will not be of the world (in that we will not join nonbelievers in sin).³¹² Being of the world can be as dangerous as isolating ourselves from it.³¹³

Even as God's Word promises us, so we anticipate sufferings, tribulation, and persecution in this life.³¹⁴ In light of these expectations, we deny the Prosperity Gospel and any gospel that promises only health, wealth and exemption from suffering. So, whether trials and persecution come from individuals or governments, by God's grace we will endure³¹⁵ trials and rejoice³¹⁶ that we are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.³¹⁷

In days of freedom and prosperity, and in days of persecution, we will remain subject to the governing authorities³¹⁸ and will obey the laws of the land, including paying taxes.³¹⁹ The only time that we will not submit to the governing authorities is when they require us to sin against God.³²⁰ Then, we must obey God rather than men³²¹ and be prepared to face the consequences. Even when we disagree with the

³¹¹ Matthew 11:19, 9:9-13

³¹² John 17:14-18

³¹³ 2 Corinthians 6:17

³¹⁴ Acts 14:22, John 15:20, 2 Timothy 3:12

³¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 4:12, 1 Peter 1:20, 2 Corinthians 6:4

³¹⁶ 1 Peter 1:6, Romans 5:3, Acts 5:41

³¹⁷ Acts 5:41

³¹⁸ Romans 13:1, 1 Peter 2:13-14

³¹⁹ Romans 13:6-7

³²⁰ Exodus 1:16-20, Daniel 3:12-18

³²¹ Acts 5:29

governing authorities, we will honor³²² and pray for them.³²³ We do not affiliate ourselves with any political party but recognize that as American citizens we have the responsibility to vote for candidates who best represent Biblical ethics and are most likely to allow Christians to live peaceful and unhindered lives.³²⁴ While our primary calling as Christians is to live in peace with all men³²⁵ and to attempt to overcome evil with good,³²⁶ we recognize that the time and place may come when peaceful, non-violent protest is necessary.

³²² 1 Peter 2:17, Romans 13:7

³²³ 1 Timothy 2:1-2

³²⁴ 1 Timothy 2:1-2

³²⁵ Romans 12:18

³²⁶ Romans 12:21

Chapter 12

Death and the Coming of the Lord

We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness,³²⁷ are received into paradise,³²⁸ and are ushered into the presence of Christ where they await the redemption of their bodies.³²⁹

We believe that when those without Christ die, they are cast into hell where they remain in torment and darkness, awaiting the Day of Judgment.³³⁰ It is appointed to every person to die and then after this to face the judgment,³³¹ at which point he or she will enter into one of the above mentioned dwelling places – either heaven or hell. We deny the Roman Catholic teaching of purgatory or any other teaching that suggests that there is a third destination at which the dead may arrive, even if it were only assumed to be for a temporary time.

We believe in the blessed hope,³³² that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will personally³³³ return to this earth—visibly,³³⁴ physically³³⁵ and suddenly in great power and glory.³³⁶ Upon His return He will gather His elect,³³⁷ raise the dead,³³⁸ judge the nations,³³⁹ abolish the curse,³⁴⁰

³²⁷ Hebrews 12:22-23

³²⁸ Luke 23:43

³²⁹ Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

³³⁰ Jude 6-7, 1 Peter 3:19, Luke 16:23-24, 2 Peter 2:4, Matthew 10:28

³³¹ Hebrews 9:27

³³² Titus 2:13

³³³ Acts 1:9-11

³³⁴ Mark 14:61-62

³³⁵ Philippians 3:20-21, Luke 24:39-43

³³⁶ Luke 21:27

³³⁷ Matthew 24:31

and restore all of creation as He causes the new heavens and the new earth to descend.³⁴¹ In so doing, Christ will establish His kingdom that will last forever.³⁴²

Though many have tried and miserably failed to predict the date of His return, we believe that no man knows the day or hour.³⁴³ We humbly acknowledge that we do not understand all details of the tribulation, the identity and work of the Antichrist, and the millennial reign of Christ. However, we do believe that Christ could return at any time³⁴⁴ and as a result we must obey Him by staying "awake,"³⁴⁵ being ready,³⁴⁶ praying³⁴⁷ and longing³⁴⁸ for His appearing. The cry and prayer of PVCC should now and always be, "Come, Lord Jesus."³⁴⁹

³³⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

³³⁹ 2 Timothy 4:1

³⁴⁰ Revelation 22:3

³⁴¹ Acts 3:21, Revelation 21:5

³⁴² Luke 22:28-30, Revelation 22:5

³⁴³ Matthew 24:36, 42

³⁴⁴ Revelation 22:20, Matthew 24:44

³⁴⁵ Matthew 24:42

³⁴⁶ Matthew 24:44

³⁴⁷ Matthew 6:10

³⁴⁸ 2 Timothy 4:8

³⁴⁹ Revelation 22:20

Chapter 13

Positions on Relevant Issues

We believe that in a day and age in which the line between right and wrong has become increasingly blurred, the people of God have the responsibility not to straddle the fence but to take clear and decisive stances on moral and ethical issues. We recognize that some of these issues did not previously exist; for this reason the older confessions of faith do not address them. However, we are responsible to defend truth before our generation, and we believe that it is necessary and appropriate to concisely address the following matters.

The Sanctity of Life

We hate³⁵⁰ the practice of abortion and equate it to the demonic sacrifice of children in the Old Testament.³⁵¹ We despise abortion because we know that God hates the shedding of innocent blood.³⁵²

We believe that life begins at conception³⁵³ and as a result, all abortions—regardless of how early they are performed during one’s pregnancy—are murder. As a church, we will always defend the lives of these helpless, unborn children and will continually pray that God would change the minds of those who allow this evil to take place legally.

We recognize that early termination of a pregnancy may become a necessary decision when the choice must be made between choosing

³⁵⁰ Amos 5:15

³⁵¹ Psalm 106:37-38

³⁵² Proverbs 6:17

³⁵³ Psalm 139:13, 15-16

the life of the mother or the life of the baby. In such a dreadful situation, we can only pray for grace and wisdom and not pass judgment.

Marriage and Sexuality

Scripture clearly defines marriage as the union between one man and one woman.³⁵⁴ We believe that same-sex marriage is a revolt against God's plan for marriage and cannot be endorsed or supported by Christians. Similarly, we affirm that Scripture teaches that homosexuality is an abomination before God.³⁵⁵ We do not hate homosexuals; we love them and pray for their repentance. We recognize that there are individuals who may be predisposed toward homosexual tendencies, perhaps (even from birth), in the same way that many of us are predisposed toward other forms of immoral conduct. However, we must vigorously resist any temptation to sin and instead choose to obey Christ over our flesh. An innate tendency toward homosexuality in no way grants anyone permission or justification to participate in such sin.

Not only do we reject same-sex marriage, but we also reject, pray, and labor against the evils of divorce. Marriage is a God-given covenant between a man and a woman to last for life.³⁵⁶ Every time a divorce happens, it is a picture of the mystical union between Christ and His church being ripped apart. Such a severance shows dishonor to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

³⁵⁴ Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:22-33

³⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10

³⁵⁶ Malachi 2:14, Matthew 19:6

As a church, we will do everything in our power to cultivate an atmosphere where marriages are strengthened for the glory of God. We will teach, preach, pray, and counsel to the end that every marriage at PVCC is one that brings glory to Christ: representing a beautiful picture of His one-flesh union to His bride, the church.³⁵⁷ Individuals and couples who seek unlawful divorces will be lovingly confronted, called to repentance and—if necessary—come under church discipline.

Gender Roles

We affirm that the Scripture reveals a pattern of complementary order between men and women, and that this order is in itself a testimony to the Gospel—even emblematic of the order within the Trinity. We also affirm that all Christians are called to service within the body of Christ, and that God has given to both men and women important and strategic roles within the home, the church and the society. In the context of the local church, we further affirm that the pastorate is assigned only to men, and that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men.³⁵⁸ Within the home, we believe that men are called to serve as heads and spiritual leaders.³⁵⁹ We do not espouse a harsh, dictator-like leadership, but rather a loving, humble, selfless, sacrificial-like leadership, even as is displayed by Christ.³⁶⁰ Men are, in ordinary cases, to provide the primary source of income and to work by the sweat of their brow.³⁶¹ We affirm that if a man will not work,

³⁵⁷ Ephesians 5:22-27, 32

³⁵⁸ 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9

³⁵⁹ Ephesians 5:22-24

³⁶⁰ Ephesians 5:23-27

³⁶¹ Genesis 3:17-19

neither should he eat.³⁶² We believe that in a marriage, the husband should not coerce his wife to work outside the home. Her first and primary calling is that of being a wife and mother, and her God-given orientation is one that is inward in nature—toward her home.³⁶³ We respectfully realize that there are exceptions, as in the case of single mothers, or after children have grown to the age where they are no longer in need of the daily and consistent attention and care of their mother, or in other unique cases

The distinctions in roles between men and women are in no way indicative of an inequality or differentiation in terms of value. In terms of value, worth, dignity, and standing before God, Scripture makes no distinction between male and female.³⁶⁴ Therefore, the differences that we speak of are simply part of God's created order and only applicable in terms of roles. Even as Christ is one with the Father in terms of His value and deity,³⁶⁵ He willingly and humbly took upon Himself the role of a servant and submitted to His Father.³⁶⁶ Therefore, when a wife submits to her husband,³⁶⁷ she is being like Christ.

Lastly, we deny that the distinction of roles between men and women revealed in the Bible is evidence of mere cultural conditioning or a manifestation of male oppression or prejudice against women. We also deny that this biblical distinction of roles excludes women from

³⁶² 2 Thessalonians 3:10

³⁶³ Genesis 3:16, Titus 2:5, Proverbs 31:27

³⁶⁴ Galatians 3:28

³⁶⁵ John 10:30, John 8:58

³⁶⁶ Philippians 2:6-8

³⁶⁷ Ephesians 5:22-24

meaningful ministry in Christ's kingdom.³⁶⁸ The Word of God simply forbids women to teach men, or to take authority over them. Biblical leadership, by God's design, is male leadership.

Orphan Care

We are distraught over and sympathetic for the more than 147 million orphans around the world. We recognize that this crisis is a result of the curse of sin, and yet we also recognize God's call upon our lives to visit³⁶⁹ the orphan in his distress and to defend his cause.³⁷⁰ We cannot save every orphan, but we can rescue one, or maybe several. We believe that there are few better pictures of the Gospel of Jesus Christ³⁷¹ than when believers to adopt children. As a church, we will earnestly pray and strive to provide an adoption and foster-friendly culture whereby we both spiritually and financially support those who feel called to rescue the orphans. Whether these rescues occur through adoption or fostering, we believe such practices honor Christ and we will be mindful as a church to recognize and celebrate with those who do such.

³⁶⁸ Romans 16:1, Acts 9:36

³⁶⁹ James 1:27

³⁷⁰ Isaiah 1:17

³⁷¹ Galatians 4:5-7, Romans 8:15-17

Conclusion

We do not believe that all things in this confession of faith are of equal weight; some are more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for an individual to be saved or become a member at PVCC. However, it is necessary that those in positions of leadership at PVCC—namely those who serve as pastors and teachers—agree to in good conscience and honesty, teach in accordance with (and not contrary) to the affirmations of this confession. With regard to those seeking membership, we request that they share with our pastors the areas of doctrine where they disagree. If their disagreements are issues of a critical nature and ultimately deny the foundational truths of Scripture, membership should not be pursued. If the issues are not of a critical nature, and the would-be members pledges to not undermine the teaching and unity of the church, the pastors would happily recommend them for membership.

We do not claim infallibility for this confession and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture.³⁷² However, we do firmly and unapologetically hold to truths in this confession as we see them and call upon others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are not so.³⁷³

³⁷² 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Peter 3:18

³⁷³ Acts 17:11

While our inspiration and driving guide in formulating our confession is to uphold the Word of God, we additionally give credit to the following confessions and documents for their helpful insight, and acknowledge that many of the phrases, vocabulary, and paragraphs in this document have been directly taken from them:

- Bethlehem Baptist Church Congregational Affirmation of Faith
- Mars Hill Church Affirmation of Faith
- The 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession
- Capitol Hill Baptist Church Statement of Faith
- 2000 Baptist Faith and Message
- Together for the Gospel Affirmation of Faith
- The Gospel Coalition Foundation Documents
- Abstract of Principles (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)
- The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith
- The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689