



Topics/Questions addressed in order:

- 1) Homosexuality
- 2) Can a Christian Lose Salvation
- 3) Spiritual gifts
- 4) Healing
- 5) Prophecy
- 6) The Holy Spirit
- 7) The Role of Women in the Church

Concerning Homosexuality

We believe that heterosexuality is God's revealed will for humankind and that, since God is loving, a chaste and faithful expression of His divine design (whether in singleness or in the marriage relationship between one man and one woman) is the ideal to which He calls all people.

We believe that homosexual behavior and same-sex attraction are a result of the fall of humanity into a sinful condition that pervades every person. Whatever biological or familial roots of homosexuality may be discovered, we do not believe that these would sanction or excuse homosexual behavior, though they would deepen our compassion and patience for those who are struggling to be free from sexual temptations.

We believe there is hope for the person who struggles with same-sex attraction and that Jesus Christ offers a healing alternative in which the power of sin is broken and the person is freed to know and experience his or her true identity in Christ and in the fellowship of His Church. We also believe that those guilty of heterosexual sin can find healing, freedom, and forgiveness through the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that that this freedom is attained through a process which includes not only recognizing homosexual behavior as a sin but also renouncing the practice of it. Sexual holiness also comes through the rediscovery of healthy, non-erotic friendships with people of the same sex; embracing a moral sexual lifestyle; pursuing Spirit-filled counseling, discipleship, and healing prayer, and in the age to come, rising from the dead with a new body free from every sinful impulse. This process parallels the similar process of sanctification needed in dealing with heterosexual sin and temptations as well. We believe that this freedom comes first and foremost through faith in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that all persons have been created in the image of God and should be accorded human dignity. We believe therefore, that hateful, fearful, unconcerned harassment of persons with same-sex attraction should be repudiated. We believe that respect for persons with same-sex attraction involves honest, reasoned, nonviolent sharing of facts concerning the immorality and liability of homosexual behavior. On the other hand, endorsing behavior which the Bible disapproves endangers persons and dishonors God.

We believe that Christian churches should reach out in love and truth to minister to people touched by homosexuality, and that those who contend Biblically against their own sexual temptation should be patiently

assisted in their battle, not ostracized or disdained. However, the more prominent a leadership role or modeling role a person holds in a church or institution, the higher will be the expectations for God's ideal of sexual obedience and wholeness. We affirm that both heterosexual and homosexual persons should find help in the church to engage in the Biblical battle against all improper sexual thoughts and behaviors.

Can A Christian Lose Salvation?

This question has been the source of much debate within the Church, as a whole. Many Christians disagree on the answer. Those of a more Arminian view would say that one can indeed lose their salvation, while those of a Calvinistic theology would answer that a true believer cannot undo what God has done.

There are scriptures in the Bible that people on each side of the issue use to defend their stance. But, being the inspired, infallible word of God, the Bible never contradicts itself. How can this question be reconciled by verses that seem to lend support to each side? In an effort to define the position of Evangelistic Temple on this issue, we will highlight some of the main scriptures used to answer this question and define how we interpret these scriptures in light of this topic. Realizing there are a slew of texts throughout the Bible that speak to this issue, for reasons of time and space, we will limit this discussion to some of the main ones.

Romans 8:28-30: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

The verse begins with "and we know". This is not merely an assumption Paul is making. He is presenting inspired truth according to the revelation given him by God. The next phrase is "that God causes". This expression asserts that God is the effective agent in the equation.

One of the questions that believers wrestle with is, "Does our human free will trump God's will?" The answer to this question usually determines how you interpret other issues in the Bible. To be able to answer this question, we must understand that there are 2 wills of God in the Bible. One is what we refer to as His 'will of command'. Sometimes this is called God's 'permissive will'. The other will of God is His 'will of decree'. This is also referred to as His 'perfect will' or 'divine will'.

Our human will can come against God's will of command. For instance, we know that it is God's will that we not kill one another, yet murder is committed every day. We know that it is God's will that we love one another, yet many people don't. These wills of God are being thwarted by our human will.

God's 'will of decree', on the other hand, cannot be trumped by our human will. When God says something, it happens. When He decreed, "let there be light", the light didn't have any other choice but to appear. This understanding of the 2 wills of God will help us better understand the issue here.

Who is this referring to that God is causing something in? The promise is given to "those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Surely this is to be interpreted to include any and every believer – those who are saved.

What is being promised? What is God causing? "All things to work together for good." What is the good? The answer to that is in the next verse – 'that we be conformed to the image of His Son.' This is what is happening to us during the process of sanctification.

Notice that it says He 'predestined' this. The Greek word used for predestined in the original text is the word *proorizo*, which means, "to determine before hand, to decree." When God decrees something, it does not fail to

come about. In Isaiah 55:11, God says, “My word which goes forth from My mouth will not return to Me empty without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

Putting all this together, this text is saying, “We know for a fact that God will complete the work of salvation in those who are saved, according to His will.”

A problem with saying that a Christian can lose their salvation is that we would have to say that God will not fulfill His promise, and this one in particular. It is to say that God promised to work all things for good in the life of a particular Christian, but somehow that person rebelled in such a way as to nullify God’s promise and fall from grace. How is it good (“all things work together for good”) to lose salvation and spend eternity in hell?

If a person who is truly converted and regenerated by the saving grace of the Gospel can then commit apostasy and fall away from salvation, then it is impossible to confidently say that God really causes “all things” to work together for good. It implies that “God causes all things to work together for good in accordance with each man’s personal will.” What a far cry from the truth of Ephesians 1:11 which says that He “works all things after the counsel of His will.” His will, not ours.

In John 6:38-40, Jesus says, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me; and this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise Him up at the last day.”

Here, Jesus is saying that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. He doesn’t say they might have it or that having it is conditional after they believe.

This text also emphasizes that Jesus does the will of the Father, which is that He should “lose nothing of all that He has given Me.” Those given to the Son by the Father will not be lost.

Another passage emphasizing this truth is John 10:27-29, where Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Here, Jesus is saying that those who follow Him are given eternal life. He further says that no one shall snatch them out of His hand, nor the Father’s hand.

Now, some who believe a person can lose their salvation often explain this verse by saying that although no one can snatch them from His hand, we can choose ourselves to leave His hand. But doesn’t “no one” also include the person who is in His hand? If the possibility remained that we could remove ourselves from Christ’s hand, the passage would hardly give the assurance that Jesus intends by it.

Other texts that teach that God’s children will not lose salvation:

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Philippians 1:6, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 1:13-14, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

God has made a promise and has sealed us as a guarantee of salvation. To allow anything to break God’s

promise would bring dishonor upon God's own glory as it greatly questions His faithfulness and truthfulness. God always fulfills His promises.

But, we must also recognize that there are a few texts which initially and on the surface, seem to contradict this truth. Specifically, proponents of the Arminian position point to two texts, Hebrews 6:4-6 and II Peter 2:20-22.

Hebrews 6:4-6, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame."

This passage is not clearly referring to someone who has truly been born again, but rather, "once been enlightened" simply means that they came to understand the truths of the Gospel, not that they responded to those truths with genuine saving faith.

The text further states that they "have tasted of the heavenly gift" and "tasted of the good word of God". Tasting is a temporary act and the one tasting might or might not accept the thing being tasted. The Greek word used in the original manuscript for 'taste' is the word 'geuomai' and is the same word used in Mathew 27:34, that says that those crucifying Jesus "offered Him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when He tasted it, He would not drink it."

These people might have heard the truth of the Gospel and not accepted it for salvation. They might have even been in intellectual agreement with the facts of the Gospel, but not truly been regenerated by the power of the Gospel.

Furthermore, the next two verses of Hebrews give an interpretation of verses 4-6. "For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."

The analogy presented here is of water falling on two types of ground. Though both receive nourishment, only one truly bears fruit. It does not state that one bears fruit for a while and then bears thorns and thistles. It would seem rather clear that the metaphor is speaking of two types of people. The first received the influence of the Gospel and bore weeds, thus showing no sign of true salvation and no real faith. The second received the influence of the Gospel and bore fruit which is evidence of true belief and repentance.

The second text of scripture used to prove a person can lose their salvation is II Peter 2:20-21, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them."

Again, this text is not clearly referring to someone who has experienced true saving faith. This passage can be taken to reference those who have heard Christian principles and morality and decided to act upon them in some manner (choosing not to cheat on their spouse, not to steal, etc.). This action represents some sort of escape from the natural order of a fallen world. Obedience to God's principles, even if done apart from saving faith, still generally results in some common grace and blessings. But in no way does it produce true salvation. Salvation is by faith and grace alone, not works.

I John 2:19 is a verse that speaks to what the above passages in Hebrews 6 and II Peter 2 are talking about: "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us."

This verse shows us that enduring faith is the sign of true salvation. The reason that some people depart from the faith is that they never truly were saved to begin with. Where Justification has occurred, sanctification will always take place. We may at times fall, we may at times have moments of despair and doubt, but where true salvation has occurred, the chart of one's spiritual growth, even though it may have ups and downs, will always be up.

Another verse people often quote to prove a person can lose salvation is Rev. 3:5, "He who overcomes will be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life."

They say that this verse suggests that a person's name CAN be erased. But, nowhere does it say that. So, in reality, this verse actually supports the fact that you can't lose salvation because God is assuring us that He won't erase it.

Looking at this verse a little more shows us why we think it is important to be assured of salvation. This is where this whole issue points to the Gospel.

Whose name is not going to be erased? Those who overcome. On the surface, it might seem that 'to overcome' implies some type of achievement or self-effort. It might sound as if God not erasing our name is conditional on whether or not we do something to overcome.

But Rev. 12:11 tells us how we overcome – "They overcame by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." The blood of the Lamb is referring to Jesus' death on the cross. Our standing before God is not based on what we do. It is based on what He did. The 'word of their testimony' – what is our testimony? "I once was lost, but now I'm found. He forgave me. He saved me. He changed me. He brought me to life. He made me His child. He sealed me with the Holy Spirit." It's all about Him.

We can take no credit in our overcoming. It is all to the praise and glory of Jesus. That's why we believe this is an important topic for the church to take a stance on. We believe it points to the Gospel. We believe that the stance we take increases the work of Jesus and decreases us.

If we can lose salvation based on what we do or don't do, then all we will tend to focus on is what we do in order not to lose it. Our focus then becomes on our self-effort. Knowing our salvation is secure gets our eyes off of us and on to Jesus. It's all for the praise and glory of Him.

Spiritual Gifts

The first question that is often debated within the church as a whole is whether or not spiritual gifts are valid for use in the church today. There are really 3 positions that people take on this question. Some argue that some of the more miraculous gifts (prophecy, tongues, healing, casting out demons, etc.) were given only during the time of the apostles during the early preaching of the Gospel, and that they are no longer needed today. Others believe that 'yes', the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are still valid and useful for us today. And then there is a third group, who takes neither one of those positions, but is 'undecided'. These are churches who think that the issue of spiritual gifts is just too controversial, and so they avoid the subject altogether.

How do the scriptures answer this question? In I Cor. 1:4-7 Paul says they are "not lacking in any gift...waiting eagerly for the revelation of the Lord." This seems to indicate that their gifts would be with them until they saw Jesus. In I Cor. 13:8-13 Paul says that spiritual gifts will cease when the perfect comes. He is explaining that our present understanding and knowledge are indirect and imperfect, but that someday they will be direct and perfect. In this argument, Paul connects the function of prophecy with the time of its ending. It fills a certain need now, but does so imperfectly. When the perfect comes, that function will become obsolete or useless. The

overall function of this text is to show that love is superior to spiritual gifts, because those gifts will pass away but love will last forever.

So, the position we take on this question is that we believe spiritual gifts are given to the church for the period between Jesus' ascension and return. They are valid and relevant for us today.

What is the purpose then, for spiritual gifts? In Acts 2, we read how the Holy Spirit first empowered the apostles to preach the Gospel. That's one purpose of spiritual gifts, and we know that preaching the Gospel is not going to be done until Christ returns. Eph. 4:11-12 says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;" And so we see two other purposes of spiritual gifts here: equipping for service and building up the body (Church).

Spiritual gifts not only equip the church for the time until Jesus returns, they also give a foretaste of the age to come. When God manifests His presence in this broken world, He reminds us of what we have to look forward to. For example, the gifts of insight and discernment are a taste of the much greater discernment we'll have when Jesus returns. Gifts of knowledge and wisdom are a taste of the perfect wisdom we will have in heaven. The gift of tongues, the common language we will all speak. Gifts of healing foretaste the perfect health that will be ours when Christ grants us our resurrected bodies. Similar parallels can be found in all the gifts. So when the Holy Spirit manifests God's presence through a spiritual gift, we see at that moment, the glories of heaven interjected into a broken world, reminding us of the restoration of this broken world that will come at His return.

Another question is, "Does every believer get spiritual gifts?" Those of a more Pentecostal leaning will say that only those who have been baptized by the Spirit will get spiritual gifts. But we believe that receiving the Holy Spirit is not an event separate from salvation, but that we receive the Holy Spirit at salvation. Therefore, the scriptures teach that every believer receives at least one spiritual gift, usually more than one. If you have been saved, regenerated by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, you have a spiritual gift that God has given you for His glory. I Cor. 12:7 says, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Many people don't like talking about spiritual gifts because there has been so much abuse in regards to using them in the church. But, we can't reject spiritual gifts because of a potential for abuse. Rather, we should encourage gifts and do our best to guard against abuse. If we are taught correctly on how they are to be used, that is the best way to guard against the abuse of it. Would we give someone a gun without teaching them how to use it? Of course not. A gun in the hands of someone who doesn't know how to use it is extremely dangerous. Same way with spiritual gifts. They can be powerful when used correctly, and dangerous when not. We should have sound teaching on spiritual gifts so that much of the abuse can be avoided. That doesn't mean it won't be abused. We are still working with broken people here. But if we are informed on what the Bible teaches on this subject, we will be better equipped to correct the abuse when it occurs.

Healing

We believe God is able to miraculously bring physical healing to people as He chooses by His sovereign will. That doesn't mean that every time someone prays for healing that they should be healed. Nor, do we believe in the teaching that if someone does not experience healing, that somehow it is their fault (i.e. they 'didn't have enough faith'). This is a dangerous and destructive teaching.

God heals who He chooses to heal and doesn't those He chooses not to. There are several reasons for healing. One, scripture shows that it is a 'sign' to authenticate the Gospel message and show that the Kingdom of God has come. It brings comfort and health to those who are ill, thereby demonstrating God's attribute of mercy toward those in distress. Third, it equips people for God's service, removing physical impediments to effective

ministry. And fourth, it provides an opportunity for God to be glorified as people see physical evidence of God's goodness, love, power, wisdom, and presence.

Prophecy

To begin, it's important that we understand the difference between OT prophecy and NT prophecy, because they are very different. The prophets in the Old Testament spoke with absolute divine authority. They could say, "Thus says the Lord," and the words that followed were the very words of God. To disobey or disbelieve the words of a prophet were to disobey or disbelieve God Himself. Because of this divine authority, they were able to write down those words as scripture for all time.

That is not the case with New Testament prophecy. In Thess. 5:20-21, Paul says not to despise prophecy, but then he says to examine everything carefully and to hold fast to what is good. This implies that NT prophecies can contain some things that are bad and some things that are good. It implies that it might contain things that don't pass examination. In I Cor. 14:29, Paul says, "let 2 or 3 prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment."

These are things that would never have been said about Old Testament prophecy. We can't imagine Isaiah to stand before the people and declare, "Listen to what I say and weigh what is said; sort the good from the bad and judge what parts you should accept." If prophecy had absolute divine authority, it would be sin to do this. But here, Paul commands that it be done, suggesting that NT prophecy did not have the authority of God's very words.

The church in Corinth had a lot of prophecy going on in it. And yet, in verse 36 of Ch. 14 Paul says, "Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?" Then, in verse 37 and 38 he claims authority far greater than any prophet at Corinth: "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." The apostles in the early church were the only other people who could speak the very words of God with divine authority and write them down as scripture for us to follow.

What then, is prophecy in the New Covenant church today? It's not fortune telling or predicting the future. Prophecy today is defined as, "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind." Paul calls this a 'revelation' in I Cor. 14:30. He is referring simply to something God may bring to mind or impress on someone's heart or thoughts in such a way that it is distinct from one's own train of thought. Sometimes a thought or something will come that you know wasn't from your own head. Prophecy is no more mystical than that. Usually, it takes some time to learn to distinguish between what are just your thoughts and what may be thoughts inspired by the Lord.

And that is exactly why Paul says that all prophecies or revelations from God must be tested. Behind every prophecy there are three possible sources: the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, or an evil spirit.

These revelations from God can be about all kinds of things. It very well could be something about the future. It might be something God is saying to the church. It might be something the Lord laid on your heart about someone else. It might be something about a subject you are teaching for a Bible class. It can come in the form of a dream you have while sleeping, or a picture that comes to your mind that represents a truth God wants to communicate.

The point is that whenever someone says they have a 'word from the Lord' it should never be automatically taken as truth, but should first be tested. So, now let's talk about how it should be tested.

Test 1 – does it edify, exhort, and comfort? I Cor. 14:3 says, "But one who prophecies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation." To edify means to 'build up', to exhort means to 'stir up' and to

console means ‘to bind up’ or heal. If it doesn’t achieve that, it’s not true prophecy. If the effect is condemnation, confusion, and discouragement, then the prophecy cannot be accepted. A prophetic word should enable people to know and understand the heartbeat of God for themselves.

Let me say here, that a prophetic word is never a substitute for you going directly to the Source yourself. Some people go to so-called ‘prophets’ on a regular basis so they can find out what the Lord wants for them or what He’s saying to them. If someone has a word from God for you, the majority of the time it’s going to confirm something God has already been telling you. If it is something new, it should always be tested first.

Test #2 – The spirit behind the prophecy. I John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” A prophetic word can come either from God, from your own mind, or an evil spirit. A prophetic word can be spot-on in accuracy but still be from an evil spirit. We see this very scenario in Acts 16:16-18. What the girls said in this text was 100% accurate, but it was not the Spirit of God revealing this to her. Remember, the counterfeit is often close to the real thing.

Test #3 – Does it line up with scripture? It is very important to state that we build our lives on Scripture and not on prophecy. Prophecy must not be used to establish doctrine or church practice. A prophetic revelation should always fall within the parameters of Scripture and any word that would lead or encourage you toward something that Scripture clearly teaches as improper or immoral is clearly out of bounds.

But, there are times when a prophetic word might speak to a situation that the Bible doesn’t cover. This is especially true when it is more predictive in nature, telling of something that will come to pass. If that’s the case, then we go to the final test, which is:

Test # 4 – Does it glorify Jesus? Rev. 19:10 says, “Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Jesus. Any word or ministry that exalts man’s ministry at the expense of the glory of Jesus must be considered unworthy.

A few more things about prophecy: A revelation from God can come in many different forms. It can be a thought that you know wasn’t from your own head, a dream you had while sleeping, a picture in your mind that represents something, or even something that jumps out at you while reading His word. It can even come with the gift of tongues. If a message in tongues is given with an interpretation to go with it, then usually it is a word for the church as a whole. That’s when it edifies the church. So, prophecy can come in the form of a message in tongues.

Anyone giving a prophetic word today should never begin it with, “thus says the Lord.” That is never a phrase that was used, even by the apostles. To say that gives the impression that what is about to follow are the direct words from God. It’s far better to begin with, “I believe the Lord told me”, or “I feel led to say this.” And then you can say, “Great, let me hear it and we’ll weigh it.”

Be careful of what some call ‘parking lot prophecy’. That’s the term used for words that given ‘on the sly’, so to speak. That’s prophecy that doesn’t want to be judged or weighed and is usually given outside of earshot of someone in authority. If someone is not willing to have their word tested or weighed they better hold it. A personal agenda is usually behind a ‘prophetic word’ that isn’t willing to be tested.

Just because God has revealed something doesn’t necessarily mean it is supposed to be shared with someone. Often times God will reveal something just so that it will be a matter of prayer.

Prophecy is one of those spiritual gifts that some people are uncomfortable with, just because it might seem kinda ‘weird’. If you are going to be a follower of Jesus and be a part of His kingdom, you better get used to

things happening that don't seem 'normal'. The Bible says that we are a peculiar people. And again, many people are uncomfortable with it because of the abuse of it they've experienced. But look again at what was going on the church at Corinth. This gift was being grossly abused. Yet, Paul doesn't shut it down and say, "Okay, you've abused the spiritual gifts too much, we aren't going to be talking about them anymore. Let's just focus on the basics and not get off on this stuff anymore." On the contrary, even while scolding and correcting them on their abuse, he still encouraged them to operate in the gifts. He said, "Earnestly desire spiritual gifts", and "do not forbid anyone from practicing them."

As long as we are resolute on the Word of God being the absolute and final authority on all matters and centered on the Gospel, I don't think we have to worry too much about things getting out of hand.

Those who are always looking for someone to 'have a word' for them need to be reminded that we should find our joy, our comfort, and our delight in God himself as He speaks to us through the Bible. There we have treasures of infinite worth – the actual words of our Creator speaking to us in language we can understand. And rather than seeking frequent guidance through prophecy, we should emphasize that it is in Scripture that we are to find guidance for our lives. That is where we find direction, God's will, and is our complete reliable standard. It's in God's words in scripture that we can confidently say, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."

Gift Of Tongues

Tongues is a spiritual gift that has probably caused more controversy and debate within the Church than any other gift. What belief people have on it has even been the defining issue of some denominations. If we were to rank spiritual gifts on importance, this would be at the bottom. Paul puts it at the bottom when he does list some gifts in numerical importance in I Cor. 12:28.

Even though Paul lists tongues at the bottom, there are many denominations that put great emphasis on this gift; even going so far as to say that if you don't speak in tongues, you aren't truly saved. Some will back off a little from that extreme and say that you can be saved, but if you don't speak in tongues, you're not filled with the Holy Spirit. We believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a separate event apart from salvation. When you receive Christ for salvation, you receive the Spirit (see text on 'The Holy Spirit'). Those who believe tongues is the definitive sign of salvation or the Holy Spirit base their doctrine, or belief, on the book of Acts.

In several instances, when believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in tongues. But like we mention in other texts (see 'the Holy Spirit'), just because it happened in Acts does not mean that it has to happen for every believer. There are also instances in Acts where people were filled with the Holy Spirit, but displayed some other gift other than tongues. When the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit in Ch. 8 it doesn't name any spiritual gift that was evident. In Acts 4, those who were gathered were filled with the Spirit and began speaking the word of God with boldness.

So, yes, in several instances tongues were a sign that believers had received the Holy Spirit, but that is not a reliable foundation on which to say therefore it should be the case with every believer. Nowhere else in the New Testament does Paul or any of the other writers say anything about tongues being the true sign of the Holy Spirit, or that every believer will have that gift.

What we do find is the exact opposite to be true. I Cor 12 makes the very point that each believer has different gifts and not all believers have the same gift, but that the Holy Spirit distributes them to each one as He wills. In verse 29 and 30 of that same chapter, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions: "All are not prophets, are they? All are not teacher, are they? All do not speak with tongues, do they?" The implied answer is of course, no. Not everyone has these gifts. The point He was making is that although we don't always have the same gift, we all make up the same body and are dependent on one another.

There is also the debate on exactly what tongues is. Some say it is a known human language that is only unknown to the speaker. Others say that it is a language not spoken anywhere on earth, but a heavenly one given to the speaker. The scriptures show us that it can be both. The first instance of tongues being spoken was in the disciples, and it was in the form of known human languages. It says they were declaring the great works of God in the languages of all the foreigners around them who had come to Jerusalem in observance of Pentecost. But in I Cor. 14:2, Paul says tongues can be in a language no one understands. Whether it is a known language or a heavenly language, tongues is defined as prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.

How is the gift of tongues to be used in the church? I Cor. 14 is where Paul gives specific instruction regarding spiritual gifts, and tongues in particular. Here, we find out some things about tongues. Verse 2 says that it is prayer or praise to God. Verse 4 says that “one who speaks in tongues edifies himself.” Edify means to build up, to encourage, to improve. Tongues is given as a gift of the Holy Spirit in order to edify the one who is speaking. It does not edify the church as a whole, just the individual. According to verse 27, it is clear by Paul’s instruction that unless an interpretation is given to the words spoken in tongues, it is not to be used in a congregational setting. If you know the interpretation, and if someone else doesn’t know the interpretation, it should not be spoken.

Paul goes on to explain in this chapter how pointless it is to speak in tongues in church without an interpretation. He says if lost people come in and hear you doing it, they’ll think you’re crazy in verse 23. In verse 19 he says that he’d rather speak 5 words that people understand than ten thousand in tongues.

It’s important to understand what was going on in the church in Corinth when Paul wrote this letter to them. Paul started this church; he trained leaders, and then left to spread the Gospel in other places. Later on, he was informed that this church was pretty much out of control. They had become a selfish, glory-seeking body of baby Christians, doing whatever they felt like doing in church, causing complete chaos and disorder. Paul wrote this letter to set them straight. One of the things they were doing was that many people were exercising their spiritual gifts as they felt like it. You had lots of people speaking in tongues at the same time, lots of people prophesying at the same time, it was total chaos. Basically, they were all showing off, trying to show how spiritual they were by operating in their spiritual gifts. Paul scolds them and tells them that if someone has something for the church, then they are to take turns and not all do things at the same time. He also drives home the point that everything they do in church should be done for the building up of the body – not the building up of themselves. In verse 26 he says, “Let ALL things be done for edification.”

And yet some people get so upset if they feel like they aren’t allowed to speak in tongues in church whenever they feel like it. The reason you can’t do it whenever you feel like it is because that gift is for building yourself up. The Bible says everything must be done to build the church body up.

That goes for anything we do in church. One of the greatest things about our country is that we are free to live how we want. It’s what makes us who we are. Because of our ‘free to be me’ mindset, we think that therefore, we are free to do whatever we feel like in church, as well. Even in our society, our freedom has limits. We are free to do what we want as long as it is within the confines of the law. We aren’t free to break the law. The same thing goes for the church. We are free to do whatever we want as long as it is within the parameters of scripture. And the scripture says that when you are together as a church, everything should be done to build up the whole body, not just yourself. That goes for using spiritual gifts, that goes for how you worship, that goes for what you teach, etc, etc. If you feel like doing something in church, you first need to think, “Is this building up the church or is it building up me?” “Is this drawing attention to me or is it drawing attention to Jesus?”

Some people view tongues as having some kind of extra mojo attached to it that is supposed to cause something to happen that wouldn’t happen in regular language. It’s as if tongues is being used as a Christian way of saying, “Abra-Cadabra”. The thing is, if you are praying for someone else, speaking in tongues is an improper

use of that spiritual gift. When you pray for someone, it is for their benefit. Scripture says that when you speak in tongues, it is for your benefit. How can you build someone else up by building yourself up? You can't.

Being in a group of people who are praying together would also be an improper setting for tongues without an interpretation. When several people are together praying, it's important to be able to understand what someone else is praying so that you can be in agreement together on what's being prayed. If we are praying together and you start speaking a language I don't understand, how am I going to agree with what you're praying? Paul mentions this, too in verse 16 – "If you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?" "Amen" means, "so be it", or "let it be done."

It also very distracting to others when someone else is praying in tongues. Paul uses the analogy in this chapter of instruments all being in tune with one another. If a group of people are praying together, and one person starts praying in another language, it's like an instrument in a band being out of tune. Which instrument is notices the most? The one out of tune.

Our stance on the issue of tongues may sound like we are against the use of it, but that is not the case. We believe that it is a valid spiritual gift, just like any of the other gifts. But like all the other gifts, it should be used within the parameters of scripture. Tongues is a great gift given by the Holy Spirit to those who have it. It enhances one's personal prayer life in a tremendous way. But unless there is an interpretation given with it, it should remain in personal prayer time.

In summary, the position we take on the gift of tongues is as follows:

It is a minor, personal spiritual gift.

Unless accompanied by an interpretation, it should not be done in the presence of others.

It is not a gift that everyone has.

It is praise and prayer to God.

It is an indication of God's active presence at work.

It edifies the one using it, not the church as a whole, unless accompanied with an interpretation.

The Holy Spirit

We believe the scriptures are clear that the Holy Spirit is an equal part of the Trinity of God. As a church, we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity - that God exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a thing, and should be referred to as such; He and not it.

Some people tend to think that the Holy Spirit showed up on the scene at Pentecost. But He has always existed, just as God. We see Him involved in the beginning at creation, where Gen. 1:2 says, "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

We define the work of the Holy Spirit as follows: The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world.

There are 5 main functions of the Holy Spirit that are revealed in scripture. He empowers, He purifies, He

reveals, He guides, and He unifies. You can then break these down into more specific ways He does these things, but in general, that is the function of the Holy Spirit. Anything you see the Holy Spirit doing will generally fall under one of these 5 things.

Although the Holy Spirit was at work in the Old Testament, or under the Old Covenant, it was to a lesser degree than He would be under the New Covenant. Acts 2:1-13 describes the inaugural work of the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant.

This is where we get into some things that not every believer agrees on, when it comes to the Holy Spirit. Just like in many doctrinal issues, you have people on both extremes. On one extreme, there are those who believe that the work of the Holy Spirit we read in the New Testament was just for the early church at that time and does not apply to us today. On the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that if it doesn't happen exactly the way it did in Acts, you aren't a Christian. We believe that correct theology lies somewhere in the middle.

In order to interpret what the scriptures teach in regard to the Holy Spirit, we need to understand something important about the book of Acts. Acts is not a book of hard and fast doctrine. Acts is exactly what it says it is, 'The Acts of the Apostles.' It is not the acts of every believer. To say that just because it happened a certain way in Acts means that it has to happen that way today is incorrect. But at the same time, we can't put God in a box and say that just because it happened to the apostles means that it can't happen today. Again, both statements are incorrect extremes.

The only way we can know for sure that something that happened in Acts is applicable to a Christian's life today is if the apostles talk about it in the other letters of the New Testament. Paul's letters, and the other letters written by the apostles in the New Testament are books that we build doctrine on. They are teaching and explaining Christian theology. Acts is a historical record of things that happened. If something happened as recorded in Acts and then is discussed more in the other epistles, we can build doctrine on that. But if something happened in Acts that wasn't explained any further in the other epistles, we can assume that such is not the case for everyone.

What does it mean to be 'filled with the Holy Spirit' or as some say, 'baptized by the Holy Spirit'?

Some believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a separate act that comes after salvation. Others believe that it something that happens at the moment of salvation. What do the scriptures say about that? Are there examples of the Holy Spirit coming into someone at some point after they were saved? Yes, there are actually two instances. We just read one. The disciples could be considered already saved before Pentecost. They believed Jesus was the Son of God. So, in this case, they being filled with the Holy Spirit happened at some point after they were saved.

The other instance is in Acts Ch. 8. Phillip preached the Gospel in Samaria and some of the Samaritans believed and were baptized. In verse 14, it says that when the apostles heard this, they sent Peter and John who came down and laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

An important thing we must understand is that this time of the events in Acts was a time of transition between the Old Covenant work of the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant work of the Holy Spirit. This transition meant that believers would have much greater effectiveness in their witness, much greater power in ministry and victory over sin. It meant they would have much greater power over Satan and demonic forces. It meant that a wide distribution of gifts for ministry, never known before, would be distributed to all believers. It meant that the salvation would not just be for Jews alone, but now for people of every nation and language.

For the disciples to receive this in a separate instance in the presence of many people was a signal that the prophecy had been fulfilled. The New Covenant age was here. For it to be distinct and separate in the apostles

first, signaled that they were to be the leaders and the authority in this new movement.

In the case of the Samaritans, it is important to know a little background. The Samaritans were a mixed race of Gentiles and Jews. They were discriminated against by the Jewish people, considered second-class citizens. That's why it was such a big deal for Jesus to be talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. Jews just didn't associate with Samaritans. This separate empowering of the Holy Spirit was given through the hands of the apostles so that it might be evident to the highest leadership in the Jerusalem church that the Samaritans were not second-class citizens, but full members of the church now.

And so, though these two instances were a 'second experience' of the Holy Spirit coming as it did after conversion, it is not to be taken as a pattern for us, for we are not living at a time of transition in the work of the Holy Spirit. In their case, believers with an Old Covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit became believers with a New Covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit. But we today don't start off with a weaker, less-powerful work of the Holy Spirit. We start off with New Covenant already fully in effect. There is no more time of transition.

This happened in these two instances in Acts, but nowhere else in any of the epistles do we read of the Holy Spirit indwelling being a second experience after conversion. On the contrary, what we do read is that it happens at the moment of salvation.

I Cor. 12:13 – “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Being baptized into one body means becoming a part of the church, the Bride of Christ. When does that happen? At salvation. So, it is saying that we drank of the Spirit at salvation.

Romans 8:9 – “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” When you are saved, do you belong to Christ? Yes. If you are saved, you belong to Christ. If you belong to Christ, the Spirit of God dwells in you. That means the Spirit of God came in you when you were saved.

In Colossians 1:27, Paul is saying that we have something in Christ that was hidden from the ancients, that was a mystery to them, and “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. “

Galatians 3:3 In Galatians, Paul is scolding them for after being saved, trying to maintain their salvation by works. They were mixing law and grace. In verse 3 he asks them, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” They began with the Spirit. It doesn't say you began with belief and then got the Spirit. It says they began with the Spirit.

The problem with believing in this second experience is that harm comes to the Church from teaching a two-class Christianity. Dividing believers into two groups and calling them 'spirit-filled Christians' and 'non-Spirit-filled Christians' is not scriptural. It creates division in the body and a 'we/they' mentality. A 'Spirit-filled Christian' is a redundant term. Although those who believe in this will deny that they are trying to divide Christians into two categories, the division exists every time someone is asked, “Have you been baptized by the Holy Spirit?”

How contrary to scripture is this mentality? Romans 3:22 says, “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

Col. 3: 11 says, “a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all and in all.”

The Bible teaches over and over how there is no distinction among those of us who are in Christ, but yet labeling 'spirit-filled' and 'non-spirit-filled' Christians makes the very distinction the Gospel destroys. In order

to interpret scripture accurately it has to be interpreted through the lens of the Gospel. The Gospel eliminates distinctions among believers. Does teaching a two-class or two-level Christianity eliminate distinctions or create distinctions? Of course, it creates them.

But there are many Christians who claim to have experienced this second experience in addition to salvation. They claim that since their experience, their worship has been more vibrant, their hunger for God's word stronger, their ability to say no to sin easier, their faith bigger, etc. Are their experiences valid? Yes, we believe they are.

The Bible teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit at salvation, but it also teaches that there is a continual filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit as we grow in spiritual maturity. It's not a one-time event that propels us to a new status. It is a continual occurrence as we follow Jesus. Eph 5:18 says, "do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit." The word structure in Greek there more accurately translates to 'continue to be filled' with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 4, Peter and John and some of the other disciples gathered together after being threatened by the religious leaders. Remember, they had already been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Verse 31 says, "when they were gathered together, the place they were gathered was shaken as they prayed and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness." After being filled once before, they were apparently filled again.

If we seek more of God and are willing to be used by Him, He will give us what we desire. There are times when we need His power more than usual in order to do something He asks of us. There are times when the Holy Spirit is at work in us at a greater strength and evidence than at other times. Remember, the process of sanctification is a continual growth in the Lord, and some are at different levels of spiritual growth. There can be times when the Holy Spirit takes us from point A to B in an instant, rather than slowly and gradually. This would be the case with those who say they have had a separate experience of the Holy Spirit, apart from salvation.

II Peter 1:3 says, "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and excellence."

This says that we have been given everything we need for life and godliness through what? Through a second experience of the Holy Spirit? No. Through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. When we understand the truth of the Gospel and receive it for our salvation, at that moment we have been given everything we need for life and godliness. Everything would include everything for being an effective witness, everything for living the Christian life, everything for displaying God's presence and glory. If we have been given everything at salvation, why then would there be a need to seek something else in addition to salvation? There's not.

When you receive the Gospel, you get the full meal deal. You don't get partial possession of the fullness of God and then have to go back and receive something else in addition to it. When the Holy Spirit awakens you to the knowledge of the Gospel, and you put your trust in it, your sin nature is destroyed and replaced with His divine nature. You are made in right legal standing before God. You are made new. You are made alive. You are made whole. You are made clean. You are given all the fullness of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and receive supernatural gifts that enable you to live the life He has called you to live for Him.

The Role Of Women In The Church

The main question we will be addressing is, "Can women be pastors or elders in a church?"

To begin with, it is important to affirm how the Bible views the equality of men and women. Genesis 1:27 views men and women as equally created in the image of God. Therefore, men and women have equal value to

God. They should be viewed as having equal value as persons, and equal value in the church. Scripture also assures men and women of equal access to all the blessings of salvation (Acts 2:17-18, Gal. 3:28). We also see that Jesus treated women with high dignity and respect in His earthly ministry.

We must admit that evangelical churches have often failed to recognize the full equality of men and women. We recognize that God often gives women equal or greater spiritual gifts than men, and have great value to the church.

However, with respect to the question at hand, we believe that the Bible does not permit women to function in the role of pastor or elder within a local church. I Tim. 2:12-13 says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."

The whole issue here is authority. There are many functions within the church that women can and should be involved in such as church staff positions in administration and/or counseling, women's ministries, education, children's ministries, as well as ministries of music and worship, evangelistic ministries, ministries to the poor, and other ministries that do not function as a position of authority over the whole church.

In no way do we take this to mean that men are better or more superior in any way to women. It solely has to do with the way God has structured authority. God has assigned men to be the ones in the role of spiritual authority. That's why Paul refers to Adam and Eve in the passage above. The husband is the one who God has assigned spiritual authority.

(Let me say here that the word 'authority' often carries with it negative connotations, mainly because of the way it has been abused and the way it is despised in media. I think a better understanding of Godly authority would be to say 'covering'. It is more a role of protection than one of rule or domination.) The New Testament often makes frequent connections between family life and church life. Because of this connection, it is inevitable that leadership patterns in the family will reflect leadership patterns in the church, and vice versa.

The passage quoted above in I Tim. Is not the only text from which we base our view. Throughout the history of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there is a consistent pattern of male leadership among God's people. There is not one example in the entire Bible of a woman doing the kind of congregational Bible teaching that is expected of pastors/elders in the New Testament church.

We must also recognize that God gives much insight and wisdom to women as well as men, and that any church leaders who neglect to draw on the wisdom that women have are really acting foolishly.