

# LBF Church Beliefs



## Life Bible Fellowship Church

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# Mission & Vision

## Mission

We exist to passionately pursue LIFE in Jesus and to lead our neighbors to do the same.

**Passionate Pursuit** – This is no half-hearted journey. Our relationship with Christ and the continual deepening of the realities and rewards of that relationship is first and foremost. We who are passionately pursuing LIFE in Jesus will give our full commitment and energy to our relationship with Jesus. Jesus has to be the central guiding force for everything we believe and do. This passion compels our desire to engage and encourage those around us (church family and community) to understand and pursue LIFE in Him too.

**Life** – While certainly the source of eternal salvation, LIFE in Christ is also a total redesign of our personal priorities and LIFE acknowledges that our “old life” and our “old self” are gone and our “old mistakes” have been covered by Christ’s redeeming blood. LIFE communicates vibrancy, energy, freedom, second chances, and is what actually comes from our relationship with Christ – abundant life today and life full and everlasting in eternity.

**Lead** – People are more likely to follow others who live what they say they believe. God works through our passionate pursuit of Jesus – and God uses our life to light the way for others to know Him. Jesus led by example with His primary teaching about leadership being that as a servant. He has called His followers to do the same – lead by serving. When we walk alongside to assist others in their journey toward Christ, we serve, build relationships, and share Christ – leading them with our own life as an example.

**Neighbors** – “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered this question by telling a story about a Samaritan who saw a person in need and sacrificed a great deal to meet that need. God defines “neighbor” by those He chooses to place in our path – no matter how similar or different they are to us. Jesus teaches that loving others is our priority. This will likely require something of us – a sacrifice of time, an extra effort, an inconvenience, maybe even an awkward encounter. In these faith-stretching opportunities we can draw strength knowing we are not only serving our neighbor but God Himself. We are committed to helping our members become generous people, who live a lifestyle of giving for the sake of God’s kingdom. We are committed to being an incubator for fresh and innovative ministry ideas, continually launching new ministries that make a difference in the lives of people.

## Vision

As we pursue our mission, our vision represents our next horizon – or our ability to see as far as we can with clarity, our plans to live out this mission.

**Connecting** – We envision families gathering, studying together, praying together, serving together, and creating real and meaningful relationships where they support each other and grow. LIFEgroups create community within our church where we walk alongside each other, sharing burdens, caring for needs, and encouraging each other towards LIFE in Jesus. They allow us to show grace to one-another and apply what we learn in our study of God’s Word.

The healthiest churches in the nation depend on LIFEgroups for creating a firm foundation. Likewise, LIFEgroups will be our key priority to unite our church family and get people connected and growing.

**Serving** – When Jesus modeled love-in-action, He did so as a servant. He invited us to be like Him. He commissioned us to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus told us to feed His sheep. And He asked us to reach out to the disenfranchised, the homeless, the imprisoned, and the needy (Matthew 25: 31-46). Jesus asked us to preach the good news and to serve “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine.”

**Love in Action** – We envision creating projects that serve real needs of our community. These projects will be located in our community and beyond our church walls. They will provide opportunities for our church to be involved life-to-life with our neighbors – where conversations can take place and relationships can grow. They will be ongoing and sustainable so we can improve our outreach and learn to be even more helpful. They will always be about lifting up those we serve – establishing love, respect, dignity, and value no matter what the circumstances are. We will work together with other groups, organizations and churches whose goals and methods we admire. When we put love in action, we trust we will grow as Jesus will stretch and mold us into His image.

**God's Word** – God's Word brings us LIFE! We envision deepening our knowledge, understanding and dependence on the Word of God. God reveals Himself through His Word. It is truth - accurate and penetrating - and as we come face-to-face with God's Word, reading it and engaging it on a personal level, our lives will be changed. We are embracing God's Word in new, intentional ways.

**Bible Reading Plans** – Our Bible Reading plans unite our church family as we journey together through God's Word. Weekly emails and daily posts through our Facebook Bible Reading Page guide our readings and allow us to collaborate - sharing thoughts, asking questions, and genuinely encouraging each other.

**Deeper Bible Study Events** – Deeper Events are extended times of in-depth Bible study led by LBF Church Pastors. Through these extended times, we dive into God's Word where we can really struggle, ponder, and uncover God's deep truths and love. A mixture of lecture and Q&A, our Deeper Events provide opportunity to cover more ground than we can in Sunday morning services.

**Sharing** – God's plan for getting the Good News of Jesus out to the world is through people just like you and me. And whether we take the time to think about it or not, if you are a follower of Jesus, people are watching your life. And this is a good thing. People are on a search for God - they desire to draw close to God but they don't know how. This is where you come in. Whether the audience is large or small, every Christian has a sphere of influence. And within that sphere of influence are those to whom we can help bring an understanding of how a person can restore their broken relationship with God through Jesus.

LBF Church is committed to helping people know how to share their faith in our every day ordinary living. This is done through the relationships we already have in place. This is not about confronting people as much as it is about loving people and recognizing and then responding to the preparation that God is already doing in their life. We want to have our church family trained and prepared so that when the time is right they can share their faith so that others may personally receive Jesus.

## Doctrinal Statement

Our statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of Life Bible Fellowship Church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Elder Board is the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

**We believe** – The Bible (a) is the divinely inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original writings, (b) and is , therefore, the final authority in matters of faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

**We believe** – in the Triune God, one in essence, eternally existing in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, coequal in attributes, power and glory and equally worthy of all obedience, worship, praise and adoration (Matthew 28:19; Deuteronomy 6:4; John 14:6,7; John 5:23; Acts 5:3-4).

**We believe** – that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and that He is in very truth God and in very truth man (Luke 1:30-35).

**We believe** – that the Lord Jesus Christ, having lived a sinless life, was buried following His crucifixion on the cross at Calvary and rose bodily from the dead; and that He is the only Savior through whom fallen man can find forgiveness and salvation (Luke 24; John 1:29; 8:46; Hebrews 4:15; I John 3:5).

**We believe** – that humanity is lost and sinful and therefore needs to be saved; that the forgiveness and salvation made possible by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross comes to humanity through personal faith in Christ, the Crucified One, and that salvation is by grace alone, not by any good works (Romans 3:10-23; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:24).

**We believe** – that the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into the body of Christ at salvation, distributes Spiritual gifts to each believer as He wills, and seals the believer for the day of redemption (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:30).

**We believe** – that Jesus Christ will come to this world to rule and reign in righteousness, and that His coming again is imminent and that it will be literal, personal and visible (John 14:1-6; Acts 1:11).

**We believe** – in the resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are unsaved unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29; I Cor. 15; Rev. 20:4-6, 13; Daniel 12:2).

**We believe** – that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted and commanded two ordinances for His church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:17-19; I Cor. 10:16; 11:23,24; Acts 2:38; 8:34-38; 10:47-48).

**We believe** – as Christians we are called to walk by the Spirit, not after the flesh, so our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in all things (Gal. 5:16-26; I Peter 4:11; Romans 12:1,2).

**We believe** – God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. Family is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood or adoption.

**We believe** – marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment and is a sacrament of the church. Marriage is to provide for the man and the woman the framework for intimate companionship, the place for legitimate sexual expression according to biblical standards and the means for procreation of the human race.

**We believe** – that any sexual activity outside of marriage as described above is inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible and the Church.

(Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25; Matthew 5:31-32, 18:2-5, 19:3-9; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16)

## Church Leadership

Life Bible Fellowship Church is an elder-led church. The Elder Board determines all major policies for the church. These include our doctrinal statement, doctrinal distinctives, purpose, mission, vision, and major goals of LBF Church as a whole.

Life Bible Fellowship Church's Pastoral Staff have the responsibility and authority to develop procedures, goals, strategies, and structures in alignment with the Elder Board's policy. The pastoral staff is recognized as having more accurate understanding and training regarding their specific area of ministry; therefore, they are given as



much freedom as possible within the policies and parameters set by the Elder Board. The pastoral staff shall manage the administrative details of ministry programming, freeing the Elder Board from micro-management.

In general, the Elder Board is a leadership board, focusing on congregational wide issues relating to church purpose, vision, values, etc. The Pastoral Staff shall be an executive team, focusing on the specific implementation of purpose, vision, and goals within the perimeters set by the Elder board. The Elder Board operates on a 2/3 majority on most issues, and consensus on major issues such as budget, purchase of property, hiring of pastoral staff, etc.

## **The Sanctity of Human Life**

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life.

## **Baptism**

There is a lot of confusion among people today about water baptism. Some people tell us that unless a person is baptized, he or she is not a genuine Christian, while other Christian traditions don't even practice baptism. Some churches baptize infants; others only baptize adults. Some baptize by sprinkling or pouring water, while others demand full immersion. This pamphlet is designed to help you sort through the confusion, so you can make an educated decision about water baptism.

### **What is the meaning of baptism?**

The Greek word translated "baptize" in our English Bibles is *bapto* or, in some cases, *baptizo*. These words simply mean "to dip" or "to wash." Water baptism is an external symbol of the internal washing and renewal that takes place when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. For example the biblical writer Paul wrote, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 1:3). This is an inner reality that comes through faith in Christ.

Baptism is also symbolic of a person's union with Jesus Christ. Paul also wrote, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4). Baptism, then, is a public confession of our new life in Christ and an outer sign of our obedience to Him.

### **Who should be baptized?**

When the Christian Church was born almost 2000 years ago, the people who heard Peter's first sermon asked, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), to which Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ..." (v. 38). Weeks later the same thing happened after an evangelist named Philip shared the good news with the people living in Samaria: "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). These verses indicate that people who were baptized had first repented of sin and believed in Jesus. One must, therefore, be a believer in Jesus Christ in order to be eligible for baptism. Nowhere in the Bible do we see infants baptized.

### **Why be baptized?**

There are three important reasons for a Christian to be baptized. The first is to follow Christ's example. A Christian is a "follower of Christ," and Jesus Christ was baptized (see Mark 1:9-11). Jesus Christ also commanded us to be baptized. He told his followers, "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" (Matthew 28:19). The last reason is because this was the practice of the early Christian Church. While Paul was a missionary in the city of Corinth, "many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Therefore, our reason for being baptized is to express our love for Jesus and our obedience to His Word.

### **When should we be baptized?**

Perhaps the most detailed account of baptism is found in Acts chapter 8, where Philip led an Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Christ: "Then Philip... told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?'... Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him" (8:35-38). There is no reason to delay. As soon as a person puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ, that person should be baptized.

To participate in our next Baptism service, call the church office at (909) 981-4848 or check the appropriate box on your K.I.T. (Keep In Touch) card during one of our weekend worship services.

## **Infant/Child Dedication**

The task of raising godly and healthy children in our culture today is very difficult. More and more parents are recognizing that they need help. The Bible teaches that parents are responsible to nurture their children spiritually.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 NIV).

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4 NIV).

Child dedication at Life Bible Fellowship Church is a public act of parents, where they express their conviction that their child belongs to God and their commitment to raise their children in a way that honors God. This act of child dedication does not produce salvation in a child, but it is a public expression of dedication by the parents. Dedication is the parents' promise that they will seek to nurture and raise their child in the love and truth of God. Child Dedication is also the parents' appeal to us as a church family to assist them and hold them accountable in raising that child in a godly and biblical way.

Because of the unique nature of child dedication, parents who dedicate their children must first become members of Life Bible Fellowship Church by completing "Meet Life Bible Fellowship Church" (Seminar 101) and sharing their testimony of Christ with our leadership team. Since part of child dedication is asking the church for help and accountability, this is a statement appropriate for church members, not attenders or occasional guests.

Our Child Dedication Services are special times in our weekend worship services where we give the opportunity for parents to publicly express their wish to dedicate their children to the Lord. These Services are part of our church's worship experience.

Due to the size of our congregation, we practice child dedication in groups about twice a year. In preparation for the Child Dedication Service, each parent who will participate must meet with one of our church's pastoral staff members. This is to ensure that the parent(s) understand the nature of child dedication.

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# Divorce & Remarriage

The issue of marriage and divorce among Christians has become very controversial in recent years as the divorce rate has skyrocketed. Currently about one of every two marriages in America ends in divorce. Unfortunately, the divorce rate among Christians is the same as the unchurched world. The Bible speaks very directly to the issue of marriage and divorce, and the purpose of this pamphlet is to guide you through the relevant passages of Scripture that address this issue, as well as to communicate Life Bible Fellowship Church's position.

## The Old Testament

### **Genesis 2:24**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Marriage was originally God's idea. It was not an invention of modern society. God created humanity as both male and female (Genesis 1:26-27). God blessed the first husband and wife and gave them the divine commission to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). Marriage is a crucial aspect of God's plan for humanity. Men and women were designed by God to desire intimacy with each other. Before the entrance of sin into the world, there was no need for divorce. However, when sin entered into the world as recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, the possibility of divorce entered along with it. It is important to realize, however, that God designed men and women to remain married for life in the beginning. Divorce is simply God's provision in a world where his original intention has been twisted and distorted by sin.

### **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if she leaves his house, she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled...

Several principles about divorce and remarriage can be found from this passage, but at the outset it is important to note that this was part of the Old Testament law given by God to the nation of Israel. As Christians we are not under this law today. What we can learn from this section of Israel's law are principles about God's attitude toward divorce.

Divorce was an extremely popular practice in the ancient world. Being a male dominated society, only men could practice divorce. Women were looked upon as property, having no inherent rights or dignity. It is within this kind of culture that God spoke to his people about divorce. Essentially this law provides protection for the woman by providing her with a written certificate of divorce and by not allowing the husband to change his mind. Biblical scholar Walter Kaiser, Jr. notes that this passage "does not bestow any divine approval, or even implied approval, on divorce as such. It sought, rather, to soften some of the hardship and injustices that divorce caused for women in a society that persisted in this practice...Deuteronomy 24:4 is more concerned about protecting women from the whims of a fickle or vindictive husband, who without putting his declaration of divorce in writing, could resume or drop his married state."

Many have wondered what the "something indecent" (v. 1) refers to. Opinions among Bible teachers vary. Everything from adultery to leprosy has been suggested. However, many lean toward an understanding that this "indecent" thing is some form of sexual impropriety or sexual sin. This is further clarified in the New Testament comments on divorce.

### **Jeremiah 3:6-8**

During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. I thought that

after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.

In this prophecy from Jeremiah to the nation of Judah, God uses the metaphor of divorce to communicate his attitude toward his people. They had been unfaithful to God because they had worshipped other gods and been involved in the sexual immorality that was so typical of the pagan religions of that age. God presented them with a certificate of divorce because their actions constituted spiritual adultery. Although this is only a metaphor, it gives us further insight about the grounds for divorce in the Old Testament. Spiritual adultery formed the basis for a spiritual divorce. It is important to realize, though, that God was always ready to receive back his people if they would come in repentance. Even after God serves this certificate of divorce, he goes on to say, “Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord, I will frown on you no longer for I am merciful, declares the Lord, I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt – you have rebelled against the Lord your God” (Jeremiah 3:12-13).

### **Malachi 2:14-16**

The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith.

The context of this prophecy is that the Levitical priests of Israel had divorced their Jewish wives and had married women who were involved in worshipping other gods. This was a direct violation of the Old Testament law. These priests then wondered why God did not accept their sacrifices. In this passage, God provides the answer: He hates divorce. He allows it in certain cases because of the sinfulness of humanity, but he hates it nonetheless. This again points to God’s intention in creation for marriage to be a lifelong relationship between a husband and wife. When that covenant is broken, God acts as a witness against the person who has broken it.

The reference to someone covering himself with a garment refers to the ancient practice of a man putting his garment over a woman to claim her as his wife (see Ruth chapter 3). Old Testament scholar Charles Feinberg notes, “Instead of spreading their garment to protect their wives, they covered their garment with violence toward their wives. The garment symbolized wedded trust and protection.”

## **The New Testament**

### **Mark 10:2-12**

Some Pharisees came and tested [Jesus] by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” “What did Moses command you?” he replied. They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.” When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

A parallel to this passage can be found in Matthew 19:3-12. Essentially there are two different settings: One with the Pharisees trying to trick Jesus and the other with the disciples asking Jesus for clarification. At this time there was considerable debate among Jewish rabbis about what constituted valid grounds for divorce. The rabbi Shammai, a contemporary of Jesus, restricted divorce to cases of adultery only. The rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, allowed for divorce for any reason, even a burnt meal. Jesus responded to the Pharisee’s question by asking what the Scriptures taught, and they cited Deuteronomy 24:1-4. They were quite right in saying that Moses “permitted” divorce. It was a concession because of sinfulness.

However, Jesus gets to the heart of the issue by pointing out that it was only because their “hearts were hard” that Moses allowed divorce. Divorce was not part of God’s original plan. Jesus appeals back to creation as the prototype for marriage.

The disciples were confused about Jesus’s teaching, so in private he put it in uncertain terms: Divorce is forbidden. This is not the last word on the issue, but it points to the seriousness of divorce in God’s sight. Interestingly, Jesus recognizes the possibility of women divorcing their husbands, a notion that was totally unknown in ancient Israel. Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce notes, “The law was unequally balanced to the disadvantage of women, and Jesus’s ruling, with its appeal to the Creator’s intention, had the effect of redressing this unequal balance.”

### **Matthew 5:31-32**

[Jesus said,] “it has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

This is probably the most important passage on the grounds for divorce and remarriage in the whole Bible. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but then He clarifies how this principle applies to Christians today. For Christ’s followers, the only valid reason for divorce is “marital unfaithfulness.” In this case, not only is this grounds for divorce, but also for remarriage.

Obviously the term “marital unfaithfulness” needs to be defined. Most likely this phrase is the New Testament equivalent to the “something indecent” in Deuteronomy 24:1. The Greek word used here is *porneia* (*porneia*), which is a general term that describes all kinds of sexual sin, including prostitution, incest, adultery, homosexuality, etc. *Porneia* is more broad and comprehensive than the Greek word for adultery. It always describes sexual sin with another person. Jesus is making an exception here for married people whose spouse has made a choice to be involved in sexual sin. He is not commanding divorce, but he is providing it as an option for the non-offending spouse’s protection. Where there has been some form of “marital unfaithfulness,” the non-offending spouse is free to divorce and remarry if he or she chooses.

### **Romans 7:1-3**

Do you know, brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law – that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband for as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

Although the apostle Paul here uses marriage as an illustration here, we find in this passage another ground for remarriage as Christians. The law referred to here is the Old Testament law of no divorce, except in cases where “something indecent” is found (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). As mentioned previously, this most likely refers to sexual sin. Barring that scenario, a married person is bound to his or her spouse for life. However, when that spouse dies, the legal bond is severed, and the surviving spouse is free to remarry another Christian if he or she chooses.

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

In this passage, Paul is appealing to Jesus’s teaching about divorce. This is why he says, “not I, but the Lord” because he is appealing directly to the words of Jesus. Paul is consistent with the rest of the Bible, that Christians should not divorce their spouses. However, Paul introduces the concept of separation here. He does not spell out any particular reason why a Christian might seek separation; he simply assumes it is an option. It is crucial to understand the grammar of this passage in the Greek to understand its intention. Biblical scholar Gordon Fee says, “In this kind of construction...the previous sentence expresses the ideal situation (in this

case, no divorce [or more precisely, no separation]), while the following conditional clause introduced by de ('but') describes the alternative possibility which is permissible but not ideal (in this case separation, but without remarriage)." Hence, Paul is saying that there may be certain cases where separation is permissible, even indefinitely. However, in this case the Christian should not remarry. If the person desires to be married, he or she should seek reconciliation with the spouse. Obviously if during the separation the one spouse has remarried or been involved in "marital unfaithfulness," the Christian is free to divorce and remarry another Christian if he or she chooses.

### **1 Corinthians 7:12-17, 20**

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches...Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.

This particular passage has been misunderstood by many Christians. Some have thought that Paul was merely giving his personal opinion since he says, "I, not the Lord." However, this takes Paul's instructions out of its immediate context. He refers to his instructions as a "rule" that applies to all churches. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul writes, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command." All of 1 Corinthians is inspired by God and authoritative for Christians today. The reason why Paul says "I, not the Lord" is because Jesus (the Lord) never addressed the issue of a Christian married to a non-Christian spouse. Paul is giving new revelation on this issue, so he acknowledges that Jesus did not speak about it during His earthly ministry.

The basic principle here is that a believer should not initiate divorce from a non-Christian spouse. Indeed, if the non-Christian spouse will consent, they should live together as husband and wife. Rather than the Christian being defiled by such an arrangement, the non-Christian is "sanctified." This does not mean the unbeliever becomes a Christian, but that he or she is more likely to respond to the good news of Christ because of the testimony of the believing spouse. Gordon Fee notes, "As long as the marriage is maintained the potential for realizing salvation remains." The same holds true for the children, who, in the case of a divorce, could possibly end up with the non-Christian spouse and no longer have a source of spiritual input in their lives. This obviously does not take into account a spouse who is physically or emotionally abusive to the Christian spouse, in which case separation would be an acceptable option (see 1 Corinthians 7:11).

However, if the non-Christian spouse abandons the marriage, either by initiating a divorce or simply by moving out and pursuing an independent life, then the Christian spouse is free from the marriage bond. In this case, the Christian is free to remarry another Christian.

The overarching principle for all of this is that a Christian should retain the place in life he or she was in when first becoming a Christian. This is not a law, for there are some exceptions (e.g., death of a spouse, marital unfaithfulness, etc.), but it is the general guideline for the Christian life. Thus if a person who has been divorced and remarried comes to Christ, he or she does not need to seek reconciliation with the former spouse. Paul's concern here is that Christians not initiate divorce in order to marry a Christian spouse. Instead, they should look at their circumstances as God's calling for their lives (v. 17).

### **2 Corinthians 6:14-15**

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

The immediate context of this passage is Christians who are participating in pagan festivals. Paul is telling these

Christians that such practices compromise their faith in Christ. However, the principle here certainly applies to other circumstances in life where Christians could be “yoked together with unbelievers.” Obviously Paul is not forbidding all relationships with non-Christians, for that would contradict the whole idea of evangelizing the world. What he is forbidding is certain relationships with unbelievers, the most obvious example being marriage. In such a case, the Christian would be unequally yoked. The reason for this is not that the Christian is somehow better than the non-Christian, but they have a different blueprint for marriage. They live under different values. Because of this, Paul exhorts Christians to only marry other Christians.

## **Conclusion**

When we put all these passages together, we see that divorce is a provision of God’s grace that is only necessary in a sinful world. It was not part of God’s original plan.

Life Bible Fellowship Church will never counsel a person to divorce his or her spouse. However, we will support a member’s decision to divorce if his or her spouse has been involved in marital unfaithfulness. In such a case, we would encourage reconciliation; however, if the non-offending spouse feels that the violation is too severe, we will support the decision to divorce. We will also support the decision to divorce in cases where a Christian has been physically abandoned by a non-Christian spouse.

We will recommend separation in circumstances where there is abuse, and in certain cases of alcoholism and substance abuse. In these cases we see separation as God’s provision for the safety and welfare of the family. Separation can also be helpful at times in motivating a spouse to seek out help for such issues. Our prayer in such cases is always reconciliation.

Obviously if a Christian is unwillingly being divorced by a Christian spouse who does not have Biblical grounds, there is nothing that person can really do. In such cases we will support the person being divorced.

We will remarry people who have been widowed or who have been divorced on Biblical grounds. We will also remarry people who have been divorced on other grounds before becoming Christians. We will also remarry people who have been unwillingly divorced by their spouses.

Obviously the whole issue of divorce and remarriage is very complex, and each case is unique. As cases come to our attention, we always treat each one on an individual basis. Our commitment is to the authority of God’s Word, while at the same time communicating an atmosphere of grace and acceptance. At times members of LBF Church go against our counsel on these issues. In such cases we will try as best we can to continue ministering to that person.

## **Notes**

1. All biblical quotes are from the New International Version of the Bible.
2. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *More Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 10.
3. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 202.
4. Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p. 258.
5. Merrill C. Tenney (editor), *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), Vol. 2, p. 150.
6. F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 59.
7. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 295.
8. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 300.

# Scripture and the Transgender Question

## Introduction

Many of the pressing cultural questions of our time have to do with gender and sexuality. We are asking fundamental questions such as, “Is there any real difference between a man and a woman?” This then crosses over into questions about whether or not a man can declare himself to be a woman or a woman can declare herself to be a man. Sometimes this is accompanied by medical procedures intended to change the physical body and the hormones. Other times it is simply accompanied by changes in dress and appearance.

While this question is debated on the moral, societal, and medical level, this document is intended to explore it on the biblical level. Does the Bible have anything to say about this issue? And if so, what does it say?

## Our Desire

Our desire as a church is to show the love of God, which was poured out through Jesus Christ, to every person. Jesus was a friend of sinners, and frequently spent time with people who were outcasts in the eyes of the religious community. As the church of Jesus Christ, we want to follow his example and his calling by showing love and care and compassion to every person we encounter.

Our desire for a transgender person who attends a church service, or who simply interacts with a church member, is that they would experience grace, kindness, and compassion. Jesus’ compassion toward us leads us to show compassion toward others. As we explore the Scriptural teachings on questions about transgender issues, our ultimate desire is that more people will experience the joy and freedom and new life that are available only in Jesus.

## Direct and Indirect Teaching

In starting, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that there is no passage in Scripture that directly addresses the question of whether or not a man should self-identify as a woman. It also says nothing directly about transitional surgery. So, someone could conclude that the Bible is silent on this question. But the Bible also says nothing directly about pornography. However, because of the overall Scriptural teaching concerning lust, most Christians would conclude that the Bible gives us clear guidance on the issue of pornography. In a similar way, we believe that the Scriptural teachings concerning gender, sexuality, and the human body give us ample guidance on questions surrounding the transgender debate.

## God Created Them Male and Female

The Bible begins with the creation of the world, which is closely followed by the creation of mankind. When God creates mankind in his image, he distinctly and intentionally creates them as male and female. Both men and women bear his image, both are equal in standing before God, and yet they are different from one another. These differences are not a point of grief, but a point of celebration. It is good for a man to be a man, and it is good for a woman to be a woman.

Not only this, but throughout Scripture there are specific commands to men and women. And the backdrop for these commands is not that people will choose their own gender identity, but that their God-given gender—determined by their male or female biology—will impact how they engage with the world and with God’s plan for them. For example, there are separate instructions to husbands and wives. And there are different instructions for how men and women conduct themselves in the church. These gender-specific commands reflect the idea that a person’s gender matters. Being male or female is not a peripheral quality, but one that is near the core of identity. And it seems that God intends for us to embrace that our biological maleness or femaleness will be part of what guides us in our conduct throughout life.



## **Exchanging the Truth for a Lie**

In Romans 1, Paul speaks of the tragic situation that happens when human beings exchange God's truth for a lie. He speaks of how this leads to idolatry and sexual immorality. Then he gives an example of a specific way that people exchange the truth for a lie. In verses 26-27 he writes, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error." While this passage addresses homosexuality in a very direct way, it also addresses the transgender question in an indirect way. Paul states that men have a natural use of their sexuality, and women have a natural use of their sexuality. This reinforces the idea that God has created us male and female and that our calling is to embrace our gender rather than attempt to exchange it. When we attempt to exchange our maleness for femaleness, or femaleness for maleness, we exchange the truth for a lie.

The message of this passage is consistent with other biblical teachings concerning differentiations between men and women. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul goes to great lengths to command men to embrace their masculinity and women to embrace their femininity in public worship. While most scholars conclude that the specific issue that Paul addressed—head coverings for women—was a cultural expression for the time and not a timeless imperative, the underlying teaching that each person should embrace his or her gender is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Deuteronomy 22:5 also supports this idea when it says, "A woman must not wear a man's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this." A strong argument can be made that this command is suspect as a timeless idea since it comes in the context of various Old Testament laws, and because Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament Law. At the same time, there are clearly many Old Testament commands that reflect God's eternal will for his people. This command, while perhaps not very convincing in isolation, serves to show consistency with the New Testament teaching on issues related to gender and sexuality.

The consistent message of Scripture is that our maleness or femaleness is a God-given characteristic that we each have, and that this is something to embrace instead of exchange. In fact, to exchange it is to trade the truth for a lie.

## **Is Gender a Social Construct?**

The prevailing narrative in popular culture is that gender is simply a social construct. In other words, they claim, while we each have a biological sex, gender is something else entirely. Ideas about what masculinity and femininity entail are said to be inventions of society and therefore gender is a continuum. Some of us will identify completely with the idea of being a man, while others will identify more as a woman, and others will identify somewhere in the middle.

This idea is not completely without merit. For example, many cultures might consider physical labor to be the sphere of men and consider food preparation to be the domain of women. But there are plenty of women who practice physical labor, and there are plenty of men who like to cook. Similarly, there are many women who like to work on cars, and there are plenty of men who excel at caring for small children. In these senses, there are aspects of "gender" that are a social construct. Many of the things that we consider to be masculine or feminine are not exclusively so.

This said, there is a large leap from saying that not everyone fits every gender generalization to saying that there is no such thing as gender. There is also a leap from saying that a man exhibits some characteristics that often are associated with women to saying that this means that he is not a man but a woman. A more reasonable response would be to say, "If I have assumed that it is not masculine to care for young children, then perhaps I have too rigid an idea of what it means to be masculine." The man who likes to care for young children is still a man. He is simply a man who defies that one gender generalization. The solution is not to say that there is no such thing as a man or a woman—or that a biological man can become a woman and a biological woman can

become a man. The solution is to challenge our generalizations and to make sure that certain categories are not too rigid.

On top of this, there is an inconsistency with how many in our culture proceed on this point. Step 1 is to say that our conceptions of gender are simply culturally constructed. Because of this, a man can say, “I don’t fit our societal ideas of what a man is, so I will declare myself to be a woman. After all, I find that I identify with more characteristics that are typically thought to be feminine.” Step 2 is to say, “Since I am now a woman, I will dress like women dress, and I may seek to change my body so that it looks more like a female body.” If gender is socially constructed, and if gender is not tied to biological sex, then why would a biological man who identifies as a woman feel the need to change his appearance or his hormones? Doing this would seem to indicate the belief that gender identity is tied to biology. All in all, this is an unjustified solution to the problem of gender stereotypes not holding up.

As believers in Jesus, it is valuable for us to break down negative gender stereotypes. It is good for men to know that it is good to be sensitive and compassionate, and it is good for women to know that it is good to be assertive and bold. But it is also valuable to reinforce positive values for men and women. Positive masculinity is strong and brave (1 Corinthians 16:13), and positive femininity is gentle and kind (1 Peter 3:3-4). The ideal situation is to give both men and women a clear idea of their God-given calling, while not imposing restrictive and unbiblical standards of what it means to be a man or a woman.

### **What About Intersex?**

What about babies who are born with no clear gender? Depending on how “intersex” is defined about 0.05% of babies are born with some ambiguity as to whether they are biologically male or female. Is this an indicator that gender is fluid and that we should see it as a spectrum?

As a parallel, somewhere around 0.3% of the population is born deaf or with detectable hearing loss. Despite this, though, we as a society have not concluded that being deaf is no worse than being able to hear. We see deafness as a tragic defect that people have to overcome. Similarly, a baby born intersex is not a proof that gender is fluid. It is simply a case of a baby being born with a problem that has to be overcome. This doesn’t make the child any less valuable or important. It simply means that we don’t feel the need to act as if being deaf is just as good as being able to hear, or that being born intersex is just as good as being born with a clear gender.

In many of these intersex cases, parents are given a difficult decision about what to do. Often, even though the gender is ambiguous, the baby seems closer to either male or female. In those cases, parents can make medical decisions to best care for their child.

Again, any kind of physical trait that is outside the norm is not a sign that a person should be disparaged in any way. We all live in a fallen world and the Fall has impacted us emotionally, spiritually, and physically. But the presence of physical abnormalities does not mean that we refuse to recognize the healthy norm or that we refuse to uphold the norm as something good.

### **Then What is a Transgender Person to Do?**

Biblically, it is best to look at transgender feelings as a temptation. A person may identify as transgender for a number of different reasons. None of us chooses our temptations, and we don’t bear guilt for having temptations. But we do have choices about how we respond to our temptations. Some people have intense temptations to lash out in anger, to indulge themselves sexually, or to drink alcohol to excess. In these cases, the Christian calling is to self-denial. This doesn’t mean that we deny that we have the desire; it simply means that we choose not to act in sinful ways in order to indulge that desire.

While a man may not have a choice over whether or not he feels that he should be a woman, he certainly has choices about his behavior. He can choose whether or not to wear women’s clothes, take certain hormones,

or have transitional surgery. In following Jesus, we all choose to deny ourselves a number of things that seem desirable to us, because we trust that God knows better than we do, and we choose to follow his lead.

This is not to say that a person with transgender feelings is meant to fight this battle alone. None of us is meant to do this. Any person dealing with transgender feelings will be warmly welcomed into the church community, and will receive support and encouragement in this battle. Just as people need support in dealing with temptations in many other arenas, those dealing with temptations in the area of transgenderism deserve support and help and acceptance.

## **Women in Church Leadership**

Perhaps no issue has caused controversy among churches in the last few years as much as the issue of women in leadership roles in the Christian church. With the rise of the feminist movement and increased recognition of women in the workplace, a whole host of questions arise about what aspects of leadership are open to women in the local church. Can women be ordained? Can women teach the Bible to men? Should women be elders? This document will give you an overview of what we believe the Bible says about this issue, and will summarize Life Bible Fellowship Church's position.

This is not an attempt to defend our position. For this we refer you to the suggested reading at the end of the document. We recognize that this is an issue on which many Bible believing Christians disagree. We don't claim to have the final word, nor would we break a partnership with those who would disagree with our position. The most important factor to consider on this issue is the Bible's teaching about men and women. As a church that considers the Bible to be divine and without error, we seek to understand and apply God's Word to our particular situation on this important issue. In an attempt to be concise, this document will summarize the main points of what we understand to be the Bible's teaching on the role of women in church leadership.

### **Men and Women are Equal yet Different**

We believe that God created both man and woman in his image, totally equal in dignity, value, and personhood (Genesis 1:26-27, Galatians 3:28-29). While God made men and women equal, he also made them different. Even the order of creation (Adam before Eve) is seen as an indication of difference between men and woman (Genesis 2:18-25, 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 1 Timothy 2:13). In addition to this, both the Old and New Testaments continually give different commands to men and women, especially in relationship to marriage and church life (1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, 1 Peter 3:1-7). The differences between men and women are not simply physical; they reach into every area of our lives. We believe that these God-given differences inform how we relate in marriage, in the church, and in society in general. Our gender permeates every area of our lives, and these distinctions are reflected in the Bible's specific instructions concerning marriage and church structure.

When it comes to the life of the church, the role of women is every bit as important as the role of men. First Corinthians 12:4-7 says that God distributes spiritual gifts to every believer for the building up of the church. There is no spiritual gift, including teaching or leadership, which is not exercised by women as well as men. There are, however, roles and positions within the church reserved solely for men. This is not because men are in any sense superior, but because our God-given differences lead us to play different roles in Jesus' church.

### **Are Any Roles Reserved Only for Men?**

We believe that the only official role in Scripture that is reserved for men alone is the role of elder. Both 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 say that an elder must be a "one-woman-man". Eldership is the role of ultimate authority and oversight in the church, and Paul reserves this role for men. At Life Bible Fellowship Church, all ultimate church decisions are made by the Elder Board. These decisions include the doctrinal distinctives of the church,

the mission and vision of the church, and the shepherding and discipline of the members of the church.

The idea that the ultimate role of spiritual authority is reserved for men is not a new concept introduced in Paul's letters. It is modeled throughout the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament priesthood was completely male, and the priests were the key formal spiritual leaders at that time. It is true that there were male and female prophets (although the majority of the prophets we come across are male, including every Major and Minor Prophet who has a book attached to his name), the prophets did not have the role of the regular and consistent spiritual leadership of God's people. They were called upon at specific times to speak God's truth to his people.

It is also worth noting that the concept of male leadership is consistent throughout the New Testament. Wives are consistently called to respectfully submit to their husbands' leadership, while husbands are consistently called to lovingly lead and care for their wives (Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Peter 3:1-7). While male leadership in the home does not necessitate male leadership in the church, the New Testament instructions about male leadership in the church make more sense when seen in the light of the consistent pattern of male leadership.

### **Are Any Functions Reserved Only for Men?**

So, if the role of elder is reserved for men, are there any functions in the church which are therefore reserved for men? The New Testament passage that has, understandably, received the most attention concerning this question is 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Below are some comments on the passage that will touch on how this passage relates to the full New Testament teaching on women in church leadership.

In verses 11-12 of this passage, Paul says, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." Several points must be made as we seek to understand this passage:

1. This is in the context of the gathered church. The entire book of 1 Timothy is about how the formal church functions. The key passage of the book is 3:14-15, where Paul says, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." While Paul's instructions here could have potential applications outside of the gathered church, the gathered church is what he has in mind in the immediate context.
2. Women are not forbidden from ever speaking in church. Paul talks about women having the posture of quietness and submission and he does not permit them to teach. In other passages, though, he speaks of women praying and prophesying in church (1 Corinthians 11:5-6). In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul does say, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." This passage seems like Paul is forbidding any speaking at all by women. However, there is evidence from the broader context to indicate that Paul is giving specific instructions about judging prophecies and forbidding women from engaging in this. This makes sense, since interpreting prophecies would be exercising significant authority and may have been a function reserved for the formal leaders of the church. All in all, in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 Paul is not forbidding that women ever speak a word in a church service. Instead, he is giving instructions on the posture and attitude of women in church services. That posture and attitude is of submission and quietness.
3. Women are forbidden to teach and exercise authority over men. The teaching that Paul has in mind is almost certainly the formal doctrinal teaching that went on in churches. We see this modeled throughout the New Testament (Acts 2:42, Acts 6:2, 1 Timothy 4:13). This formal and authoritative teaching concerns the doctrine laid out in the Scriptures, and not simply the opinions of man. The prohibition on exercising authority is a bit more complex because the Greek term that Paul uses is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Some believe that this term means to usurp authority or to dominate someone in an inappropriate way. Others show evidence that this is simply a neutral way to refer to the exercise of authority. While an argument can

be made on both sides, Paul's consistent teaching on benevolent male authority leads us to conclude that Paul is most likely speaking of the normal use of authority within the context of the church. Since Paul teaches that elders must be men, it makes sense that he would forbid women from exercising authority over men in the context of the church.

4. Paul is not simply giving his personal opinion. Some believe that Paul is not speaking authoritatively for all churches for all time because he says in verse 12, "I do not permit." Is he simply stating his own preference? There is strong evidence that he is stating not a personal preference, but timeless command. The strongest evidence for this is that he bases this command not on a problem in Timothy's church or on a cultural concern. Rather, as verses 13-14 show, he bases it in the creation of man and woman: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." While there are different interpretations to Paul's reasoning here, it is clear that he sees something in (a) the order of creation and (b) the deception that took place in the Fall that lead him to say that women should not be teaching and exercising authority over men in the church. This makes his statements in this passage applicable to all churches, not just those in his immediate context.

### **How Does LBF Live This Out?**

What then are the implications of the New Testament's teaching on women in leadership as how it applies to ministry at Life Bible Fellowship Church? Here are some specifics:

*The role of elder is reserved for men.* This is clearly supported by key New Testament passages, as cited above. *The role of pastor is open to women.* While the role of elder is fairly well-defined in the New Testament, the same cannot be said of the role of pastor. Because of this, different churches have different definitions of what a pastor is. The word translated "pastor" in the original Greek simply means "shepherd." We believe that both men and women can perform the function of "shepherding," and therefore we believe that women can hold the role of pastor. We also believe that there are a variety of other pastoral positions open to women, as long as the tasks involved would not require her to teach from the pulpit or fulfill elder functions.

At some churches a pastor is the equivalent of an elder. This is not the case at LBF. Pastors here are paid ministers and shepherds of the church. We believe the both men and women can function in paid positions as shepherds of the flock. As will be outlined below, there are certain pastoral positions at LBF that would be reserved only for men. But, in general, we believe that it is appropriate for women who are in paid positions of shepherding the flock to be referred to as pastors.

At LBF the most likely pastoral positions that would be held by women would be "Women's Pastor" and "Children's Pastor." In both of these cases the primary shepherding and teaching will be to women and children, and will in no way violate Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and other passages.

*We will not have a woman as the Lead Pastor or the Teaching Pastor.* Both of these roles are (1) required to be a part of the elder board and (2) tied to elder functions.

*We will not have women teaching from the pulpit in a Sunday morning service.* We believe that the most direct application of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is the sermon in the regular Sunday church service. It is the clearest and most authoritative teaching that the church provides. While we will have women in all kinds of roles during our services (singing, giving testimonies, praying, serving communion, etc.), we believe that the pulpit is reserved for men who are called to the ministry of the Word.

*Women who are called to the ministry of the Word can teach in certain settings in the church.* In keeping with our belief that God has called men to take the initiative in teaching and leading God's people, we make it a priority to equip men to lead their families and the church in sound biblical doctrine. At the same time, we at LBF believe that there are a number of settings in which women both can and should teach. Certainly we encourage women to teach in the children's ministry and the women's ministry. We also do not believe that women are forbidden to teach Sunday school, facilitate small groups, and lead worship. We want to encourage all believers to

use their spiritual gifts, while at the same time encouraging godly and servant-hearted leadership by men.

**Recommended Reading:**

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.

Two Views on Women in Ministry, edited by Stanley N. Gundry

Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth by Wayne Grudem

Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles by Kathy Keller

Different by Design by John MacArthur

Men and Women: Equal Yet Different by Alexander Strauch

## **The Work of the Holy Spirit Today**

Life Bible Fellowship Church is not a distinctively charismatic church, in that we do not believe that miraculous signs and spectacular spiritual gifts such as tongues, miracles, healings, and prophecy are necessarily a normal part of the Christian's life in every generation of the church. However, neither are we an anti-charismatic church, for we believe in the perpetuity of all spiritual gifts during the church age – including these miraculous sign gifts – and we recognize that God can choose to act in any way at any time consistent with his Word.

We recognize that signs, wonders, and miracles had particular significance as the signs of a New Testament apostle (2 Cor 12:12), who were unique to the New Testament period of church history. However, we also recognize that God continues to perform signs, wonders and miracles today, the most amazing miracle being the transformation of a sinner into a child of God. We will therefore be open to God's unique working in our church and will pray for healing of the sick. However, supernatural demonstrations of the Holy Spirit through tongues, prophecy and other miraculous gifts are not a regular part of our ministry distinctives.

At LBF Church we reject the notion that the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit occurs at any time other than conversion (2 Cor 12:13). We believe that upon conversion, every Christian is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the point of conversion on (Rom 8:9). However, the filling of the Holy Spirit is not automatic (Eph 5:18), and every Christian must strive to voluntarily yield his or her life to the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering. To speak of this filling as a "baptism" is the wrong application of biblical terminology. Moreover, we affirm that the genuine sign that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit is not miraculous gifting but Christ like character (Gal 5:22-25). Although spiritual gifts and extraordinary phenomenon can accompany the Spirit's filling, the fruit of the Spirit will always accompany the Spirit's filling.

We affirm that an important part of the Christian life is experiential. Moreover, we believe a Christian may have many supernatural experiences during his or her Christian life. However, every experience must be evaluated in light of the Bible, and no experience ought to be seen as normative for every Christian.



We encourage a spirit of love and acceptance among our charismatic, evangelical, and Pentecostal brothers and sisters in Christ who differ from us. We must not allow this distinctive to divide us from mutual love, support, and prayer.

## Christians & Political Action

Christians getting involved in politics evokes strong emotions in the hearts of people ranging from fear to excitement. Admittedly, Christians have a sometimes troubling legacy when it comes to their political involvement. Since the fourth century, when the Roman Emperor Constantine marched into war under a banner bearing the Christian cross, many people have associated Christian political action with oppression, hatred, and intolerance. Indeed, acts of hatred and oppression in the name of Jesus, like the medieval crusades and the Salem witch trials, should cause shame and embarrassment for followers of Jesus of every generation.

However, at times, Christian political action has been a source of inspiration, heroism, and positive social change. For instance, the “Confessing Church” movement among Christians in Germany during World War II provided the only organized and sustained German resistance to Hitler’s Nazism. Moreover, devoted Christian activists like William Wilberforce led the British Parliament’s abolition of the African slave trade in eighteenth-century England.

In America, the civil rights movement was also spearheaded by many devoted followers of Jesus Christ, who indeed saw the civil rights movement as an expression of their Christian devotion.

Just how involved should individual Christians and Christian churches be in political and social action? Is such activism in harmony with the Bible? This position statement is designed to help people think through these issues from a biblical perspective and to present Life Bible Fellowship Church’s approach to social and political action.

### What is God’s Role in Human Government?

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them (Daniel 2:20-21 NIV).

The Bible consistently presents God as being in ultimate control of the events that occur in all the world’s nations. The above text from the Old Testament book of Daniel is especially relevant because it presents God as the One who is ultimately responsible for setting up political rulers and deposing them. An example of this from the Bible is the Persian king Cyrus. Although Cyrus did not believe in God, God used Cyrus’s political and military decisions as the king of Persia to accomplish God’s plan. The prophet Isaiah even calls Cyrus God’s “anointed one” and God’s “shepherd,” even though Cyrus did not believe in or worship God (see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13). The Bible consistently claims that God is sovereign over the affairs of all the nations of the world.

### What is God’s Purpose for Human Government?

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect;

if honor, then honor (Romans 13:1-7 NIV).

This section from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans in the Bible is vitally important for any discussion of Christians were getting involved in politics because it describes God's purpose for human government. Every human government ultimately derives its authority to rule from God himself because God is the Ruler of the universe. Government leaders are described here as God's "servants," even if they are not Christians or even God-fearing. We learn from this Bible passage that God's purpose for human government is to maintain social order by restraining lawlessness, collecting taxes for the public good, punishing lawbreakers, and commending good. When Paul wrote this letter, he was living under the government rule of the Roman Empire. At the time, the Roman emperor was Nero, who was not exactly a paradigm of Christian values or virtue. Nero was well known for his bisexuality, immorality, and was even later suspected of setting fire to Rome. Nero hated the Christian faith, and he ruthlessly persecuted Christians for their refusal to worship the traditional Roman gods. Ironically, Nero was the very emperor who would eventually order Paul's execution. However, Paul still views Nero's reign as deriving its ultimate authority from God. In this respect, Paul would agree with Christian author John MacArthur: "Even the poorest form of government is better than no government at all." Paul does not expect the Roman Government to govern according to Christian values, but he does expect it to fulfill God's purpose for government by maintaining social order.

God has a special purpose for human government in His plan. It is vitally important for Christians to understand this purpose, lest we expect the Church to do what God ordains the government to do, or expect the government to do what God ordains the Church to do. In this respect, the Bible itself teaches a kind of "separation of Church and State." This separation, however, is not a wall of separation that strives to prevent Church and State from influencing each other, but it is a separation into distinct but complementary roles. Former presidential aide and contemporary Christian author Charles Colson reminds us, "To maintain this balance the church and the state must fulfill their respective roles. One cannot survive without the other; yet neither can do the work of the other. Both operate under God's rule, each in a different relationship to that rule."

### **What is God's Purpose for the Church?**

If God's purpose for government is to maintain social order by restraining lawlessness, affirming good, collecting taxes, and punishing lawbreakers, what is his purpose for the Church? The Bible tells us:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20 NIV).

The above passage is Jesus Christ's Great Commission to his Church. Being an evangelical church, Life Bible Fellowship Church believes that Jesus Christ's Great Commission is God's purpose for the Christian Church. This Great Commission is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all people everywhere, inviting them into a relationship with Jesus, receiving them into the Christian community through baptism, and then helping them grow into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. At Life Bible Fellowship Church, we summarize our commitment to the Great Commission with our church mission statement:

### **Life Bible Fellowship Church's Mission Statement:**

We exist to passionately pursue LIFE in Jesus and lead our neighbors to do the same.

This mission statement describes our congregation's reason for existence. Everything we do as a congregation (including any social and political action) must find its basis in this mission statement. Only by maintaining our unswerving commitment to our mission will we be faithful to Jesus Christ's Great Commission for his Church.

### **What is God's Perspective on Social Problems?**

No one doubts that many social problems plague our nation. Rising crime rates, escalating divorce rates, human life denigration, substance abuse, poverty, and sexual promiscuity increasingly characterize our culture. Violence seems to intrude on our lives more and more, especially in places once thought to be safe, like our homes, workplaces, and schools. We long to return to times when these social problems were less widespread

in our culture.

Christians often wonder what they can do to curb this downward spiral into moral chaos. Should the Church corporately speak out against the ethical problems within our culture? How involved should the Christian community be in providing solutions to these problems? What do Christians uniquely have to offer our society? To answer these questions, we must understand the Bible's teaching about the root cause of moral problems within human society. The testimony of the Bible is quite clear about this issue:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile...The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen (Romans 1:16, 18-25 NIV).

The clear teaching of the Bible is that all social problems find their ultimate root cause in human sinfulness. Because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), human sinfulness is universal to every nation and culture. Its social problems plague every human society. According to the above passage, the existence of social issues in society is not the cause of God's judgment against a society, but it is instead the result of it. The entire human race finds itself under the power of sin (Romans 3:9); it is in desperate need of reconciliation with God. The Bible claims that the only remedy to this desperate situation is the good news of Jesus Christ, which Paul calls “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Picture social problems like violence, abortion on demand, domestic abuse, sexual confusion, racism, and so forth as the fruit of this universal human rejection of God described by Paul in the first chapter of Romans. Simply condemning this fruit as bad does not change it into good fruit. Nor does picking the fruit and throwing it away, or even cutting down a branch from the tree change the fruit's nature. Instead, the root must be changed to produce good fruit. If the root problem is human sin (as the Bible clearly claims), this root can only be changed by helping people become reconciled to God through the good news of Jesus Christ.

Thus, while our government fulfills its role by seeking to slow the bad fruit's growth by maintaining social order, only the Christian Church offers a means for transforming the root. No human government can change the root, no matter how moral and just that government might be. Within the role God has assigned to human government, the best we can hope for is a government that slows the bad fruit's growth by effectively maintaining social order. But the Church has a message that can actually produce new fruit, the “fruit of the Spirit,” which includes such social virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). In this sense, the government and Church play complementary roles in society's welfare, as the government seeks to slow the growth of the bad fruit by maintaining social order, which in turn enables the Church to thrive so it can introduce people to the good news of Jesus Christ.

The best way the Christian Church serves society and curbs social problems is by producing more and better followers of Jesus Christ. The more people who are reconciled to God through Christ and the better these people follow Jesus as his disciples, the less bad fruit there will be, and the more good fruit there will be in a society. This is why Jesus called his followers “salt” and “light” in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). According to Jesus in this passage, we don't do things to act as salt and light, but our very presence as followers of Jesus is salt and light for our society. Although at times the Church can perhaps assist the government in curbing the growth of the bad fruit, the Church must put its best efforts, energy, and resources into fulfilling Jesus Christ's Great Commission, so it can provide society with individual people who produce good fruit that is good for the welfare of society.

## **What is the Role of Judeo-Christians Values?**

We know that the law is good if one uses it correctly (1 Timothy 1:8 NIV).

I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death (Romans 7:7b-11 NIV).

Despite our nation’s heritage, people in our culture are less and less concerned about Judeo-Christian values. By “Judeo-Christian values,” we mean the moral values found in the ten commandments, which are found in both the Jewish and Christian Bibles. Both Judaism and Christianity embrace these ten commandments to express God’s moral absolutes for the human race. Many of our nation’s founding fathers believed that the moral values found in the ten commandments were essential to our society’s proper functioning.

Because of a decline in believing in these moral absolutes, we are tempted to think that by proclaiming these values and calling people to live by them, we can bring about moral transformation in our nation. However, the Bible cautions us against viewing the ten commandments alone as an agent for moral change. The apostle Paul warns us to use God’s law, “lawfully.” In Romans chapter 7, Paul describes his own experience with the tenth commandment (“Thou shall not covet”). Merely knowing the tenth commandment stirred within Paul covetousness he previously did not know existed. For people who are alienated from God and still under the power of sin, God’s moral standard is in itself unable to empower them to fulfill that moral standard. Proclaiming the moral standard can, in some cases, actually cause people to become less moral, as Paul himself experienced with the tenth commandment before becoming a Christian. According to the Bible, the only way a person can live in conformity with the ten commandments is by being transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ. This means that the Church should avoid proclaiming Judeo-Christian values apart from the good news of Jesus Christ. We must beware of giving the impression that people can meet God’s moral standard apart from the transforming work of Jesus Christ.

## **Who is God’s Chosen Nation?**

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Romans 9:3-5 NIV).

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1 NIV).

Patriotism is a good thing. Christian author C. S. Lewis was right to call love of country a basic human love. However, Lewis was also quick to point out that patriotism can quickly become destructive, even evil, if not submitted to God’s higher love. American Christians should love their country. However, they should always love God more.

Some Christians believe what is sometimes called “replacement theology.” Replacement theology teaches that all of God’s promises to the Jewish nation of Israel were forfeited when Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah. According to this way of thinking, God’s promises were taken away from Israel and transferred to the Christian Church. Consequently, in this way of thinking, the Church is “spiritual Israel,” the recipient of the blessings and promises God originally made to “literal Israel” in the Old Testament. People who hold to this way of thinking freely transfer Bible verses originally describing Israel to the Church. Other replacement theology believers go even further. These people claim that the United States America has replaced Israel (or is equal to Israel) in its unique status as God’s chosen people. These Christians freely transfer Bible verses, originally describing Israel to America. Bible verses frequently transferred in this way include 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Psalm 33:12.

At Life Bible Fellowship Church, we respectfully disagree with all forms of replacement theology.

The above verses from Romans remind us that God only has one special, covenant nation: Israel. Even though the Jewish people did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, God has not rejected Israel. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that America has a special, covenant relationship with God. Thus, we believe it is inappropriate to transfer Bible verses originally describing Israel to anyone other than Israel. Because we believe God has not rejected Israel, we respectfully disagree with many of our nation's founders who embraced replacement theology. Replacement theology is what is behind many of our founders' description of America as "the New Jerusalem," "a city set upon a hill," and "a garden in the wilderness." Although many of our nation's founders saw themselves in this way, we must adhere to the Bible's teaching that only Israel can claim this unique status. America has not replaced Israel, nor has God entered into a covenant relationship with America.

However, as Americans, we do love our nation. We rejoice that our experiment in democracy has become a source of inspiration to many other nations in their quest to find freedom from tyranny.

### **What is Responsible Christian Citizenship?**

American statesman Daniel Webster was right in saying, "Whatever makes people good Christians, makes them good citizens." Since being a follower of Jesus Christ means being fully devoted to him and passionately pursuing him in every area of life; indeed, this includes our citizenship. The Bible offers unambiguous guidelines about how to express our devotion to Jesus in our citizenship.

Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21 NIV).

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king

(1 Peter 2:13-17 NIV).

The Bible presents our citizenship as a significant aspect of our Christian devotion. Even after becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, Paul still valued his Roman citizenship (see Acts 16:37; 22:22-29; 25:11). Our minimal duties as Christian citizens are to respect, obey, pray for, and honor our government officials. This includes paying our taxes honestly, not slandering or maligning our civic leaders, and supporting our military and law enforcement personnel. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul emphasizes the importance of praying for our government leaders. Living in a representative democracy, responsible citizenship for American Christians also includes voting our conscience and fulfilling civic responsibilities such as jury duty. We want to develop a biblical worldview on the weighty social issues of our day. All followers of Jesus must strive to become better equipped to explain how the Christian worldview addresses weighty moral issues like abortion, poverty, violence, racism, homosexuality, etc. Although Christians often have legitimate differences on the best political strategies to address these ethical issues, all Christians should strive to hold a biblically informed view on these issues. Every Christian is duty-bound before God to express his or her devotion to Christ by living as a responsible citizen of our nation.

Some Christians might also receive a special calling from God to serve in civil service, as political activists or elected officials. The Christian Church should love and encourage these Christians, recognizing that their calling is difficult and challenging. The Church should also hold these Christians accountable to live lifestyles that honor Christ and exemplify appropriate Christian character, as well as helping them to keep a clear vision of the different roles of government and the Church.

### **What is Our Responsibility When Church and State Conflict?**

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:18-19 NIV).



Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21 NIV).

We should not be surprised when the values of our society conflict with our values as Christians. As we saw earlier in our discussion of Romans chapter 1, this is the consequence of living in human society. According to Romans 1, no human society lives consistently with the values of God's kingdom. However, occasionally there may come times when a government passes a law that is in direct contradiction to the Christian faith. When this occurs, Christians are not obligated to obey that law. However, this only applies when the government commands us to do something the Bible forbids or prohibits us from doing something the Bible commands. For example, if Christians were banned from proclaiming the good news of Jesus (Acts 4:18-20). Ultimately these Christians must obey God. During World War II, Christians in the "Confessing Church" refused to disclose Jewish refugees' whereabouts, even though they were required by law to disclose this information. Many of these Christians were imprisoned for their civil disobedience. Many Christians refused to obey segregation laws that they deemed were immoral during the civil rights movements and contradicted God's command to treat all people with dignity. In cases like these, God's command is a higher law, and we are conscience bound to obey God's law. However, in these rare cases, we must disobey these "unjust laws" with an attitude of respect, love, and non-violence. In the verse from Acts cited above, two Christians were required by law to stop telling others about Jesus. In a spirit of humility, they respectfully refused to obey that law.

As American citizens, we are free to protest moral evils and government policies we disagree with. However, we must strive to communicate such protests in an irenic attitude of humility and respect. In no way is violence ever appropriate in these cases; we must always seek to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Furthermore, a protest must never be done in a way that alienates people from the good news of Christ, condones violence, brings dissension to the Christian community, or infringes on people's fundamental human rights. Great care must be taken to use language in these cases, especially avoiding "warfare" terminology that suggests the government or non-Christians are our enemies. Instead, we can look at them as the mission field.

### **How Does This Apply to Life Bible Fellowship Church?**

Because Life Bible Fellowship Church is an evangelical church, social and political action are viewed as a component of our discipleship ministry. Just as Jesus calls us to be fully devoted to Him in our roles as spouses, parents, bosses, employees, neighbors, and friends, He also calls us to be fully devoted to Him as citizens. Just as we seek to equip our members to be faithful spouses, reliable friends, fair bosses, and godly parents, we also seek to equip our members to become responsible citizens.

In light of this, we seek to help our members grow in the discipleship component of citizenship. This is done in Sunday morning services, small groups, seminars, special events, and leadership training. In these settings we seek neither to be overtly political, nor do we seek to avoid political issues. Sometimes important moral and spiritual issues—such as abortion, marriage, sexuality, and justice—become politically charged. We seek to proclaim the gospel and teach Scripture, and we address any issues that are raised in that process.

As a church, Life Bible Fellowship Church will never endorse a political candidate. Moreover, we will never endorse the platform of a particular political party. Furthermore, as a church, we will rarely endorse or oppose specific legislation. Occasionally, our elder board might find a particular piece of legislation to be so important that it calls for an official statement from our elder board. These cases are determined at the discretion of the elder board.



We realize that other Christian churches and ministries approach this issue differently than we do. Some Christian traditions emphasize total withdrawal from all social and political action. Other groups urge higher levels of political and social action than what we emphasize at Life Bible Fellowship Church. We encourage a spirit of love among Christians who hold to different convictions in this area. Differences over this issue should never become a source of contention or slander between churches or ministries.

Furthermore, we urge followers of Jesus Christ everywhere to exercise a spirit of love and servanthood amid their social and political activity, whatever it's level. Paul's words to the Colossian church are just as appropriate to us today:

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:5-6 NIV).

## Christians and Marijuana

### The Context

Until recently, the Christian position on the recreational use of marijuana was fairly simple. Because it was illegal in the United States, the matter was settled. As believers in Jesus, we are called to submit to the laws of the land unless they specifically call us to violate God's will for us (Romans 13:1-7, Acts 4:18-20). A prohibition on marijuana certainly does not require us to disobey God. So the clear answer was that Christians should not break the law by using marijuana recreationally.

Now that many states, including California, have decriminalized marijuana, the issue is more complicated. Part of the complication is that the recreational use of marijuana remains illegal federally, while it has been legalized on a state level. This leaves us in confusing waters on a legal level. Some conclude that because it is still illegal federally, it is clearly a non-starter for Christians. Others see this as a less clear situation since, although the federal government still considers it illegal, they seem to show no indication of a desire to overrule the state.

This confusion leaves believers in a position to think more carefully about the recreational use of marijuana. Even if we still considered it to be illegal, there is a chance that the federal law could eventually be changed. Therefore it is a good time to think through the deeper questions behind marijuana use.

### The Goodness of Creation

As a starting point, we as Christians believe that everything that God created is good (Genesis 1, 1 Timothy 4:3-5). This doesn't mean that every created thing is good for every purpose (a fire is good for warming a house, but it is not good for burning down an enemy's house). But the assumption is that marijuana is not an inherently evil substance. It is a part of God's good creation.

### Medicinal Marijuana

The natural outflow of searching for good uses of marijuana is to talk about its medicinal uses. While there are still debates about the extent of its positive uses, marijuana is widely recognized as having benefits for pain relief, while also being less addictive and harmful than opiates that might otherwise be used. It is also used to relax muscles and reduce spasms.

Medicinal uses of marijuana, through medical research, continue to expand. In addition, it is often used as a deterrent for anxiety. This use raises questions more generally about when medicines should and should not be

used. Doctors and medicine are both viewed positively in Scripture. Christians are not called to avoid all uses of medicine. But we also know that legal and prescription drugs can be misused. Sometimes this results in a person being mastered by the drug. It can lead to people seeking to escape their problems instead of dealing with them.

This is a tricky path to walk. One person might shrug, saying, “If you have a headache, you take a pill. If you’re stressed out, you smoke some pot.” But biblically we are told to deal with our anxieties by bringing our requests to God (Philippians 4:6-7). This doesn’t mean that there are no proper uses of medicine for mental health issues. But it does mean that getting high is a big price to pay and Christians should be cautious about it. Rather than erring on the side of using it, Christians would be wise to err on the side of avoiding medicinal marijuana in cases that are questionable.

A Scriptural understanding of the world would seem to lead Christians to the conclusion that there are legitimate and good medicinal uses for marijuana. But this understanding would also lead us to be suspicious of using marijuana to deal with emotional and social discomfort. This does not mean that there are no legitimate medical solutions in these areas; it simply means that God’s counsel in Scripture does not lead us primarily to seek medical solutions for issues that are primarily spiritual.

### **Recreational Marijuana**

Most of the controversy about marijuana relates not to medical uses, but to recreational uses. Is it permissible for Christians to use marijuana in much the same way that it is permissible for Christians to drink a beer or a glass of wine? Is it permissible to smoke pot simply for the pure enjoyment it brings? Again, there is nothing inherently evil about marijuana, so we must look at its effects. What effects of marijuana might lead Christians to conclude that it is not good when used recreationally?

One area to explore is the health implications. Will marijuana be detrimental to one’s health? While this subject is still debated, it has been difficult to demonstrate that there are significant health risks related to occasional use of marijuana. There have, however, been studies that show negative health effects when marijuana is used extremely frequently. Furthermore, there is wide consensus that it has harmful effects down the line for those who use it frequently in their youth. But in the overall scope of the question, Christians would have a hard time making the case that marijuana should never be used because of negative health effects. Other things we consume (cheeseburgers, donuts, alcohol) can cause much more severe health problems if used excessively.

A second area to explore is in marijuana’s effect in terms of addiction. The idea of addiction is not strictly a biblical idea. More precisely, there is a biblical idea that believers are not to be mastered by anything, whether that thing is inherently sinful or not. Does marijuana, then, pose a severe danger of mastering those who use it? Again, it is difficult to come to a clear answer on this question. There are some signs that it is addictive, but it is certainly less addictive than many other recreational drugs (as well as many prescription drugs). We all need to be careful not to be mastered by foods, drinks, television, phones, and a number of other good gifts from God. It would be hard to rule out marijuana simply on the question of whether or not it masters people.

A third area to explore—and almost certainly the most significant—is the effect of marijuana on the mental state of the user. Marijuana use leads to a high, an altered state. While this altered state is highly unlikely to lead to violent outbursts, it does lead to a haze, to loss of mastery over oneself, and often to inaction and passivity.

In Scripture, we know that alcohol consumption is not immoral. But we also know that drunkenness is. It is possible to drink alcohol without getting drunk. Is it possible to smoke marijuana without getting high? It seems that getting high is the entire purpose of smoking marijuana recreationally, while many people can enjoy a drink of alcohol without getting drunk.

Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filling with the Spirit.” This is a telling verse because it gives a strong reasoning why Christians avoid drunkenness. Drunkenness is placed in contrast to being filled with the Spirit. The parallel is that in both of these situations, an outside influence is taking over. In the case of drunkenness, the alcohol is now exercising significant (if not complete) control over the person who is drunk. In the case of the Spirit, God’s Holy Spirit is exercising significant control

and influence over a person. Christians are told to give themselves over to the Holy Spirit, not to drunkenness.

It would seem, then, that Christians would also be called not to give themselves over to the control of marijuana. And since the odds are slim-to-none that a person would smoke marijuana without becoming high, it seems difficult to imagine any scenario in which a person could use marijuana recreationally without unwisely giving over control of their actions. This is the most significant problem with the idea of Christians using marijuana recreationally.

### **Pastoral Counsel**

The heart of the leaders at LBF Church is not to give Christians new and burdensome rules for life. The heart of this paper is to give pastoral counsel to believers in Jesus, so that we don't bring into our lives anything that causes pain, destruction, or a blemish to the gospel of Jesus. Our desire is for people to thrive by walking in greater closeness to Jesus as he leads us on the narrow road.

Our pastoral counsel to all believers is to avoid using marijuana recreationally. One reason to avoid it is that it is still on murky territory legally. But the greater reason is that the recreational use of marijuana represents a parallel to drunkenness, which Christians are clearly called to avoid. As Christians, we want to turn to Jesus with our anxieties, with our hurts, with our loneliness, and with our distress. We don't want to turn to cheap imitations like drunkenness, overeating, binge watching television, or getting high. We want to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not by any outside substance. And while we all need to be careful about overeating or watching too much television, these do not immediately control us in the same way that marijuana does.

While some would make a case that this is a debatable matter, and while we affirm some proper medical uses of marijuana, we do not believe that the recreational use of marijuana has any helpful role to play in the lives of believers in Jesus.

## **The Emergent Church Movement**

Over the last few years, the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) has become the focus of much attention within the Christian community. Some Christians praise it as the answer to what ails the church today and others condemn it as repackaged heresies of the past. Since part of the job of our Elder Board here at Life Bible Fellowship Church is to safeguard the doctrine of our church, the ECM has been the topic of much discussion and research by board members. We will attempt to clarify our current thinking, research, and conclusions regarding this movement.

One of the major problems that immediately arise whenever there's an attempt to discuss ECM is that there isn't a single definition that seems to accurately capture all facets of the ECM. It means very different things to different people. And like the New Age Movement, it is best understood by its family traits or its shared characteristics. There are elements that are common to its participants. At the benign end of the scale, the ECM represents a retooling of the methods that the church uses to evangelize those who are lost. In its most malignant form, it represents a radical reformulation of essential doctrine and what it means to be Christian. It is vital that we understand that the ECM is not a monolith, but rather a movement with many different flavors.

### **What is the Emergent Church?**

In a very broad sense, ECM is an attempt to rethink the Christian faith and practice for our life and times. From our research, here are some of the key elements associated with the ECM:

- A view of theology that is sympathetic to the post-modernist approach. Post-modernism rejects the notion of absolute truth in favor of a relativistic view. Rather than challenging the foundation assumptions

of post-modernism, the ECM seeks to present Christianity to the unchurched within the context of post-modernism.

- A rejection of the post-modern approach to theology in which everything is subjective. For some, this is a reaffirmation that there is such a thing as absolute truth and post-modern's elevation of relativism and pluralism cannot be foundational.
- A desire to move toward a more decentralized form of church organization.
- A hunger for a more authentic Christian living experience.
- A strong focus on evangelism and outreach.

When we survey these elements of ECM, we can sympathize with many of the goals. After all, what church doesn't want its congregants to hunger for a more authentic Christian life or become more outreach-minded in their focus? Likewise, what church leader doesn't recognize that their church has been infected with a multitude of cultural viruses? You may recognize that the last two elements sound very similar to our Life Bible Fellowship Church mission statement.

One way of breaking down the diverse thinking of the Emergent Churches is using the framework of Ed Stetzer, who serves on the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Missions Board. He sees these churches as falling into one of three categories:

Relevants are classified by Stetzer as those individuals and churches that are simply attempting to translate the gospel and its implications into an increasingly secularized culture. These churches/people share the conservative values of traditional evangelical faith and are concerned with trying to communicate the message of Christ in biblically faithful and culturally meaningful ways.

Reconstructionists, according to Stetzer, argue that the current form/structures of modern, organizational church are frequently irrelevant and unhelpful in reaching lost people. These churches/people typically hold a more orthodox view of gospel and scriptures, but they reject the hierarchical, organizational models that often accompany the American mega-church movement.

Revisionists go beyond the reconstruction of church form, structure, and method to the revision of core Christian belief. Issues such as the inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Jesus, sovereignty of God, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, the reality of hell, and the exclusivity of Jesus are being questioned and reformulated in ways that bear little resemblance to historical, orthodox Christian faith.

Using these categories, Life Bible Fellowship Church would consider itself a part of the EC movement only to the degree that we share some affinities to Stetzer's Relevants.

### **Where We Part Company**

Our main difficulties with the Revisionists begin as we start to examine some of the elements of Christian doctrine and practice that they seek to question and rethink. While there are many doctrines and practices within Evangelicalism that do need to be rethought, there are also essential Christian doctrines that should be non-negotiable. When Jude 3 exhorts us to "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," it's clear that he's talking about a body of knowledge. Doctrines like the triune nature of God (the Trinity), the nature of Christ (fully God and fully man), the vicarious atonement (that Jesus died for our sins), the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are not up for debate. If you toss out any one of these essential doctrines then the Christian faith will be quickly transformed into something that's hard to recognize.

In regards to high level of dissatisfaction with the current state of the church in western culture, it is important not to romanticize the existence of the church in ages past. The church has always had its share of problems. Nearly every New Testament epistle was written to address some collection of problems at a given church.

Those within the ECM sometimes become hypercritical of the church and tend to forget that despite her faults, Jesus loves His bride, the church. The body of Christ is still the apple of God's eye. We are all people in the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Christ, which we call sanctification.

With that in mind, there is plenty of room within the body of Christ for many different expressions of the church. For example, the house church movement is just as valid as the mega church.

The ECM approach to outreach also has some controversial aspects to it as well. As a board, we are open to works of God which grow the church as well as those designed to grow our church. And yet, while we would hope that our church is a place where all members are being trained how to share their faith, we still recognize that some members are uniquely called to be missionaries. In other words, we believe that every member should be a minister, but not every member is a missionary in the modern sense. Today when we use the term missionary, we typically think of ministers who serve the Lord in distant lands. However, in the New Testament sense, every Christian is a missionary since outreach is the responsibility of every believer.

In addition, there's a social justice component to ECM that bares a close resemblance to the failed social gospel of decades past that is a great cause for concern. The irony of the social gospel is that the movement sought to change the world at the expense of evangelizing it. In the end, it denied the very gospel that launched the movement in the first place. It's much easier to invest our time and energy into works for which the world will praise us than it is to confront our neighbor with the truth of the gospel which the world despises. Every local church still has finite resources. It is our view that the main focus of the church should be to make disciples as Jesus commanded in Matthew chapter 28. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't fight for what is just and righteous, but only that those things can't be the main focus of our church. There are many para-church organizations that are better equipped to fight these battles.

### **In Summary**

So is Life Bible Fellowship Church an EC? No, if this means that we are moving away from biblical faithfulness on issues like the deity of Christ, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, the realities of heaven and hell, the doctrine of the Trinity, the authority of scripture, etc.

But we do believe that, while not compromising on the core doctrines of the Christian faith, we are called to utilize creative means and methods of communicating the truth of the gospel to the world around us. This approach is in line with the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some."

Therefore, we seek relevant forms and methods that help communicate biblical concepts and ideas in ways that are meaningful to today's adults. We believe that the Bible gives ample permission to the church to adapt the means of transmission of the gospel to various contexts. However, that permission does not extend to adjusting core doctrine to better fit the cultural mood. We grieve that some, in confronting the mistakes and ineffectiveness of the evangelical church, have strayed from core doctrines of biblical faith. Nevertheless, we remain flexible in our approach to convey the unchanging truth about Christ.

Regarding church organization, we affirm that there are many valid expressions of church government. Each expression will have its strengths and weaknesses. We would affirm that the house or simple church is just as valid as the mega-church.

As elders here at Life Bible Fellowship Church, we seek to be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who understood the times in order to know what to do. Rather than pursuing the latest Christian fads, we seek to be well reasoned and intentional in the changes that we make. We may not always get it right, but our earnest desire is to make changes that are for God's glory and the good of our church. We will not pursue change simply for the sake of change itself. From time to time, we find great insights into our culture or God's Word from people within the ECM. However, the fact that we might quote them shouldn't be taken as an endorsement of everything they advocate. It should go without saying that this is true for any source we quote.

Life Bible Fellowship Church does not have any affiliation with the Emergent Village and we would seek to distance ourselves from any part of the EC movement where individuals or churches have disregarded clear biblical teaching on central doctrine.

## Christians and Racism

Racism is a subject of consistent discussion in our world. This position paper aims to examine what Scripture has to say about (1) race and racism, and (2) how they relate to justice.

### What is Race?

When we speak of a person's "race," we usually refer to the person's physical features—most prominently, skin color. This is distinct from "ethnicity," which generally refers more to the country of origin and culture than to physical characteristics. Because of this "racism" refers to (1) the mistreatment of a person based on (usually) the color of their skin or (2) the belief that one person is superior to another because of the color of their skin.

This paper will have broad applications to ethnicity—especially since Scripture speaks much more about bridging ethnic differences than differences in skin color—while having specific applications to bridging divides based on race.

### Created in God's Image

Foundational teaching from Scripture is that all human beings are created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27 says,

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and overall the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'*

There is debate about what all is entailed with the image of God, but what is certain is that being created in God's image carried with it great dignity and honor. Unlike any other good creation of God, human beings bear the image of God and are therefore precious to him.

One of the reasons Scripture's teaching on this is so powerful is that only royalty was thought to bear the image of God in many ancient cultures. The idea that every person—rich or poor, young or old, male or female—bears God's image is unique in ancient cultures. This is revolutionary teaching that promotes the equality of all people.

Scripture also teaches that God's relationship with his image-bearers is something he takes very seriously and personally. Genesis 9:6 says,

*"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind."*

In other words, the penalty for murdering a human being must be severe because that murder is an insult to God himself. When we attack a fellow image-bearer, it is an attack on God.

A statement in Proverbs 17:5 furthers this idea.

*"Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished."*



To mock a poor person is not merely to show contempt for that individual human being. It is to show contempt for the God who made that human being. The Scriptural teaching that human beings bear the image of God leads us to the notion that all people are treated with dignity and honor.

## **Israel and the Nations**

The Old Testament is mostly the story of God at work through the nation of Israel. Because of this, it could be easy to assume that God placed a higher value on the Israelites than he did on the surrounding nations. But that is not the case. The purpose of God forming the nation of Israel was to be a blessing to all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3). They were meant to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), which meant that their purpose was to connect others to God. Although Israel sometimes functioned as God's arm of judgment against evil nations, their existence was meant to be for the nations, not against the nations.

Throughout Israel's history, there are times when God subverted their expectations by doing great work among foreigners. One such case is the book of Ruth, whose hero is a Moabite woman who places faith in the God of Israel and ends up bringing about redemption and blessing for her mother-in-law Naomi. On top of this, the book of Jonah is about God's desire to pour out mercy on the Assyrians, even though the prophet Jonah wanted to see them judged.

Some prophecies point to the idea that all nations will benefit from the promises that God makes to Israel. One such example is Isaiah 2:2-4:

*In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

This beautiful idea is confirmed in the book of Revelation when we see a vision of heaven in Revelation 7:9:

*"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."*

From the beginning, God planned to gather for himself a people from every nation. All who desire to come will be welcomed. No one will be excluded based on ethnicity or skin color.

## **Oneness in Christ**

The New Testament is clear that Jesus Christ has brought about a new unity between people. Jesus brought a universal offer for salvation. Romans 3:23-24 says, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Regardless of ethnicity, we are all spiritually lost in the same sense, and we all end up justified in the same way. And, in Christ, there is no different status for different ethnicities: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The Apostle Paul goes so far as to say that Christ has brought about a new humanity. Ephesians 2:14-16: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." This does not mean that Christians no longer have an ethnic identity. It merely means that ethnic identity is peripheral, and identity in Christ is central. Ethnic identity does not divide us because the same Jesus came to save all of us, and now we all are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4).

This oneness in Christ was so vital to the gospel of Jesus that Paul publicly confronted the Apostle Peter when Peter was not living consistently with this concept. Paul tells the story in Galatians 2:11-13:

When Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Peter was wrong because, to please some fellow Jews, he began to treat the Gentile Christians as if they had an inferior status to the Jewish Christians. Paul did not see this as a small matter. His evaluation in Galatians 2:14 says, “When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel . . .” Paul did not see this as an isolated sin of prejudice or cowardice. He saw this as something that undermined the gospel itself. To treat others as having different status before God based on their ethnicity undercut the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself previewed this idea of his message spreading to all nations when he said in John 10:16, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” The heart of God is to gather men and women from all nations and make them into one new humanity through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

### **Live Justly**

Justice is a consistent and significant concept in the Bible. In Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, “justice” is defined as follows:

In a philosophical sense, justice is understood as fairness, correct treatment, or equitable distribution of resources, but biblical justice is more than a mathematical delivery of goods. The Bible speaks of justice as a chief attribute of God, with biblical justice inextricably tied to God’s mercy and grounded in God and humankind’s relationship. From the time of the wilderness wanderings when the Hebrew people were given ethical instructions about their treatment of widows, orphans, and strangers, the practice of justice has been understood as the mission of those who follow Yahweh.

Similarly, John Perkins says, “Justice is any act of reconciliation that restores any part of God’s creation back to its original intent, purpose, or image.” Justice describes the world as it is meant to be under God’s perfect rule. When we live justly, we live out God’s purpose for us and his world.

But we live in a world marred by the Fall. The whole creation—along with all human beings—suffer from God’s alienation and the effects of the curse (Genesis 3:17-19, Romans 8:18-25). Thus, it is not surprising that injustice is an ever-present reality, even in the best societies. We steal from one another, murder one another, lie to one another, divorce one another, and selfishly mistreat one another. Racial injustice is not a uniquely horrible sin; it is merely one atrocious manifestation of how human beings sin against God and one another. It is one example of injustice. And in this fallen world, true justice is often elusive, while injustice appears all too frequently.

While injustice should not surprise Christians, this does not mean that we simply shrug our shoulders when we see it. The Old Testament is full of commands for God’s people to value justice. Micah 6:8 says,

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Amos 5:24 similarly says,

*“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”*

The Israelites were called to pursue just living toward one another.

In the New Testament, the same call to pursue justice remains. Jesus criticized the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, saying, “You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the

former.” Paul commends believers in 2 Corinthians 7:11 when he says, “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.” God is just (Psalm 9:16, Romans 3:26), and he calls his people to value and practice justice.

Because of this call for justice, one of the ways that the church of Jesus Christ shines the light of God (Matthew 5:16) is through good works related to justice. It is our calling to “speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves” (Proverbs 31:8) to rebuke injustice when we see it and to show mercy and compassion to those who are victims of injustice (1 Corinthians 12:26). This call to value justice applies strongly to how we respond to racism, whether systemic or individual. Not every Christian is going to agree on the political policies or practices that best accomplish justice. Still, all Christians share the calling of valuing what God values, caring for those who are vulnerable, and practicing justice in our personal lives.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, we believe that part of the solution to racial injustice is to break down bridges that divide us. It means that we listen to one another with empathy and care. This is an especially important calling for Christians who are part of any majority culture. This is not to say that only the people of the majority culture can be racist. Anyone of any race can fall into this sin. But it does mean that minorities in any culture tend to carry the weight of racial dynamics. Love drives Christians to use any power we have to benefit others. At the very least, this means that Christians in the majority culture ought to willingly embrace the burden of listening, showing compassion, and using their voices and their power to bring help and justice to those who have less power.

As we live in a country that is consistently rocked by acts of racial injustice, we as Christians grieve and pray and listen. And we also seek the guidance of God in how to use our gifts and platforms to achieve greater and greater levels of justice whenever and wherever injustice is found.