



Our Theological Distinctions

Distinctive 1: Sovereignty of God in Salvation

The salvation of humanity is fundamentally the work of God. Before the foundation of the world, God elected His people, setting His affection and grace upon them (Rom. 8:29-30). In love, God predestined His people for adoption (Eph. 1:4-6). Faith is a gift of grace that is given by the mercy and pleasure of God, so that no one may boast. Apart from the intervention of God, humanity cannot choose of his own accord to worship God and pursue righteousness (Rom. 3; Eph. 2:1-3). God's sovereignty in salvation is comprehensive: from first to last, all of salvation is the work of God.

Distinctive 2: Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit that we see on display in the New Testament are still active within the life of the church. These gifts did not end with the close of the New Testament or the death of the last apostle (1 Cor. 12:1-11).

Distinctive 3: Complementarianism

Men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value but are distinct by divine design. As part of God's good created order, men and women are to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the home and church. As it relates to the church, men and women are both expected to lead; however, the office of elder is reserved for qualified men (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

Distinctive 4: Baptism by Immersion

The precedent we find in the New Testament is baptism following conversion by immersion into water. Baptism by immersion is meant to symbolically depict the believer's real union to Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14). (For more on this distinctive, consider attending one of our Baptism classes, held several times throughout the year.)

Non-essential Doctrines

We affirm that the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the atoning work of Christ on the cross, and salvation by grace through faith alone make up the essential, distinctive nature of Christianity. In regards to these essential doctrines, there can be no conflicting opinions of those who call themselves true followers of Christ.

However, we do acknowledge that there are peripheral or “nonessential” doctrines that are important, but not critical to the follower of Christ as it relates to our salvation. Some of these doctrines include the specific functions of women in ministry, the exact timing and nature of the rapture, extent and use of certain spiritual gifts.

While our church will be diligent to establish positions as it relates to these nonessentials, we will not allow these peripheral doctrines to cause division within the church. We will accept into our body those who have differing views on the nonessential doctrines, but will not allow those of a different opinion to fracture the church. While we celebrate diversity along all lines, we will ultimately pursue the unity of the church.

The Two Sacraments of the Church

Baptism

The second step to becoming a Covenant Member is baptism. In Matthew 28, Jesus commissions his disciples and says to them: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Likewise, in the book of Acts, after Pentecost, when Peter preaches his first sermon and the Holy Spirit convicts the hearts of those who were listening, Peter instructs them to “repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:38)

The purpose of baptism is simple. It is a public declaration that you belong to Jesus. It is also a physical sign of something that has taken place spiritually. In the moment of salvation we “die” to our old life of sin and consequences of sin and we become “alive” to a new life in Jesus Christ. When someone is baptized, they are brought under the water to signify their “death” to their old life and brought out of the water to signify their “new life” in Jesus Christ.

Because baptism is such a significant part of what it means to be a Christian, baptism is a requirement for membership at Gospel Fellowship, however, baptism is not a requirement for Salvation. If you have not yet been baptized since you’ve become a Christian, there will be an opportunity for you to be baptized before the completion of the membership process.

Communion

We also hold in high esteem the participation in the Lord's Supper, also known as Communion. This sacrament is introduced by Jesus right before his death. First, in Matthew 26 starting in verse 26, we find that the precursor to communion is the Passover meal (the Jewish celebration of the Passover, instituted in Exodus 12). This is the Last Supper, the Passover meal, the night before Jesus is crucified.

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you from now on I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'"

We remember the great price that was paid for us as we take the Lord's Supper.

Paul later teaches in 1 Corinthians 11:27 that *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged."*

We hold communion as a sacrament that should be taken seriously, and the Lord's Supper is given with the warning listed above. We should not partake in the Lord's Supper haphazardly. We should examine our faith and conduct as we take joy in the sacrifice Christ rendered on our behalf.