

STATEMENT OF FAITH

CHRIST'S CHURCH OF DEER PARK

CHRIST'S CHURCH
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WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in one God and that He exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 12:29; John 1:1, 14; John 3:16; John 14:16-20; John 17:10-11; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:21; Revelation 1:4-6)

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible.

(Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11; Psalms 146:6; Acts 17:24-28; Hebrews 11:3)

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son, our one and only Lord and Savior.

(Matthew 16:16; John 1:14; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:9)

•**who was born both fully human and fully divine, conceived of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.**

(Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:14; Colossians 1:19; Colossians 2:9)

•**who lived sinlessly throughout His life.**

(2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:26)

•**who suffered, was crucified, and shed His blood for the sins of the world.**

(Luke 23:1-46; John 1:29; John 19:34; Romans 3:24-26; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:5-14; 1 Peter 3:18)

•**who died, was buried and rose again bodily from the dead on the third day.**

(Luke 23:44-24:7; John 20:19-29; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

•**who ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father to become Head over all things.**

(Luke 22:69; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:1-9; Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 3:1)

•**who will return to earth to judge both the living and the dead.**

(Matthew 24:36-42; John 5:22-27; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; Acts 10:39-42; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:5)

We believe in the Holy Spirit.

•**who is the third Person of the triune God.**

(John 16:5-15; Acts 1:7-8; Romans 8:26-27)

•**who has been sent by Christ to dwell in every Christian.**

(John 14:16-17; John 16:7; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14)

We believe in God's holy word, the Bible, to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error.

(John 5:39; John 14:26; John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-16; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

•**We accept the Bible as the final authority for all matters of faith and practice.**

(Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18-19; Matthew 24:35; Romans 15:4; Hebrews 4:12)

We believe that all people sin against God and are eternally lost apart from Jesus Christ.

(John 8:23-24; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23)

We believe salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, is only by God's grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

(Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7)

•**We receive God's grace by believing in Christ, repenting of sin, confessing Christ and being baptized into Christ.**

(Mark 16:16, John 3:16-18, John 5:24, Romans 5:1-2); (Matthew 4:17, Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 17:30, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Peter 3:9); (Matthew 10:32, Matthew 16:13-16, Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:11, 1 John 4:15) (John 3:3-5, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:1-7, Galatians 3:26-27, Colossians 2:12, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 3:21)

We believe in the church of Jesus Christ, founded on the day of Pentecost, consisting of all Christians.

(Matthew 16:13-18; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-47; Acts 26:15-18)

We believe in plural leadership, with elders exercising servant authority in the local congregation.

(Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4)

We believe marriage to be an exclusive union sanctioned by God between one man and one woman.

(Genesis 2:23-25; Matthew 19:4-9; Mark 10:5-9)

“WE LOVE GOD, SO WE MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS AND LOVE AS HE LOVED.”

That mission statement defines the purpose of Christ's Church of Deer Park. It is a statement that encompasses our very existence as a body of Christ. Although simply stated, there is a great deal of meaning behind it. The best way to explain how such a statement becomes our purpose is to know and obey the scriptures. For those who are interested in Christ's Church, we have written this document to provide an explanation of doctrinal teachings and many of our practices. We desire all who attend Christ's Church to believe the *“faith once delivered”* (Jude 3) to mankind and to be unified in our obedience of that faith. This document can only cover a certain number of issues. For further understanding, please contact an elder or minister.

A SUMMARY OF DOCTRINE AT CHRIST'S CHURCH

Christ's Church seeks to demonstrate what God expects of those who are called “Christians.” We are a family of believers whose faith, worship and daily living strives to center upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We believe that a saving relationship with God is available only by His grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said of Himself, *“I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me”* (John 14:6). The apostle Peter stated about the Lord, *“There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). We can receive salvation and eternal life with God in no other way and so it is through our faith in Jesus Christ and His written word that we live.

We believe the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ: that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, born of a virgin in the likeness of sinful man; that He lived among mankind, was tempted by every evil, yet remained sinless; that He was crucified on a cross, becoming God's perfect sacrifice for the sins of every man and woman; that He overcame death by bodily rising to life proving that He is Lord of all and making available eternal life for all those who become born again into Him.

Christ's Church believes the Bible is scripture written by prophets, apostles and men of faith, all who were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Thus we hold the Bible to be truthful and accurate and applicable to everyone in every culture and age. We believe the purpose of the Old Testament is to lead people to Christ and that the requirements of the Old Testament law have been fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. The New Testament is now the Christian's rule of life, and we seek to obey those scriptures as best we can.

The church is simply the part of God's kingdom established on earth and made up of Jesus Christ's obedient followers. It was begun by Jesus through His apostles as documented in the book of Acts. Following the example of the believers in the early church, we are simply called *“Christians”* (Acts 11:26). All Christians are commanded to *“contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). So we strive to remain obedient to God's word. As a New Testament church, we seek to model ourselves after the church written about in the Bible and to avoid teachings and doctrines that are contrary to the Lord's instructions.

Christ's Church believes doctrine is important if it meets the standard of scripture. Its result must be salvation from sin and lives filled with godly fruit. The apostle Paul wrote, *“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness”* (2 Tim. 3:16). Local culture and traditions can be diverse, yet they must yield when they conflict with the church's doctrine based upon the word of God. The burden of responsibility placed upon those in authority to preach, teach and disciple is regarded with utmost care.

We endeavor to practice the unity that Jesus prayed for just before His crucifixion. He said, *“I do not ask on behalf of these (the apostles) alone, but for those also (Christians) who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one even as You, Father are in Me, and I in You, that they may be in Us; that the world may believe that You sent Me”* (John 17:20-21). It is the Lord's desire that there be no barriers that prevent us from becoming one in Christ. Such unity does not compromise the truth rather it reinforces the grace and truth that dwells among

all who are in Jesus Christ. We call ourselves Christians, nothing more and nothing less. We warmly welcome to our fellowship, believer and non-believer alike to worship the Lord our God.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS REGARDING FAITH AND SALVATION

The following are topics regarding important issues of what we believe and practice at Christ's Church. Although there are many areas of doctrine, teaching and practice we could write about, the areas below are some of the questions that people have asked for clarification. If you have other questions please ask any elder or minister for an explanation.

1. WHAT MAKES A PERSON A CHRISTIAN?

Scripture teaches that all humans are lost without Christ. We know that our nature was corrupted by mankind's choice to rebel against our Creator. From that corruption all of us have an inclination toward evil and none of us is righteous by our effort. No matter how carefully we live, we all *"have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Ro m. 3:23). If our sin is not atoned for, the result is lasting separation from God. However, Christ has revealed the only way to escape the condemnation we deserve. That is to be born again and start over, to become a Christian. This rebirth, or second chance, is God's priceless gift of grace which pays our debt and restores us to Himself. This is known as our redemption. It is not something we earn but only receive by the grace of God. (Eph. 2:8; Acts 15:11).

Our salvation by grace is based upon the fact that we are redeemed through the blood of Jesus, by which we receive the forgiveness of our sins (Eph 1:7). This truth refers to God's principle that sin has a price which must be paid and that price is death. This was established in the Old Testament and was temporarily satisfied by the sacrifice of animals. Since it is impossible for the blood of animals to permanently take away sins, God offered the perfect sacrifice of His Son on the cross. During that sacrifice, Christ's blood was shed. It is His blood that atones for the sins of the world. The Apostle Paul therefore wrote, *"having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God"* (Rom. 5:9).

One begins to know of Christ when he hears the gospel. This gospel is revealed through God's word and has become the hope of all who desire to be saved. It can best be explained as the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, dying on the cross, being buried, then raised to life and resurrected to God (1 Cor. 15:1-8). After a person hears this good news, a true faith about who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished begins to develop. At this point personal conviction and trust begins to grow. It is this seeking of truth that leads a man or woman to claim the free gift of God's salvation. Accepting this gift results in that person being justified, made righteous before God. In other words, the penalty for sin has been paid and he or she thus becomes born again in Christ, a Christian.

This process, revealed in scripture to become born again, is intricate yet at the same time simple. It begins by hearing the gospel and continues by a developing faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith it is impossible to be saved. From our faith in Christ we continue with what is commanded by confessing Him as the Son of God and our Lord. We also must repent of our sinful ways, demonstrating a willingness to surrender to the Lord. (Repentance is a change of attitude resulting in a change of heart.) Finally, scripture instructs us to be baptized into Christ, immersed in water. (See question 2)

All of these actions are intricately woven together when we respond to God with faith, trusting Him to recreate us new in Christ. This is the very beginning of the life of a new believer committed daily to following the Lord. From this moment on, the new Christian seeks continually to put to death the deeds of the flesh by following Christ and forsaking things contrary to God (Luke 9:23-24). This is also the beginning of a battle against Satan and worldly values. It is a spiritual battle but one that has led to victory through Christ. For as Paul wrote to believers set free from sin, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1). Throughout this battle, continual grace and forgiveness is available when we repent and confess our sins to God (1 John 1:9). A true Christian will be known by his obedience to Christ and by the fruit of God's Holy Spirit in his life. Finally, when life on earth is over, those faithful followers known by God will receive the eternal glory that awaits them in His heavenly kingdom.

2. WHY IS BAPTISM IMPORTANT?

Of first importance is to understand that we are saved not by our own merit but by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8). Such a faith encompasses belief in His gospel, confession of Him, repentance of sin and baptism. In the recent past many have questioned the necessity of being baptized, particularly with respect to our salvation. Recognizing that baptism was commanded by Jesus, obeyed by His disciples when the church first began, and then observed throughout the centuries, Christ's Church also baptizes those who desire to become followers of Christ.

It is clear when studying the scriptures that baptism is an integral part of the process of being saved. Jesus was very specific about this in His great commission to the disciples. After He resurrected from the grave and appeared to the disciples, He told them in Matt. 28:19-20, *"go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."* Jesus never gave a command without specific reasons behind it. The importance of His commandment for all who wish to follow Him to be baptized is revealed in other books in the New Testament.

In reading the book of Acts we begin to have an understanding of the necessity and meaning behind baptism. Throughout the book numerous examples of new believers are baptized as soon as they begin to develop a true faith in Christ. For instance, in Acts 2 at the conclusion of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, many of those listening were convicted about the gospel message of Christ and recognizing their sin asked Peter what they should do. He said to them, *"repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). Then about 3000 of them were baptized. Continuing throughout the book of Acts, the response of believers being baptized is shown many times. For example, when the apostle Paul believed in Christ, the Lord sent a Christian named Ananias to Paul who said to him, *"arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His (Jesus) name"* (Acts 22:16). Paul obeyed.

As one continues reading the New Testament, other explanations were written by both Paul and Peter that help us understand what transpires in baptism. For instance, Romans 6:3-11 explains that we are buried with Christ into His death when immersed into the waters of baptism so that we may be united with Him in new life through the power of His resurrection. We become *"dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 6:11). Colossians 2:12 states that in baptism *"you were raised up with Him through faith in the working of God"* demonstrating that baptism is part of our faith response to God and is completely dependent on His power. Galatians 3:26-27 states that we are clothed with Christ through faith when we are baptized into Him. The apostle Peter wrote pointedly that *"baptism now saves you....through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 3:21).

There are obviously many verses that explain why baptism is important for one who desires to follow Christ but the simplest understanding is Jesus commanded it. To be baptized in His name is an integral part of becoming a disciple of Christ. What transpires from that act of obedience is entirely a work of God. Our faith, confession, repentance and baptism *all* result in the scriptural promises of the forgiveness of our sin, being given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the burial of our old self and being made new. In essence, we become born again in Jesus Christ.

When a person professes faith in Christ, he or she will be baptized by immersion into water to follow the example given in scripture. The age at which a child is able to be baptized has been a subject of debate from the time of the early church. We believe that children, before they are able to discern the gospel and the need for forgiveness of sin, are kept safe and sin is not counted against them. As a result, we do not baptize infants. In the Bible, only those who confessed faith in Jesus Christ and repented of sin were baptized. That is the example we follow. The age that a young person should be baptized will vary from child to child and we will consult with their parents or guardians to determine when they are truly ready.

3. WHAT IS YOUR BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF COMMUNION?

Communion or the Lord's Supper is a meal with roots tied to the Old Testament meal of Passover written about in the book of Exodus. Part of that meal included unleavened bread (bread without yeast) and blood from an

unblemished lamb. When Jesus was observing Passover with His apostles the night before He was crucified, He instituted what we call the Lord's Supper. During that Passover meal He took unleavened bread and gave each apostle a piece and instead of reciting the traditional liturgy for the meal, He stated to them, *"Take eat, this is My body."* Then He took a cup of wine and stated to them, *"Drink from it all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-28). Obviously, they were not physically consuming the body and blood of Christ. Instead, He was giving them food to consume that had powerful, spiritual meaning. From that last supper, the apostles began the weekly observance of the Lord's Suppers with fellow believers.

Christ's Church centers its weekly worship around the Lord's Supper. This communion, as established by Jesus, is a holy meal and central to our faith. It is a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. When we receive the bread and cup of blessing, we partake spiritually in the body and blood of Jesus as He commanded. There are several facets involved with the regular participation of communion. It is considered a time of remembrance, individual examination, unity in the body, spiritual intercession and communal celebration. From spiritually sharing in the body and blood of Jesus Christ we once again are drawn back to understanding what was accomplished on the cross and how we receive forgiveness for our sins.

We follow the tradition begun by the church in Jerusalem to celebrate communion together on the first day of the week (Sunday). We invite all born again Christians to partake in the Lord's Supper each week during our worship services. Since this meal is one of holy importance, we urge each person to examine himself with an attitude of repentance and only partake in a manner that would be worthy of the body and blood of the Lord. We typically use unleavened bread, which we bake and unfermented grape juice to be passed to the congregation. Generally, we have everyone hold onto the elements and then partake in them together.

(Exodus 12; Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7:11; 1 Cor. 10:16, 11:23-27)

4. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF GOD OR THE TRINITY?

To describe the nature of God or the Trinity is a task far greater than any human can adequately accomplish. Scripture does reveal that God's nature is of three "Persons" in one. Just as three rings intertwined make one unit and yet are distinctly three, so also the soul, spirit and body make one person and yet stay distinctly three. Similarly, there is one God in three: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The first, God the Father, dwells throughout all of creation in unapproachable light. No human may see Him and live and yet all who seek Him will discover eternal love through His presence. His angelic hosts cry out "holy, holy, holy" continuously and His enemies tremble just knowing He exists. Man has tried to describe Him by giving Him the attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience (having absolute power, being everywhere at once, having perfect knowledge). He is, however, so completely beyond our finite minds that there is only one true description of Him: He is God.

Second is the Son of God. He was in the beginning with God. His power created everything we touch and see. He was also incarnate, embodied in human form when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary and born into the world, to live a sinless life. He came to earth to lead us in grace, truth and love and to be the faultless Lamb of God willingly sacrificed on the cross for the sins of mankind. He defeated death and rose from the grave and lives in heaven at the right hand of God. He is known as God the Son, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

The third nature of God is the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit, though present throughout all eternity, took up His residence, in a special sense, in all believers beginning with the day of Pentecost to unite them into one body in Christ. He is the One who guides, convicts, protects and comforts all of God's children. He empowers God's people. He brings our prayers before the Father and searches our hearts to intercede for us according to the will of God. He was sent by Christ to be our helper and remains with us to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment. He inspired men chosen by God to write the Scriptures in order to reveal God's will to mankind.

(Gen. 1:1-2, 26; Prov. 15:3; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matt. 3:16; Matt. 12:15-21; Matt. 28:19; John 1:1-3, 14-18; John 14:16-17; John 16:8-11, 13; Acts 9:31; Rom. 8:26-27; Rom. 15:13-19; 1 Cor. 2:1-13; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:13-16; Titus 4:4-6; Heb. 1:1-9; 1 Pet. 4:12-14; 1 Jn. 4:1-3; Rev. 4:8)

5. WHAT ARE THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HOW ARE THEY GIVEN?

The Bible distinguishes between three different measures of the Holy Spirit given to mankind. The first is the gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive when born again into Christ. This gift is a seal of our redemption, the spiritual mark of a man or woman recreated new in Christ. Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit is given when we believe in Jesus Christ, confess Him as Lord and Savior, repent and are baptized for the remission of sins. This gift is given to every person who comes to Christ. The Spirit gives those Christians spiritual strength and protection. He produces in them the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. He intercedes for them in their prayers and petitions. He must be in them or they are not in Christ.

Secondly, are the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit given to believers as signs to unbelievers in order to prove the gospel of Christ. Clearly Jesus Christ had this measure of the Spirit without limit for He was God on earth. However, the apostles received some miraculous gifts for proof to verify the power, authority and truth behind the gospel message. Their miraculous gifts included speaking in tongues (foreign languages), healing and prophesying (revealing God's word). The apostles were given authority to bestow such gifts upon others by laying hands on them. However, there is no mention in the Bible of anyone other than God, Jesus Christ or the apostles who bestowed these gifts on others in miraculous measure. Over time, as the New Testament scriptures became available to the churches, those miraculous gifts of the Spirit given to people to use as signs began to disappear because they were no longer necessary in order to verify the gospel message.

Thirdly, are the spiritual gifts granted for the equipping and building up of the body of Christ (the church). Such gifts include but are not limited to serving, leading, giving, teaching and preaching. When these gifts are used to equip the saints they create a church seeking to attain to the unity of faith in the Son of God. Such a church has Christ as its head and is a body that lives out the grace and truth of Christ. To every man and woman in Christ is given this manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

(Mark 1:9-13; John 14:16-17, 26; John 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-11, 37-39; Acts 3:1-7; Acts 8:4-23; Acts 11:15-17; Acts 19:11; Rom. 8:9; Rom. 12:4-13; 1 Cor. 12-14; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 4:11-16; Titus 3:5)

6. DOES GOD PREDESTINE CERTAIN PEOPLE TO BE SAVED?

For hundreds of years the subject of predestination has been one of much confusion and controversy. This controversy comes primarily from the understanding of whether or not God predestines, elects or chooses who will and who will not be saved. Scripture does teach that God chooses certain persons for specific roles of service. For example God chose people like Abraham, Moses and David to accomplish specific tasks. He chose Jesus Christ to become the Savior of mankind. The apostles were chosen to carry out His plan to establish the church on earth. The difficulty comes with understanding whether or not God chooses or predestines who will believe and be saved and who will not.

The doctrine of predestination for salvation has followed two different paths: the Augustinian/Calvinist path as opposed to the non-Calvinist teaching. What the Calvinist teaching essentially means is that before the creation of the world, God not only predestined certain individuals to heaven for eternity but that He elects people to believe and be saved. Those chosen people thus have no say or choice of their own in being saved. It is all God's predestined choice. This is called unconditional election and is based upon the thought that mankind is born in a universal state of total depravity or original sin. Calvin taught that because of total depravity no one is able to respond to the gospel and become a believer by his or her own choice but rather that God chooses which sinners will believe. This path though violates much of the character of God. It denies for instance, that God was influenced by petitions of men like Moses, David or the prophets. It violates the love of freedom that characterizes a righteous Sovereign. Finally, it does not allow for Christians to evangelize the world for Christ.

The second path is one described by Paul in Romans 8:29-32. The key to understanding this is Paul's phrase in verse 29, "*for whom He foreknew.*" God knows from beginning to end all things. He foresees every thought we would ever think, every act, every sin, every repentance, every prayer we would make. He already knows exactly

who and what we will be in the future. Foreknowledge or knowing things in advance is not equivalent to making them happen. It simply refers to the act by which God knows or identifies those who, by their free will, choose either to believe and obey Him or choose to disobey. This foreknowledge of our lives is not predetermination of what we will do and so God still holds each person responsible for the outcome of his own life. Our salvation is *conditional* upon our response to the gospel message. It is not an unconditional choice that God predetermined. If we have responded with faith, God's divine omniscience recognizes such a response and He thus predestines us to become part of his heavenly kingdom. He foreknows our response and prepares eternity for all who choose to believe in the gospel of Christ be saved.

(Deut. 30:19; Jer. 18:1-11; John 8:31-32, 36; Rom. 2:4-8; Rom. 8:29-32; Rom. 9:18-33; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 1:3-6; Phil. 2:12-16; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev. 21:6-7; Rev. 22:17)

7. CAN A CHRISTIAN EVER LOSE HIS SALVATION?

In John 15, Jesus compares Himself to a vine, with His followers as its branches. He states that a vine must bear fruit or its branches will be cut off and burned. The implication here is that despite the fact that some may at first believe and even become disciples, they must produce godly fruit throughout their lives. Branches that do not produce fruit are cast aside. However, branches with abundant fruit are compared to believers spiritually growing in Christ who is the vine. The entire parable is describing a believer or disciple abiding in Christ throughout his or her life. The one who at first believes but does not continue to abide in the Lord will be cast away if there is never repentance from their disobedience. Our salvation is powerful and we must believe that nothing can separate us from salvation offered through Christ *except* our own willful rejection Christ Jesus.

The book of Hebrews clearly explains that a person who turns from God after having been enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Spirit and then turns his back on his faith, cannot be renewed to repentance while they continue to willfully disobey God. Such a person has put Christ to open shame, regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant and insulted the Spirit of God. So yes, a Christian can lose the salvation offered to him through faith in Christ if he chooses to reject God's saving grace. That is why it is so necessary for believers to be firmly grounded in their faith and accountable to one another and to the Lord while remaining obedient to His word.

(Matt. 7:18-21; Matt. 12:30-32; Matt. 25:31-46; John 6:35-40; John 15:1-6; Rom. 8:35-39; Heb. 3:12-13; Heb. 6:1-6; Heb. 10:26-29; 2 Peter 2:20-22)

PRACTICES AND ISSUES DISTINCTIVE TO CHRIST'S CHURCH

1. WHAT DOES THE CHURCH BELIEVE ABOUT MARRIAGE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY?

God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. To reject what God has created is willful sin against Him.

The term marriage has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union as explained in the Bible. God intends sexual intimacy to occur *only* between a man and a woman who are married to each other. He has commanded that no intimate sexual activity occur outside of biblical marriage.

Any form of sexual immorality, such things as adultery, fornication (sexual intercourse outside of marriage), homosexual conduct, bestiality, incest and use of pornography, is sin against God. However, He offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin. All who sin but then repent and seek God's mercy through Jesus Christ will be forgiven. A truly repentant person demonstrates their changed heart by obeying the word of God and practicing righteousness.

(Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:18-25; Lev. 18:22; Matt. 5:27-28; Matt. 15:18-20; Mark 7:20-24; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 1:24-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Cor. 7:2-4; Eph. 5:22-31; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; 1 John 1:8-10; 1 John 3:3-8)

2. HOW IS THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURED?

Christ's Church seeks to model itself after the New Testament churches described in the Bible. We recognize Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the church. He is the cornerstone or the foundation of the church. When the church began after the resurrection of Jesus, His apostles were given a ministry to spread the gospel throughout the region of Palestine and then to gentile nations. The apostles established churches with ordained leaders to carry on the work of the gospel from generation to generation. The Bible describes these leaders as elders, evangelists or ministers, deacons and teachers. Christ's Church follows that pattern.

Christ's Church is an elder-led body. This structure was established in the early church in which each city or community was spiritually led by elders or presbyters. The elders were charged with the spiritual health of the church. They were to protect it from sin, unsound doctrine and false teaching, as well as to develop the structure and godly leadership within the body. Paul described the qualifications of an elder in his letters to Timothy and Titus. We have multiple elders that oversee Christ's Church.

We also have evangelists or ministers who are tasked with many functions. Primarily, as scripture establishes, their focus is to preach the gospel. However they also are involved in a variety of tasks that see to everyday situations. Teaching, counseling, visiting and administration of the church are examples of their responsibilities. A minister can be an elder provided he meets the scriptural qualifications. The ministers at Christ's Church usually receive a full time salary.

Our deacons are men who oversee special areas of service. They must meet the qualifications described in scripture and are often charged more with caring for the physical needs of the body rather than its spiritual well being. However, a deacons spiritual life must reflect a man of godly character for he may be called upon by the elders to perform spiritual roles. Two examples of their responsibilities at Christ's Church are taking care of people with true needs and oversight of the church's finances. Their role is vital to the well being of the body.

Finally, we have ministry leaders and teachers. Teachers take on the extremely important task of teaching the Bible to all ages from young children to adults. A teacher is charged with imparting scriptural truths to others and to help them apply those truths to their daily lives. Ministry leaders are people who have a passion to lead and organize specific ministries in the church that are necessary for the body to function effectively.

This is an overview of our church's leadership. There is a certain degree of flexibility in the Lord's design for the governing structure of the body. The elders at Christ's Church hold the final authority and responsibility for the body and for making sure that all the leaders are living their lives and performing their duties biblically. We recognize the value of godly leadership. We desire to be a church with leaders devoted to the kingdom of God who are effective in leading people to salvation in Christ Jesus.

(Acts 1:8, 6:1-4, 13:1-5, 20:17-38, 21:8; 1 Cor. 3:9-11, 11:13, 12:28; Eph. 1:22-23, 2:20-22, 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1-10; 2 Tim. 2:2, 4:2,5; Titus 1:5-9; Heb. 3:17, 5:12; James 3:1; 1 Peter 5:1-5)

3. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF WOMEN AT CHRIST'S CHURCH?

Throughout the scriptures, women have been crucial to God's plan for His people. In fact, women were the primary support for Jesus' ministry and since then have participated in every outreach work of the church. Christ's Church follows our Lord's example by valuing the role of women highly with no less value than that of a man's. The primary complication in today's church with respect to women comes from understanding the matter of authority. The Bible teaches that all authority comes from God with Christ as the head of the body followed by men, women and children. The apostle Paul instructed that women are not to be in positions of authority over men. Consequently, we do not ordain them as elders or evangelists nor do they teach with an authoritative position over men.

However, there are many vitally important roles for women at Christ's Church. For instance, in the areas of women's ministry, teaching, ministry/committee leaders, missions, office administration, they are instrumental. Women also have oversight of many of our largest programs such as VBS, nursery, fellowship events and our annual Thanksgiving banquet for the community. Although we hold to a traditional scriptural understanding about the roles of men and women, this does not restrict women from taking an invaluable and very active part of the functioning of our church.

(Luke 8:1-3; 1 Cor. 14:34-37; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 5:21-33; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 2:12; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-9)

4. WHAT DOES CHRIST'S CHURCH TEACH ABOUT FINANCIAL GIVING?

We are somewhat unique in this area. In the same way that we understand that compulsory love is not true love, we know compulsory giving is not true giving. So we do not pass an offering plate each Sunday during our services. Not only do we not want to compel someone to give, we do not want to have money become an integral focus of our worship time with the Lord. Nor do we demand from anyone a specific amount to be given in order to attend Christ's Church.

Like all churches, we have expenses for the maintenance of our property, salaries for our ministers and staff, and missions that we contribute to. So we expect all who regularly attend the church to contribute financially to the body. We teach that a tithe, which means 10% of one's income, was the scriptural standard established by the Lord in the Old Testament. This is no longer a required expectation but it is a good goal for a Christian to pursue. What we emphasize is sacrificial giving which for some may be greater than a tithe. We understand that a new Christian's faith is a developing process and that as he or she matures in their Christian walk, so does their financial giving.

There are two basic principles that the Lord teaches us about giving. First, our giving should be in secret and never for show. Second, the measure we use will be measured back to us. In other words, if we invest in the kingdom of God using a teaspoon, that's how we can expect His blessings measured back to us. However, if we invest sacrificially, He will give back to us with great measure. It's all about where our priorities are and about the measure of our faith.

We ask that those who attend the church have a goal of giving at least a tithe, if their financial situation can merit that. Whatever amount a person gives will be kept confidential and their amount of giving has no bearing on their value to the body nor on their influence over the body. Most importantly though, it is necessary to realize that our financial giving is a reflection of where our heart is. Jesus stated in Matthew 6:21, "*where your treasure is there will be your heart also.*" We give because He gave everything for us.

(Malachi 3:8-10; Matt. 6:1-4, 19-21; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 8-9; 2 Tim. 5:17-18)