



CREDO.

CREDO.

What we believe matters.

What we believe about

God matters most.

Credo.

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Published by

Riverview Church

3585 Willoughby Road

Holt, Michigan 48842

Cover Design: Josh Michels

Photography: Dan Price

First Printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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THANKS.

Many thanks go out to our Pastors Mark Brett, Fred Choi, Paul DenHerder, James Granger, Noel Jesse Heikkinen, Dan Price, Tony Pyle, Steve Sommerlot, Joe Testa, and Greg Van Nada for taking their time to research and write these articles. Our thanks is also extended to Debbie Huntley, Josh Michels, and Nora Nicholson for their tireless work in editing and formatting this content. Pastor Dan Price was gracious enough to share his photographic work to visually supplement this book.

rivchurch.com

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*“Now I would remind you,
brothers, of the Gospel I preached
to you, which you received, in
which you stand, and by which
you are being saved.”*

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

At the time of this book's publishing, Riverview Church has ten pastors. Each brings their unique giftings and passions to partner in proclaiming the liberating power of the Gospel. You may or may not know all ten guys, but as a team, they share the responsibility and burden of leading the church in our city.

Each of the following 13 articles has been written by a different pastor, each coming at the topic from their own perspective while adding to the greater Riv narrative. Over the next few pages you can read a little about what each pastor does at Riv.

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THE LIBERATING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen

@noeljesse

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Pastor Noel focuses on preaching and overall church vision at Riverview Church. You'll see him on stage at the Holt Venue a good chunk of the year with streamed teachings at our other venues. Noel also serves as a Director for the Acts 29 Church Planting Network.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

THE TRINITY.

Pastor Tony Pyle

@tony_pyle

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Pastor Tony is one of our Westside Venue Pastors. He used to teach High School science in the inner-city schools of Chicago, IL, but was drawn back to Riv by his desire to share the Gospel with Middle and High Schoolers. You'll interact with him as he ensures that everything is going smoothly at our Westside Venue.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

THE BIBLE.

Pastor Steve Sommerlot

steve@rivchurch.com

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Pastor Steve is one of our Westside Venue Pastors who also focuses on leadership development. He's one of the original church planters that started Riverview on MSU's campus back in 1977. He continues to be a servant leader as Riv has grown over the years, empowering and trusting the younger generation to carry on our proclamation of the Gospel in Lansing. You'll be able to catch him telling his well-timed dad jokes over at the Westside Venue.

Through God we shall do valiantly.

Psalms 60:12 NASB

DIGNITY.

Pastor Fred Choi

@fchoi

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Pastor Fred leads the charge in the operations of Riv; basically he makes sure all our t's are crossed and i's dotted. You probably won't see Fred up front much, but from behind the scenes he helps to guide Riv in our singular focus of reaching the Greater Lansing Area with the Gospel.

You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.

1 Corinthians 7:23

WORSHIP.

Pastor Dan Price

@danprice1

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Pastor Dan focuses on weekend services as well as venue development. He was initially brought onto the Riv team as our Music Pastor, despite not liking Christian music (which is precisely why we like him). You'll see him on stage in any number of bands across our venues.

*Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth.*

Colossians 3:2

SALVATION.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen

@noeljesse

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GRACE AND FAITH.

Pastor Paul DenHerder

paul@rivchurch.com

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Pastor Paul focuses on our care ministries and Pre-Marriage program. Paul cares deeply about meeting people where they're at and leading them to the truth and freedom of the Gospel. You'll see him at the Holt Venue and in multiple classes across our venues.

*But whoever would be great among
you must be your servant, and whoever
would be first among you must be slave
of all.*

Mark 10:43-44

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Pastor Joe Testa

joe@rivchurch.com

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Pastor Joe focuses on teaching and leadership of the MSU Venue. He loves to connect with students as they enter this very impressionable period of their lives. Providing multiple opportunities for college students to experience the Gospel is his primary aim.

*For our sake he made him to be sin who
knew no sin, so that in him we might
become the righteousness of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

UNITY.

Pastor Greg Van Nada

greg@rivchurch.com

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Pastor Greg serves bi-vocationally in MSU Venue leadership development. He meets with the MSU Venue interns and students on a regular basis, encouraging them in their faith and challenging them to grow. Greg also serves as Managing Director for Collegiate Church Network.

*What then shall we say to these things?
If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Romans 8:31

WHAT THE CHURCH IS.

Pastor Mark Brett

mark@rivchurch.com

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Pastor Mark is one of our bi-vocational pastors, meaning he works in the city and is part of our leadership on the side. Mark focuses on operations and leadership development. In all likelihood you won't see much of him, but his professional eye helps keep Riv moving in the right direction.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

WHAT THE CHURCH DOES.

Pastor Noel Heikkinen

@noeljesse

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RESURRECTION.

Pastor James Granger

james@rivchurch.com

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Pastor James focuses primarily on our Life Groups here at Riv. He seeks to see these pockets of people in our community be perpetually multiplying and living on mission in their local neighborhoods. You'll probably see him teaching a few times a year and odds are he'll have a couple of maps to show off.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Ephesians 1:3-4

JESUS' RETURN.

Pastor Steve Sommerlot

steve@rivchurch.com

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INTRODUCTION.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen

CREDO ///



*“What we believe about God
matters most.”*

WHAT WE BELIEVE MATTERS.

*What we believe about God matters
most.*

This is why churches down through history have written, fought over, and publicly confessed various “creeds,” which is a fancy word for “*an authoritative, formulated statement of Christian belief.*”¹ The most famous creeds are the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed (see below). With some variations on wording, minor theological nuances, and major theological differences, these

creeds have survived because they simply encapsulate our Christian faith. Many churches and denominations even read these words during their weekend services.

Most churches further distinguish themselves as a local body by adopting Statements of Faith. While great pains are often taken to develop these statements, they unfortunately often end up on the back of a bulletin no one reads or as a rarely visited, deeply buried page on a website.

The purpose of this book is to work through Riverview Church’s Mission, Vision, and Statement of Faith in a deep enough way to clearly explain what we believe, but not so long that it becomes

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/creed> (accessed May 18, 2015)

impossible to digest. In other words, this book is an everyday person's creed. It's Riverview's Credo.

While this book was written first and foremost for the people of Riverview (or "Rivites" as we like to call ourselves), our hope and prayer is that it will be a useful tool for anyone who wants to know what Christians believe. We have worked hard to be faithful to Jesus and His Bible and hope this work is a blessing to anyone who picks it up.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OUR MISSION.

Riverview exists to proclaim the liberating power of the Gospel as we grow, serve, and go.

OUR VISION.

We believe that Jesus Christ has set us free from the eternal consequences, guilt, and power of sin. No longer enslaved to our own sinful desires,

we are set free to walk in step with the truth of the Gospel;

we no longer live for ourselves, but for the name of Jesus, for the glory of God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit;

we will proclaim this message of freedom until every man, woman, and child in the Greater Lansing Area has repeated opportunities to hear and respond to Jesus;

we will plant churches throughout the state of Michigan, proclaiming the message of the Gospel from there to our nation and world.

OUR BELIEFS.

We believe in one God in three distinct persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and characteristics of personality.

We believe the Bible is inspired by God, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God. It is composed of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament and was written without error in the original manuscripts. It is the highest authority over all other forms of revelation.

We believe in the Deity of Jesus, His virgin birth, sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious and atoning death as a substitute, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the Father's right hand, His personal return in power and glory.

We believe in the salvation of all who believe by grace alone through faith alone. God declares righteous all who put their trust in Christ alone.

We believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, His work to reveal Christ to the world, to convict people of their sins, and His indwelling presence in every one who believes, which enables that believer to grow in godliness in respect to his or her salvation.

We believe in the resurrection of both the lost and the saved after physical death. The believer goes immediately into the presence of the Lord and waits for his or her body to be resurrected to eternal blessing and glory with God. The unbeliever waits for his or her body to be resurrected to eternal suffering, judgment, and condemnation.

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We believe that the Church

must be faithful to unchanging biblical doctrine.

must be faithful to minister in the context of a continually changing culture.

has a mission to train people who respond to the Gospel to go into the culture as missionaries with the Gospel, using the gifts and talents God gave them.

exists for the redemption of lost people.

is made up of all believers worldwide and should meet together in local churches for worship, prayer, teaching, and mission.

should be actively involved in planting new churches.

We believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which declares that

God created heaven and earth, man and woman in sinless perfection with dignity of life, in His image.

Since Adam sinned, now all are sinners by nature and choice. All human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of themselves.

God is not obligated to save any person, all deserve the just punishment of hell. But in His love, God chose to elect people for salvation. That election was fore-ordained before the creation.

Jesus died for all, however, forgiveness of sins is given only to those who respond in belief.

We believe that the gospel should be passionately proclaimed to all people, so that all who believe may be saved.

We believe there is no opportunity for salvation following physical death.

We believe all followers of Jesus have been assured of salvation.

We believe every followers of Jesus should be baptized by immersion as a symbol of their new birth in Christ.

We believe every follower of Jesus should participate in the Lord's Supper as a symbol of remembrance of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection; to celebrate our unity in Christ; and to anticipate His return in victory.

We believe the worship of God is the end for which people are created and abiding joy is only found in God through this life.

We believe Jesus is coming back to judge all people.

We believe when Jesus comes back, He will set up His kingdom on earth and rule until a new heaven and new earth are created to be the final eternal home of all who have believed.

A BRIEF HISTORY.

In the summer of 1977 a church-planting team from Ames, Iowa decided to make the trek to the college town of East Lansing, Michigan in hopes of starting a church. Their first meeting had 12 people. Their one goal was to share the Gospel with college students.



NARRATUS ///



“Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.”

Colossians 4:3

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS.

That's not something we just say to sound all churchy or religious; we actually mean it. We're a bunch of jacked-up people who have had our lives changed by the person and work of Jesus. And we want to tell others about it.

RIV.

Riverview Church started as a house church in East Lansing, Michigan back in 1977. The oldest person in the church was 25 but that didn't stop these young followers of Jesus from passionately connecting the Gospel with the culture around them. They would gather in a

living room, pull out a guitar, play some Kumbaya worship songs, and then open up their Bibles to learn about Jesus.

The sermons weren't abstract or heady, but a simple look at the work of Jesus and seeing how it could, had, and would change their lives. It was this relatable and engaging content that started to draw people in.

And people kept coming.

Six years into this little house church's life (it's now 1983) it was decided to send out a church-planting team to Washington DC. With their roots only just established in Michigan, they took on this crazy endeavor and sent out some of their core members.

Over the next five years leading up to 1988, Riverview helped send out nine more church plants. These ranged in location from Kalamazoo, Michigan to State College, Pennsylvania to Richmond, Kentucky. All the while college students and young couples kept gathering to learn from the Word.

Eleven years after the VW bus pulled into East Lansing, this eclectic group of people had a space to call their own, well, borrow as “their own.” The Kellogg Center Auditorium, on Michigan State University’s campus, started playing host to Riverview Church on Sunday mornings.

Each week a clunky brown van, that usually started most of the time, would drive from the parking garage where it was stored to the loading dock and they’d pop up a church service.

At this point they were seeing 200 people each weekend.

In 2001, the countless years of saving and praying culminated in the building of, and moving into, Riv’s first building in Holt, Michigan. With a space to really call their own, they continued in prayer, asking to have a family of 500 people by 2005.

They were at 800 one year later.

Over a six-year span, plans were made, approved, and carried out to expand to what is now the Holt Venue auditorium (with 1,200 seats). This building opened

the doors for so many more people to come in and experience the life change that is found in the Gospel.

When their doors opened in fall of 2008, the MSU Venue was also launched to bring the church back to where it all started and engage with college students in their own environment (opening up the option to roll out of bed two minutes before the service would start).

Between 2008 and 2013, Riv sent out six more church-planting teams. It was decided that church planting should be such a part of Riv’s DNA that each year they’d take on two staff members with the sole purpose of training them and sending them out to plant their own churches.

On Easter of 2014, the doors of Riv’s REO Town Venue opened just south of Lansing’s downtown district. Weekend attendance was averaging 3000/week at this point. (If you’re doing the math, that’s just a few more than 12.)

Jesus said to him “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37-39

In the fall of 2014, Riv’s leadership (many of whom wrote the following articles in this book) took a step back to really look

at the big picture of Lansing and how they as a church could play a role in proclaiming the Gospel's message of freedom to every man, woman, and child in the Greater Lansing Area. (If you're paying attention to Riv's track record, you can probably guess that they decided to continue planting more churches and venues.)

With this target, they knew that it would take all of the Riv family supporting the mission to make this a reality. As Christ followers we're called to stand out, to be different, to be marked by our love for others (John 13:35). What would it look like if all of Riverview truly, radically loved God and loved those around them?

In challenging the Riv family to live this sort of questionable life, the church was stepping out in faith, trusting God to raise up the means to continue this Gospel proclamation in Lansing.

In the fall of 2015 Riv launched their Westside Venue on a street corner that has seen the preaching of the Gospel for over 130 years.

And Jesus' mission keeps going forward.

This isn't about Riverview or what we have done. We're only stepping into God's story that has been going on for 2000 years in seeing lives changed and bringing people to Jesus.

Despite being jacked-up people, God continually chooses to use us for His purposes. We can't change people, we can't plant churches, we can't better ourselves, but with the liberating power of the Gospel, *we are set free to live for and in Him.*

THE LIBERATING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

Jesus Christ has set us free from the eternal consequences, guilt, and power of sin. No longer enslaved to our own sinful desires, we are set free to walk in step with the truth of the Gospel; we no longer live for ourselves, but for the name of Jesus, for the glory of God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen

LIBERTAS ///
POTENTIA ///
EVANGELIUM ///



“We will proclaim this message of freedom until every man, woman, and child in the Greater Lansing Area has repeated opportunities to hear and respond to Jesus.”

Each of us has qualities about our personality—both positive and negative—that we are largely unaware of. These may even be defining characteristics but they are so much a part of who we are that we don’t see what everyone else sees. Local churches are the same, possessing positive and negative attributes that define their reputations in their communities even as they go largely unnoticed by the leaders and congregants alike.

A couple years ago, I had an “aha” moment because one of Riv’s defining characteristics was pointed out to me by one of our church planting residents. Luckily, this one happened to be positive. After a meeting, he matter-of-factly

stated, “you guys don’t just preach freedom in Christ, you actually live free.” My first reaction was, “of course we live free, that’s the Gospel!” But as he and I continued to dialogue about it over his time with us, I began to see how rare that is in churches and with Christians today.

I was equally dense when we began the process of tweaking our Mission Statement awhile back. We were trying to find words to describe what makes Riv unique. Everything I came up with was basic Christian stuff that could and should be said of every church. That’s when one of the other pastors said something to the effect of, “we really should have something in there about freedom.” Fairly quickly, our new Mission

Statement took shape and we all looked at it and said, “yes, that is what Riv is really about.”

Riverview exists to proclaim the liberating power of the Gospel as we grow, serve, and go.

Why is this freedom in the Gospel so important? Listen to the Apostle Paul to the church in Galatia:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

You see it? Freedom is what Jesus gives us (that’s the liberating power of the Gospel) and it’s also the result of that gift! Freedom is both the means and the end of the Christian life. We are set free so we will actually live free. Anything else is slavery!

We believe that Jesus Christ has set us free from the eternal consequences, guilt, and power of sin.

Sin is any failure to reflect the image of God in nature, attitude, or action. In other words, it is any time we are unlike God in any way. Sin has severely damaged everything in our world from the environment to relationships. It has dire consequences here on Earth and into eternity. But Jesus, in His sinless life, His

death, and His resurrection,¹ has done away with the eternal consequences for all who believe in Him.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

The Bible² is clear that this eternal life is one free from pain, sorrow, and suffering because there will be no more sin. It’s important to note that there are still earthly consequences to sin, those don’t necessarily go away. But they no longer define who we are. That’s why we are able to say that Jesus sets us free from guilt.

Think about the last time you screwed up and I mean royally screwed up. You remember that pit in your stomach? That’s guilt. In the Old Testament there were lots of ways people handled their guilt. One way was to get dressed up in sackcloth and rub some ashes on their face and to wail and mourn. Another was to fast from food for awhile. Another, and the most important, was to bring a sacrifice to the temple to atone for their sins.

In the New Testament, for those who follow Jesus, how do we handle our guilt?

1 For further reading, see Pastor James’ article: *Resurrection*, page 113.

2 For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *The Bible*, page 39.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:4–10

You don't need to handle your guilt because Jesus has already handled it. You don't have to feel guilty because Jesus has already paid the price, given you His righteousness, and you can live in peace! Now that doesn't mean we shouldn't feel bad when we sin. It just

means that when we feel bad we can understand that pit in our gut is just the longing of our sinful souls to be caught up in the positional righteousness we already possess in Jesus. He's not worried about our sins! He has handled them and He is actively letting God the Father know that your sins have been dealt with once for all time.

Because of this reality, we can look at our sins differently. Instead of looking at them as inevitable and believing we will never get our acts together, we can remember that we now have Jesus' righteousness and the power of sin has been broken. That's why Paul can write:

...do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11

"Such were some of you."

You used to be sexually immoral, but not anymore. You used to be a thief, but not anymore. You used to be a drunk, but not anymore. You were washed, sanctified,

and justified in the name of Jesus by the Holy Spirit! Sin no longer has power to hold over your head.

Jesus' friend John said it simply:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

What is he saying? Sin has lost its power. You can choose not to sin now, because of Jesus. But you are going to sin anyway. And when you sin, Jesus has got you covered.

No longer enslaved to our own sinful desires, we are set free to walk in step with the truth of the Gospel; we no longer live for ourselves, but for the name of Jesus, for the glory of God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a tense scene that plays itself out in the second chapter of Galatians. Paul recalls an incident where Peter acted hypocritically. What did he do? He was living out the freedom he had in the Gospel to eat what he wanted with whomever he wanted. The problem was some of his friends showed up and he switched tables, being afraid of what they might think. Paul's response to him in Galatians 2:14 was that his "conduct was not in step with the truth of the

gospel." When we really, truly, deep down get the freedom Jesus offers it sets us free to walk in step with the truth of the Gospel! We are free and we live free. We have been set free to live a new life, one that perfectly syncs with the law that Peter's friends were trying to obey. Jesus said it this way:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 22:37-40

As followers of Jesus, our lives have been turned inside out. We aren't worried or obsessed with ourselves, but think of others. This is such a strange way of living that it can only truly be done through a life changed by the Holy Spirit so when people see this in us, it gives us an opportunity to point to Jesus and give God glory.

We will proclaim this message of freedom until every man, woman, and child in the Greater Lansing Area has repeated opportunities to hear and respond to Jesus; we will plant churches throughout the state of Michigan, proclaiming the message of the Gospel from there to our nation and world.

THE TRINITY.

We believe in one God in three distinct persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and characteristics of personality but distinct in roles and responsibilities.

Pastor Tony Pyle

TRINITAS ///



“While the doctrine of the Trinity may be difficult to grasp, we should be thankful we have a God who is bigger and broader than what we can ever imagine.”

“I have to be cruel to be kind.”

“You can save money by spending it.”

“It was the beginning of the end.”

We don't like paradox do we? Oftentimes we say things or hear things that seem contradictory and can't wrap our minds around how they could be true. You have to be cruel to be kind? How does that make sense?

Webster's Dictionary defines a paradox as *“a statement or proposition that, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems senseless, logically unacceptable, or self-contradictory.”*

While a paradox is difficult for us to understand, one of the most essential doctrines of Christianity is quite paradoxical.

We believe in one God in three distinct persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and characteristics of personality but distinct in roles and responsibilities.

One God in three persons?

How can that be?

While this truth may be hard to grasp and will never be fully understood by us as finite humans, the doctrine of the Trinity shows us much regarding how God

exists and how we are to exist as His image-bearers in a fallen world.

THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE

While the term “trinity” isn’t found in the Scriptures, the truth of its doctrine can be seen in many places.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 1:26

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16-17

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

GOD THE FATHER

We believe in the loving headship of God the Father, His supremacy over all creation, His design of creation and redemption, and His exercise of authority through His Son and Spirit.

The term “father” brings forth a variety of emotions and memories depending on your experience. Many had great fathers who spent time with them, loved them sacrificially, encouraged them, and led them to Christ. Others had fathers who were absent, unloving, and unsupportive of them. Some even lack understanding of a father as they were fatherless as children.

Thankfully our experience doesn’t determine the validity of timeless truths of the Scriptures. To see God as a loving father who cares for us deeply and desires to be in relationship with us is more challenging for some than others. Regardless of our experience, we have a heavenly father who desires to love us and be in relationship with us.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:13

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:32

While God the Father was the Grand Architect of creation and redemption, He carries out His authority through the Son and the Spirit. In this perfect fellowship, each person of the Trinity is fully God, yet yields to one another out of love and difference in roles. While God the Father exercises supreme headship, His desire for the world is to see and believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. Along with this, God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and make known to us His work.

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 3:17

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 14:26

JESUS THE SON

We believe in the full humanity and Deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious and atoning death as a substitute, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the Father's right hand, and His personal return in power and glory.

The whole of the Scriptures point to Jesus. From the creation account in Genesis 1 all the way to His triumphal return in Revelation 21, the Word of God aims to make much of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation¹ for us.

Jesus claims in John 14:6 that He is “*the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” While many have a difficult time believing this exclusive claim, the weight of it moves us to share the Gospel message boldly and to be an example of Christ in our communities. Read slowly through these verses about Jesus and really think about who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: Salvation, page 61.

Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Luke 1:30-33

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

John 10:37-38

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

1 Peter 3:24

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than

five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Romans 8:34

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is *The Word of God*.*

Revelation 19:11-13

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, His work to reveal Christ to the world, to convict people of their sins, His indwelling presence in every one who believes, which enables that believer to grow in godliness in respect to his or her salvation.

While much is made of God the Father and Jesus the Son throughout the

Scriptures, it seems that Holy Spirit gets less of the spotlight. Is this correct?

Bruce Ware writes this regarding the Holy Spirit: "...as long as we make clear that the Spirit seeks always and only to point away from himself to the Son and, through him, to the Father, we can honor the Spirit in a way that also honors the focus of his own Person and work."²

This is so counter-cultural isn't it? So different than us! We are a people that love getting credit and pointing back at ourselves for jobs well done. Who doesn't like getting credit? Apparently, the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit consistently seeks to honor both God the Father and Jesus the Son by serving in His role at magnifying them both to the fullest. While still fully God, His goal is to reveal Christ to the World and go where the Father desires.

...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the

Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

John 16:8-10

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

John 14:16-17

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRINITY

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in perfect fellowship with one another and show us the relational nature in which we were made in His image. Being image-bearers of God, we were created to be in community and relationship with others.

"As we see the harmony expressed amidst differing roles and responsibilities among the members of the Trinity, we should seek the same kind of harmony as we acknowledge the various varying gifting and activities within the body of Christ."³

2 Ware, Bruce A., *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance*. p.104

3 Ware, Bruce A., *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance*. p.132

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Have you ever heard a group sing in three-part harmony? Each person is singing the same song, reading the same music on the same page. However, each voice sings a different part, and when sung together, there is an incredible fullness and melody that one alone could not accomplish.

The Trinity exemplifies perfect unity⁴ while not being uniform. This unity shows three different roles working together perfectly while loving and respecting the other. Each person of the Trinity has unique roles and diversity in how they work, yet they are still one.

The Church body is similar in that God designed all of us with diverse gifts and talents. The Church is a body with many parts, and when the family of believers leads and serves within their gifting, the Church thrives and grows. The Apostle Paul discussed this in his letter to the Corinthians:

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

1 Corinthians 12:18-20

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

We don't like these two words do we? Authority in our culture is something people despise and submission is thought of as a way to win a mixed-martial arts fight. No wonder we don't like these words!

But the Bible⁵ talks of authority and submission within the Trinity as a good thing. Our Triune God exercises authority and submission in a perfect way, and shows us the beauty of how this can be done in relationships.

The Holy Spirit submits to Christ; Christ submits to God the Father. While all are still equally God, the authority and submission within the relationship show how God functions in separate ways. This picture of loving authority and willing submission is how God desires His children to live in the world within culture, the Church, and marriage relationships.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For 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

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Greg's article: Unity, page 87.

⁵ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: The Bible, page 39.

given me, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:37-39

*Whatever you ask in my name, this I
will do, that the Father may be glorified
in the Son.*

John 14:13

*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is
to your advantage that I go away, for
if I do not go away, the Helper will not
come to you. But if I go, I will send him
to you.*

John 16:7

While the doctrine of the Trinity may be difficult to grasp, we should be thankful we have a God who is bigger and broader than what we can ever imagine. Our one God, exists in three persons, and desires to be in relationship with us.

Reginald Heber wrote a hymn in the late 1800's describing the beauty of the Trinity.

*Holy, Holy, Holy!
Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name
In earth and sky and sea;*

*Holy, Holy, Holy!
Merciful and Mighty!
God in Three Persons,
Blessed Trinity!*

THE BIBLE.

The Bible is inspired by God, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God. It is composed of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, and was written without error in the original manuscripts. It is the highest authority over all other forms of revelation.

Pastor Steve Sommerlot



SCRIPTURA ///



*“Because the Bible is God’s Word,
it is sufficient for all we face in
this life.”*

The inspiration of the Bible is ground zero for the Christian faith. In fact, it’s really the starting point to understand anything about the foundational ideas of the Christian faith. You might ask, “Well, why not start with God, or Jesus, or the creation of the world, or the plan of salvation?” And the answer to that is simply this: Everything we know about God, or Jesus, or the creation of the world, or the plan of salvation is all based on what the Bible says about it. So it follows that if the Bible is not inspired by God, if the Bible is not reliable truth, then everything it says about all of these things is also unreliable.

Todd Miles, the Director of the Master of Theology Program at Western Seminary in Oregon, captures the meaning of

the Bible’s definition of inspiration:

“Inspiration is that concurrent work between our holy God and a fallen human author, whereby the Holy Spirit so moved the human author that God gave exactly what he wanted, a perfect product, without destroying or overwhelming the personality, training, vocabulary, or experiences of the human author.”¹

That’s an amazing statement! It means that the Bible, written over 1500 years with 40 human authors, really has only one Author! Each human author brings his own vocabulary, tone, and construction to the writing, but it remains God’s Word. Christians believe that the

¹ <http://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2013/10/14/the-bible-is-the-word-of-god/>

inspiration of the Bible teaches that the Bible is the very word of God. And there is a weightiness of authority to that. What that means is that to disobey or disbelieve the Bible is exactly equivalent to disobeying or disbelieving God. This is not how we read other books. When we open up the Bible, we are reading to understand God Himself. And this is an objective reality. Our motives or feelings cannot alter that fact.

Miles went on to say, *“Inspiration brings with it an authority that is awesome. To interpret the Bible is to seek and hear the very personal and authoritative voice of God. Inspiration entails that the bible reader is to seek to discover the meaning of a biblical text to its original audience, not create his or her own meaning ... or own desires. Inspiration entails that there is a cost to sloppy interpretation. Inspiration also entails that when I interpret rightly and I disagree with the text, I really only have one option: repent.”*

The Bible claims to be the word of God; it claims to be truth – and therefore must be interpreted as such.

Paul, writing to Timothy, made the definitive propositional claim concerning the inspiration of the Bible:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Notice that Paul talks about what the Bible is before he proceeds to talk about its usefulness. First he says it *“is breathed out by God.”* Scripture is making a claim that it finds its source and origin in God, not man – and that is why it is useful. There’s a difference between saying “it’s useful, therefore it must be inspired” versus “because the Bible finds its source and origin in God, it is useful.” Do you see the difference? Because Scripture is from God, it has authority in and of itself! It carries weight.

To help understand this, let’s look at several things that inspiration does not mean.

Inspiration does not mean that the writers of the Bible had some moment of great human inspiration and insight when they wrote the Bible. We say things like, “Beethoven was inspired when he wrote the Fifth Symphony.” Or, “Shakespeare was inspired when he wrote Romeo and Juliet.” Those are both true statements, but that’s not what Biblical inspiration is. The Apostle Peter said it this way in 2 Peter 1:20: *“Knowing first of all that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* Peter is confirming here that God caused the exact words He wanted to be written down in the Bible. It’s just that He used the hands of guys like Peter, Paul, Isaiah and Moses to do it!

Second of all, when we say the Bible is inspired, we don't mean that God gave the writers of the Bible the general idea and then they sort of just fleshed it all out in their own words. In Exodus 24 it says that *"Moses wrote down the words that the Lord spoke."* In Jeremiah 30 Jeremiah says *"These are the words that the Lord spoke."* In Matthew 24 Jesus says, *"My words,"* (not my general ideas) *"will never pass away."* The point is that inspiration goes way beyond the broad concepts of the Bible. Inspiration involves each and every word in the Bible. Thus, the reason the Bible is called the Word of God and not the Concept of God. God inspired every detail and the exact words that were flawlessly recorded in the original writing of the Scripture.

Finally, when we say the Bible is God-breathed or inspired, we do not mean that God inspires the Bible to me personally and individually, as I read it. You see, there are some who wrongly teach that the Bible is not God's word – but only human words. And God must take words from this human book and inspire it to me personally and individually. He sort of zaps me. What is wrongly being taught here is that there is no universal authority. So people wrongly think that God somehow inspires that verse to me personally, separate from the intent that it was written to the original listeners. This sort of thinking allows the Bible to mean anything to anybody who claims to have a religious experience while considering things related to reading the Bible.

There are three other words that are important that help describe the Scripture as inspired by God.

REVELATION

Revelation refers to information that God revealed to mankind in the Bible. It's information we could never have discovered on our own and it's written down in human language. Examples of this would be things we learn studying the book of Genesis. We learn that the world and universe are created things. We learn the fact of how mankind was created. We learn how Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. The Bible reveals truth in many other areas, such as what should we expect in the afterlife. This is revelation – which is information that we cannot learn apart from God revealing it.

ILLUMINATION

This word refers to the Holy Spirit opening our understanding, so that as we are reading the written word of God we can grasp what is written. For instance, when a person comes to Christ, Paul writes in the book of Romans 10:9 *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead – you will be saved."* God must illuminate the mind to grasp the truth of the person and work of Jesus. A person must understand that their sins are deserving of death, that Jesus' death on the cross can be their

substitute death, and that they can be saved (rescued) from their own death simply by believing in what Jesus did for them. Jesus' resurrection² showed that He was more than just a man, in fact it showed that He was God in human flesh. Salvation³ is a result of the Holy Spirit illuminating this truth by using the written word of God.

INERRANCY

This word means "without error" and that's why we have those words in our Riverview statement of belief concerning the Word of God. Millard Erickson defines inerrancy like this: *"The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms."*⁴ Therefore, in the original manuscripts, the Bible is fully truthful and infallible – it doesn't err.

The Bible is not a science book. It's not a geography book or a geology book or an anthropology book. But, inerrancy means that the Bible is truthful when it speaks to areas relating to geography,

astronomy, and history. The Bible was not written to have exhaustive knowledge in these areas, but it does truthfully point to historical people who lived in real geographical locations and understood things about the physical earth like the stars, the sun, and the moon.

Erickson said, *"If the Bible is not inerrant, then our knowledge of God may be inaccurate and unreliable."*⁵

Jesus Himself believed that the Bible was inspired, inerrant, and truthful. He based His argument to the Sadducees (who did not believe in a resurrection) that there is a resurrection from the dead, on the basis of what was written from Exodus 3, where God spoke to Moses in the burning bush. This argument is recorded in Matthew 22. Jesus states to the Sadducees that Exodus 3 uses the present tense to explain that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who had been physically deceased for some 400 years when Exodus 3 was written). So Jesus, using the Scripture, explains that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive when Exodus 3 was written by Moses! Therefore, the resurrection is reliable, inerrant truth. Jesus not only believed every word of the Bible, He also believed that God breathed every tense of every sentence in the Bible.

Jesus held that controversial parts of the Bible happened just the way the Bible explained. In Matthew 19 it's clear that Jesus believed in the account of Adam

2 For further reading, see Pastor James' article: *Resurrection*, page 113.

3 For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *Salvation*, page 61.

4 "Christian Theology" second edition, copyright 1983, 1984, 1985, 1998 Millard J. Erickson, published by Baker Academic. Twelfth printing, Mark 2009. www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/32/32-4/32-4-pp519-532_JETS.pdf

5 *Ibid.*

and Eve. In Matthew 12 Jesus believed the Bible's account of Jonah and the fish. Also, in Matthew 24 Jesus held to the Bible's account of Noah and the world-wide flood as accurate, reliable truth. In fact, Jesus staked His entire credibility as the Messiah and Savior of the world on the fact that all these things happened just exactly the way the Word of God claims.

Jesus lived His life on the basis that God's Word was inspired and sufficient for all He would face in His earthly life. Therefore God's Word is sufficient for all we face in our earthly lives. We must treat the Bible with the same gravity, respect, and authority that Jesus did. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is sufficient for all we face in this life.

David Wells, in his book, *The Courage to be Protestant*, states: "*Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles gave the church the definitive statement of what the Christian faith is. They delivered it to us in the form of doctrine; therefore, Christians are those people who know this doctrine. They believe it. They have it. They hold fast to it. They guard it, and they contend earnestly for it. Today, however, the doctrines of the New Testament are terra incognita in many churches, and then we are dumbfounded when commitment evaporates and ignorance reigns.*"⁶

⁶ *The Courage to be Protestant: truth-lovers, marketers, and emergents in the postmodern world*, copyright 2008, David J. Wells, published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

DIGNITY.

We believe God created Heaven and Earth, man and woman in sinless perfection with dignity of life, in His image.

Pastor Fred Choi



DIGNITAS ///



“We are created by God in His image and likeness; a reflection of God’s qualities, attributes, and characteristics.”

Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:3

Dignity can be a bit of a complex issue. It may seem like a fairly simple and straightforward issue at first, but as you dig a little deeper, the challenges begin to surface. Some of the big questions to ask are - What is dignity? Who has dignity? When and how does someone have dignity?

So to answer the primary question—what is dignity—a quick Google search yields almost one entire page of various websites attempting to define dignity, but a word-origin search tells us that

it is from the Latin word “dignities” (worthiness) which is derived from the Latin word “dignus” (worthy).¹ Merriam-Webster defines dignity as the quality of being worthy of honor or respect.²

So by definition, dignity is described as having the quality of being worthy of honor or respect. By using the word “quality,” the definition is simply describing or observing a characteristic or feature that someone has, rather than an action that is done by a person or thing.³

1 <http://www.dictionary.com>

2 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dignity>

3 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quality>

Here's the first difficulty. Although it seems like the very definition of dignity is objective—not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased:⁴—that is not the case. While describing someone or something as having a quality, like, the ball is green, you are describing a quality, but when you say that someone has the quality of being worthy of honor or respect, you no longer make it an objective observation, but rather a subjective observation left to the observer to decide, because what defines honor and respect, let alone being worthy of something, is anything but objective.

Here's another challenge to consider. When exactly does someone begin to have dignity, and when, if possible, does someone lose it? So when does it start and when does it end? The difficulty is particularly evident in the debate of determining the “worthiness” and associated dignity in the bookend stages of life - birth and death.

On one end, in the earliest stages of life, it's clear to see by the ongoing and raging argument over when life begins that there is no one commonly held understanding as to when life begins let alone determining where the point of possession of value, honor, and respect begins.

In similar fashion, when you look at the late or final stages of life, there is

definitely no commonly held belief as to when life fails to be worthy, or possessing, of dignity. Some would argue that, for someone to die with dignity, they should be allowed to determine when the end of their life occurs - when the elements which most tightly define who they are and what gives them value cease to exist.

In a highly publicized case in 2014, faced with terminal brain cancer, 29 year old Brittany Maynard chose to end her own life through medically assisted methods, citing her inability to maintain a certain quality of life as well as not wanting to put her family through a drawn out death.⁵

In a more recent case, Vincent Lambert, a tetraplegic former nurse, has been at the center of several highly publicized legal battles. According to an article, *“his doctors, wife, and six of his eight siblings, say that the real Vincent Lambert died seven years ago in a road accident. They insist that he is unaware of his fame and, strictly speaking, unaware of anything. He should be allowed to die in dignity.”*⁶

In yet another case, a woman named Gill Pharoah, 75, who was seemingly healthy with no medical conditions, decided to travel to Switzerland and end her life. As

4 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/objective>

5 <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/07/opinion/maynard-assisted-suicide-cancer-dignity/>

6 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vincent-lambert-case-france-gripped-by-right-to-die-case-of-tetraplegic-former-nurse-and-an-attempt-to-kidnap-him-from-his-hospital-bed-10419934.html>

her partner is quoted, she (Gill) “disliked the ‘indignity’ of ageing.”

While in no way would I marginalize or even attempt to understand the painful decision that each person faced in these three cases, it is pretty clear that the definition of what constituted dignity was either personally determined or contested in each case.

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

Acts 17:29

It’s pretty easy to see the difficulty that arises from allowing people and culture to define dignity and what is worthy of honor and respect. By allowing people to define the worthiness of someone, you make the issue completely subjective and left for each individual to decide. Most people have, and will continue to have, differing opinions of what constitutes being worthy of honor and respect.

As Christians we have another way to define what is being worthy of honor and respect.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

Genesis 1:26

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

The Bible offers us a different and far less subjective way to determine a person’s dignity.

At Riverview we believe that we are created by God in His image and likeness. We are the “*Imago Dei*,” or the image of God, a reflection of God’s qualities, attributes, and characteristics. Just as God is worthy of honor and respect, we, as His image bearers share in that right - not because of something we have done, but simply because we reflect Him. It is not something we earn or something that can be removed from us due to age or action. It simply, is.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

While we all may inherently reflect the image of God, there remains a problem. Through sin, we fail to reflect a perfect image of God. It’s a problem because although we may be created in the image and likeness of God and bear resemblance to Him, our sin prevents us from being reconciled and in right standing with Him. He is holy and perfect in every way, and to be in His presence we are required to be holy and blameless without sin.

7 <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-33759490>

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Hebrews 9:27-28

The good news is that through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus there is a way to be justified in the eyes of God. God came to us in the form of a man, Jesus, lived a sinless life, died an unjust death on the cross, and rose from the dead three days later. Through that act, He exchanged the right standing He deserved with God for our sin and unrighteousness, and because of that, we are now hidden in Christ. When God looks at us, He not only sees the reflection of the image He created, He

also sees the spotless and sinless life of Christ as our own.

As Christians, we can rest in the fact that there is a definite and objective answer as to what characteristics and qualities define our dignity, value, and worth. It was defined by God and redeemed by Christ.

Awhile ago it was explained to me in this way. We were created as mirrors that reflect the perfect image of God. When sin entered the world the mirrors were shattered. Although there are pieces that remain, the image is so distorted that it's hard to make out the image that's being reflected. We can't put all the pieces back together and be in right standing with God. As a Christian, the good news is that Jesus, through His death, burial, and resurrection, picks up all of the pieces, and stands in our place as the perfect and true reflection of God - without any spot or distortion.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

I find great solace in knowing that my dignity is not found in the things that I do or don't do, the things that I say or don't say, but in the immutable fact that I have been created by God, in the image and likeness of God, to the glory of God.

WORSHIP.

The worship of God is the end for which people are created and abiding joy is only found in God through this life.

Pastor Dan Price



ADORATIO ///

*“Our spiritual act of worship,
is giving up all of ourselves, our
bodies, our will, and our minds
to the transformation that God
grants us through the Spirit.”*

All of us have been to a church service where a band leader steps up onto the stage, guitar in hand, and utters these words: “would you please stand with me as we worship the Lord?” Now, this isn’t an inappropriate or inaccurate thing for the leader to say, but it is incomplete. The singing part of a service is worship, but so is the teaching, the offering, the prayers, the team making coffee, and every other bit. And it doesn’t stop there! Worship continues into our homes, offices, and classrooms.

What then is worship? Simply, worship is our response to who God is and what He has done. That means true worship is done in both a corporate, specific gathering of believers and also

as a personal “all the time” act of true believers in Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah understood worship in a way that we won’t until we actually see God because he was given a vision of God, sitting on His throne, surrounded by angels worshipping Him.

*And the foundations of the thresholds
shook at the voice of him who called,
and the house was filled with smoke.
And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost;
for I am a man of unclean lips, and I
dwell in the midst of a people of unclean
lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the
Lord of hosts!”*

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Isaiah 6:4-8

When faced with the reality of a perfect and righteous God, Isaiah realized how sinful he was; he realized how sinful his lips were. He was unclean when he compared himself with God. He had the realization that he was "lost" in his sin. But then something crazy happened—God initiated with him. As God cleansed him, forgave him, and made him clean, what was his response? Worship. "Send me" he said. Isaiah couldn't just pretend like nothing happened. He'd been set free to live for God. He was liberated and instead of feeling inadequate because of his sin, he was motivated by grace. This is where we stand as well. We have been given the liberating power of the Gospel¹ which frees us from our sin. When we understand the depth of our sin and the depth of God's grace,² we can worship.

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

² For further reading, see Pastor Paul's article: *Grace And Faith*, page 69.

Worship is our right response to who God is and what He's done.

CORPORATE WORSHIP

Corporate worship (when the Church is gathered together at a weekly meeting) happens in a specific way, and at a specific time and place. When we talk about corporate worship, we try to teach that worship is all about our response to God in several different forms.

Corporate worship at Riverview is made up of the following elements:

Hearing the Bible³ and responding with open hearts.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work...I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, 4:1-2

The preaching and hearing of the Word is essential to a correct understanding of who God is. Without this, we make God

³ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: *The Bible*, page 39.

in our own image and have the tendency to worship a false god, one who shares our positions and preferences instead of the one true God, who holds both justice, mercy, righteousness, holiness, and grace in the balance of His perfect character.

Singing and confessing with our lips about who God is and what He's done.

...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 5:18–20

Corporate singing is a physical confession of our acknowledgment of who God is compared to who we are/were. We sing because, in humility, we are telling each other and ourselves that we believe in the truth of this perfect God who died for us. This is why we are allergic to too many songs that are “me” focused at Riv. It's why we are so careful about our theology. Again, we want to sing correctly, even the nuances of our beliefs to more truly remind each other of who God really is.

Taking Communion (The Lord's Supper) in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

The Lord's Supper⁴ is another physical way for us to remember the sacrifice made by Jesus. We take this together to remember the bond we have as believers who've been redeemed together.

Obedying God's command to be baptized as a symbol of the new life that God has given us.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Joe's article: Baptism And The Lord's Supper, page 77.

commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20

Baptism⁵ is another way that we physically show those around us (and ourselves) that God has taken off the sinful “old self” and put His righteousness (or goodness) on us. We are new creations because Jesus substituted Himself to die for our sin.

Giving financially to God as we understand that all we have is His and is from Him.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver...For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

2 Corinthians 9:7, 12

Giving is another way that we worship. It's interesting that in this passage, the Apostle Paul even calls our financial generosity “ministry.” There isn't any magical amount of money a follower of Jesus should give, but each of us is called to cheerfully supply the needs of the saints. In other words, it is our responsibility to take care of the Church. We give not because God needs anything but because He has given us the opportunity to be a part of His

mission here on earth. It sometimes feels weird to talk about money, but it was one of Jesus' most common themes in His teachings. Why? Because giving is worship. God has freely given us everything we have (most notably our salvation through Jesus) and we respond by giving back.

There are many more ways we can worship God in a corporate setting, but these five are the ones that are basic to our gatherings as believers.

PERSONAL WORSHIP

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9

You might wonder what this passage has to do with worship. This verse is showing us that one of the benefits of our salvation is that we are now part of the priesthood of believers. In the Old Testament the priest's main function was to carry out the worship of God for all the people through the offering of sacrifices. The New Testament tells us that there is no need to make sacrifices anymore because we have the benefit of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. Because we have that benefit and are now part of the priesthood, we can worship God directly. This is why we don't consider pastors as

5 Ibid.

mediators between God and people. Their responsibilities include teaching the Bible faithfully and leading the church, but pastors don't stand between Christians and God as a "filter" for worship. Each believer has the right to approach God and worship individually in prayer, belief, and in obedience.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Our spiritual act of worship, is giving up all of ourselves, our bodies, our will, our minds to the transformation that God grants us through the spirit. John 4:23-24 tells us that God desires those who worship "in spirit and in truth." To worship in the spirit means that we are submitting our will to God's spirit, which produces the spirit's fruit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

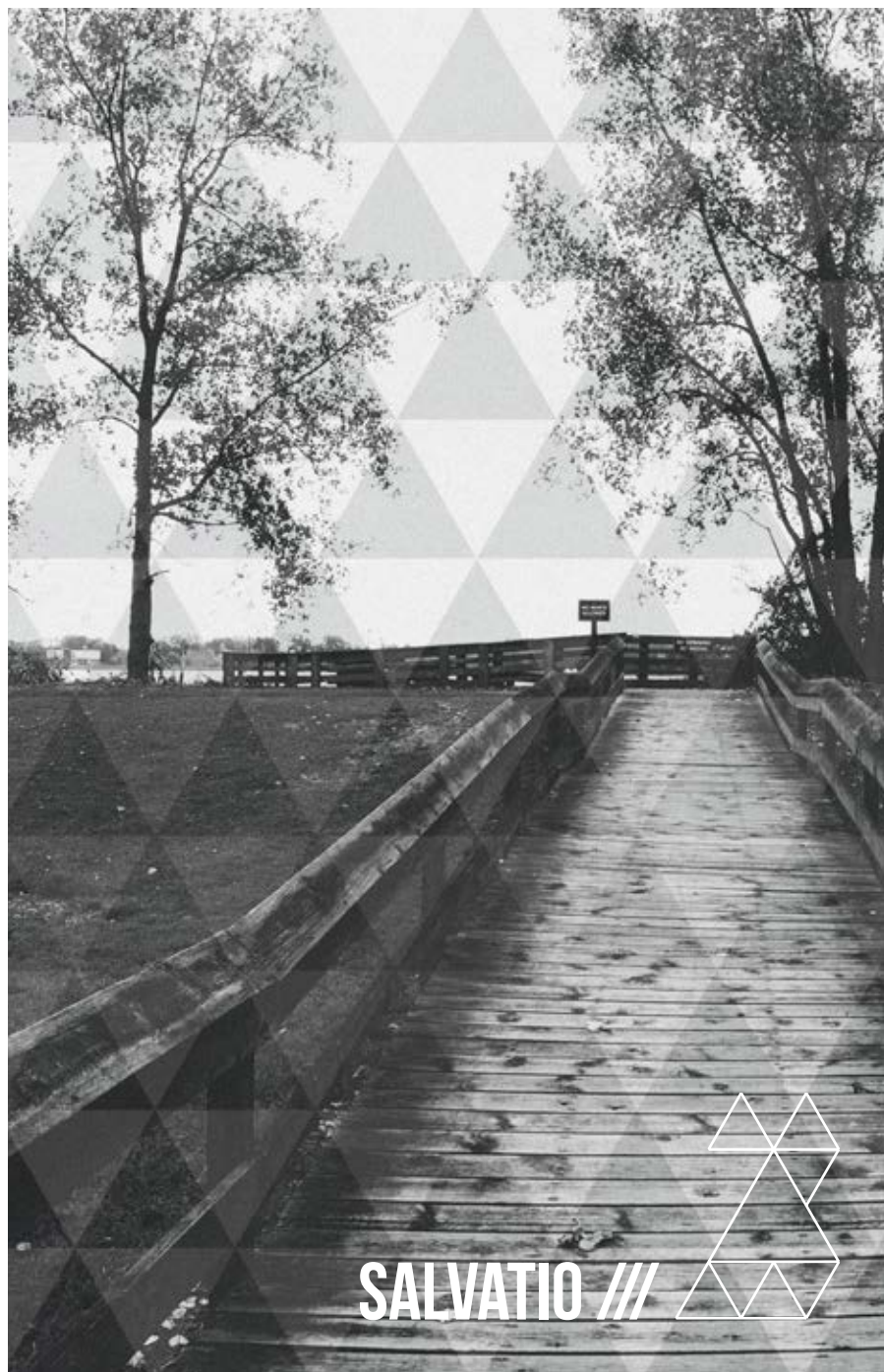
When we let God's spirit and truth guide us, there is a known outcome in our lives. We see evidence of what Galatians tells us. These actions are acts of worship. In them we are giving our old ways up for God's ways.

So worship isn't just a once a week act. It's not a way to become clean before God. But because we are clean before Him already, we now have the ability to worship Him for who He is and what He's done, whether we are gathered with other believers at a church service on the weekend, or scattered across the city throughout the week.

SALVATION.

Since Adam sinned, now all are sinners by nature and choice. All human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of themselves. God is not obligated to save any person, all deserve the just punishment of Hell.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen



SALVATIO ///



“While we were busy living in sin, God was busy loving us.”

It was an unseasonably humid day and I was sitting on a gator (the four-wheeled kind) with a friend of mine watching a youth baseball game and out of the blue, he asked me “What is John 3:16?”

That was the moment I realized those omnipresent signs at sporting events really do pay off. My friend had seen them so many times over the years that he remembered the reference.

This article is essentially an expanded version of my response to his question, which started off this way: “*John 3:16 is a verse in the Bible¹ that sums up the message of the whole thing and explains*

the most important things every person on the planet should know.”

Now let’s break it down.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

FOR GOD

We humans are a narcissistic bunch with a tendency to think the earth and everything that happens on it somehow revolves around us. Notionally, we may get how silly this is, but it’s how we

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *The Bible*, page 39.

behave. We tend to think of salvation in the same sense—it's all about us, right? But this verse starts in a much different place: "For God." Salvation is a God thing. It is initiated by Him. It's His plan. It's His work. It's all Him.

Here's how the Bible talks about salvation (emphasis added):

*But you are a **chosen race**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him **who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9–10

*God is faithful, by whom **you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord**.*

1 Corinthians 1:9

*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, **who saved us and called us to a holy calling**, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus **before the ages began**,*

2 Timothy 1:8–9

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even **as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

Ephesians 1:3–6

Look at all these active verbs: He called us, He saved us, He chose us, He predestined us. God is actively involved in every aspect of our salvation. It's really crazy to think about, but before He spun the world into existence, God had us in mind and He had already made up His mind to save us. It wasn't as if He had to scramble to think of something to do to fix all that we screwed up.

The Gospel² isn't "Plan B."

By the same token, because salvation is all about God, He gets all the glory. As the Apostle Paul put it, salvation

...is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9

² For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

SO LOVED

There are many people who point their fingers at God and presume to judge Him for all the evil done in the world. Others accuse God of gross indifference, allowing sin to run rampant, trampling the “innocent” underfoot. On the contrary, in John 3:16, we see God dealing the final blow on all the evil in the world with the polar opposite of hate and indifference: love. And He would know a little something about love. In 1 John 4:8 we are told that “*God is love.*” Love isn’t just an attribute of God, they are one and the same thing. If you are looking for love, you need look no further than the creator of all things.

In Romans 5:8 we are told that “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

What is sin? Sin is any failure to reflect the image of God in nature, attitude, or action. Because our forefather Adam sinned, our nature is unlike God. All of us are likely to admit that our attitudes are unlike God. And our actions? Well, no need to go there.

And while we were busy living in sin, God was busy loving us. Most people are familiar with both the Ten Commandments (part of the law God gave the nation of Israel) and the description of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. Let’s take some artistic liberty and combine a few of these to make our point.

While we were busy worshipping other gods (Exodus 20:3), God was kind to us (1 Corinthians 13:4).

While we dishonored our parents (Exodus 20:12), God believed all things about us (1 Corinthians 13:7).

While we slept around with someone we weren’t married to (Exodus 20:14), God hoped all things (1 Corinthians 13:7).

While we lied (Exodus 20:16), God rejoiced in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6).

Get the point? On a cosmic scale, we are unlovable sinners who are unlike God to our core and, remarkably, God loved us anyway.

THE WORLD

God’s love extends to every single person who has ever lived, is living, or will ever live. It is so encompassing that it includes you, me, and Miley Cyrus (not just the cute teeny bopper *Hannah Montana* version, either). The Apostle Paul says it this way:

[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:2

What does this fancy word “*propitiation*” mean? Simply, it means justice has been served and an offended party has been satisfied. Jesus did something that

satisfied God's wrath and He did it for the whole world. What did He do?

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Jesus died.

THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON

It's unimaginable, as a father, to think of giving one of my sons (or my daughter for that matter) to be brutally executed for a crime they didn't commit. Everything inside of me rails against that concept, but that's because I don't fully grasp the love of God the Father and Jesus the Son.

As Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:2

From cover to cover, the Bible shows the only way to cover over the sins of the world is a blood sacrifice. The Old Testament Jews had an elaborate system of sacrifices that were performed daily and yet none could completely satisfy until Jesus. Only Jesus, fully human and fully God, would do. And He did.

THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM

The word "believe," "believed," or "believer" appears 249 times in the New Testament. In fact, "Believer" is the most common name given to describe those who follow Jesus and for good reason. We are defined by a remarkable set of beliefs. This is how the Apostle Paul puts it:

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Romans 10:9–10

Christians believe that Jesus is God, that He lived a sinless life (which none of us can truly fathom), that He was executed on the cross, died, was buried, and then rose from the dead!³ Not only that, we believe that He ascended into heaven and will one day return⁴ to judge the living and the dead.

That's a lot of crazy sounding stuff to believe! No wonder Christians are called Believers. But there's more to it than that. In our belief in Jesus, we also affirm:

³ For further reading, see Pastor James' article: Resurrection, page 113.

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: Jesus' Return, page 121.

Credo.

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

1 Timothy 2:5

We don't just generally, vaguely believe in "something out there." We don't just believe in Jesus as one path to salvation. We believe that only Jesus can, and therefore only Jesus does, save. There is no other way to be made right with God except through Jesus. And that "right with God" doesn't end with this life.

Rather, those who believe in Jesus...

SHOULD NOT PERISH

One theologian noted that Jesus talked more about Hell than Heaven. While you can quibble over the numbers, you can't quibble over the fact that Jesus knew something about the after-life and He talked about it a lot. When John says those who believe in Jesus will not perish, he is talking about Hell. He is talking about an eternal punishment, or what the Bible also refers to as eternal death. On the flip-side,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

If you have ever been to a funeral of someone close to you, then you have felt the pain and sorrow that accompanies death. Death is unnatural. Death is our enemy. And Jesus defeated death. His victory is so secure that for those who believe in Jesus, we can say our eternal life has already begun! Yes, all of us will face physical death (unless Jesus returns first), but that is just a transition to the rest of our eternal life.

BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

People ask me often what Heaven is going to be like and there are two places I like to take them in the Bible. The first is the book of Revelation where Jesus' friend John is trying desperately to describe what he has seen in a vision. He uses the word "like" a lot because his mind is blown and all he can do is make inadequate comparisons to things we can relate to. Then, we head to this verse:

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him...

1 Corinthians 2:9

This verse is all about the fact that no one could have imagined that Jesus would save us the way He did but I think it can be applied even further. We still have no idea what God is preparing for us in the future. We have hints in Scripture, so let's look at a few of those and use our imagination a bit...

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Revelation 21:3

One of the effects of our sin is to separate us from God. Eternal life will be lived with God. Being in His presence for all eternity means we will know Him perfectly, no longer struggling to wrap our minds around Him. Imagine that.

I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Matthew 26:29

In this passage, Jesus is talking to His disciples and telling them about a party He is going to throw. And, yes, you are invited. Imagine that.

John 3:16 gets all the attention. But, Jesus didn't stop there. Here's the verse in context.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:16-18

There is nothing more important than this.

GRACE AND FAITH.

God declares righteous all who trust in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. All who respond in belief have been assured of salvation; there is no opportunity for salvation following physical death; the Gospel and its liberating power should be proclaimed to all people, so that all who believe may be saved.

Pastor Paul DenHerder

GRATIA ///
FIDE ///



“The Gospel alone is able to offer liberation for all from the effects of sin that plagues our lives.”

Christians believe in a loving, merciful God who by nature is also just and righteous. Love and justice co-exist and work together in God's personhood in dealing with our humanity. Our sin needs to be dealt with in such a way that God will remain faithful to both: He is always fully loving and fully just. But how is He to remain true to both aspects of His divine nature? The answer to both is the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son.

By sending His Son Jesus to live, die, and resurrect¹ from the dead as the payment and sacrifice for sin, God exhibited His nature of justice (just payment for our sin) and love (offer of forgiveness) to

those who acknowledged their sin before a righteous and holy God. Through Jesus, God's grace (unmerited favor) works together with our faith (response by believing what God says is true) to save us.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his

¹ For further reading, see Pastor James' article: Resurrection, page 113.

blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he has passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-26

Let's look at this incredible truth point by point.

We believe God declares righteous all who trust

God initiated this declaration on our behalf. He alone was able to make right and settle the account for the consequences of our sin. He did this by offering Jesus as the sacrifice to make right our standing before Him as condemned sinners. He makes us righteous (as if we never sinned) based solely on Jesus' sacrifice for us. He made possible full restoration of our relationship before God when we trust (depend on/rely on) Him through faith.

A helpful way to understand trust is to think about a chair. You can test the ability of a chair to hold you up without falling by examining its sturdiness with your hand. You may walk around it to see if its design is indicative of something able to hold you up. Perhaps you would even ask someone else who has sat in it before, to find out if the chair is reliable. Yet, at some point, you need to actually sit in the chair to see if indeed it is able

keep you from crashing to the floor. It is not enough to wonder if it will hold you, or to depend on the previous user's findings. You simply need to sit down in it for yourself and trust its ability to deliver. See, God is only able to declare us righteous when we actually trust in Him, or have faith in Him, that His work of salvation² is able hold us up. Trust and faith go hand in hand.

In Christ alone

Our sin made us blemished and damaged people. Sin's mark on our lives left a deep stain that we are unable to remove and clear up on our own. God understood our plight and therefore offered Jesus, who alone was sinless and unscathed by sin's consequences.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

God alone is able to declare us righteous (without sin) by substituting Jesus' life in our place. It's His life for ours, period. Our efforts to live a good life, trying hard to change, and all other pursuits apart from trusting in Jesus alone are useless. Jesus alone needed to be the payment for our sin because God alone is able to grant forgiveness of our sin. John says it this way:

² For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *Salvation*, page 61.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

By grace alone

Grace is simply offering us favor that we have no merit, no means, and no ability to earn ourselves. Grace is being offered for what we don't and can't deserve. The offer of salvation through Jesus is completely an act of God's grace. Contrast this with mercy, which is not receiving what we do deserve. By God's grace we receive something we don't deserve, eternal life through Jesus. By God's mercy we avoid receiving what we do deserve, death and separation from God for all eternity.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Through faith alone

Faith simply means that we have trust, or confidence, to be able to hold on to something as true. This faith must have substance. The object of faith or trust must be true and allow us to have confidence about something. So, in order to have faith in Jesus for salvation, we must have confidence that He can deal with the guilt and consequences of sin and offer eternal life in its place.

As we see in Ephesians 2:8, salvation is always through faith, not because of faith. Faith is the means through which we are able to receive God's gift of eternal life. This "saving" faith relies on the truth of the Gospel³ message which we find revealed to us through the Scriptures. It relies on the factual acceptance of the person of Jesus, and the personal receiving of His finished work for us, therefore placing on Jesus our need and reliance for what He did for us on the cross.

Jesus died for all. However, forgiveness of sins is given only to those who respond in belief

Perhaps you have seen on TV or at a sports event someone holding up a sign with "John 3:16" on it:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

This verse is on the minds of many people, but have they truly embraced what it actually means? Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for the whole world. His sacrifice was sufficient for all mankind. That's incredible! Forgiveness of sin was not simply God looking the other way

³ For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

and saying “forget about it.” No, our sin had severe consequences. It separated us from God. This is where God's righteousness and justice took front and center. Our sin demanded payment from a holy and just God.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

Our sin earned us all death. Not only earthly death, but eternal death and separation from God forever. However, in spite of this death sentence that is upon every person, God offers all eternal life as a free gift (unearned) and only accessible through faith in Jesus' personal offering of His life for all.

Like any gift, it is ours to receive. John says we must respond with belief to receive it. Forgiveness of sin is offered to every person who responds in faith and belief that the consequence of their sin can be forgiven by accepting Jesus' sacrificial payment. We must put our faith, trust, and reliance in His completed work on the cross. Once we do that, we have full assurance of being made right before God without any ill will or condemnation.

All believers have been assured of salvation

Eternal life is the result of understanding and accepting God's grace towards us and expressed through faith in Jesus' sacrifice for sin.

There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

Our eternal position and standing with God is now secure. It is not conditional on our sin, be it past, present or future. God now sees us as His children, His Fatherly love being demonstrated by securing and shielding us from the wrath of a holy, righteous God. A God who once viewed us as justifiable recipients of His wrath and condemnation now allows us to receive His grace through faith in His Son's completed and finished work on the cross.

Every person who through faith accepts Jesus' payment for their sin not only has this security in their standing before God, but also the desire of a loving God to have and accept and understand this assurance. God wants us to know we are saved! See, this assurance that God offers us has no exceptions. It is not based on our performance. It wasn't contingent on our performance to receive it in the first place, nor does it depend on our performance to keep or maintain it. Eternal life is a result of God's choosing for each person who responds to Jesus. Eternal life is just what it says it is. Eternal. Not temporary until we mess up.

Credo.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:33-39

As believers in Jesus and His work on the cross, our eternal salvation is assured. A passage of Scripture that has impacted my life and helped me understand the depth and reality of believing in Jesus is this:

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you

who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:11-13

God desires us to have complete assurance of His love and acceptance. This assurance allows us to respond in love as a child does before their father, knowing that no matter what we do or say, or how we behave, we will always be His child. What an awesome truth to know, believe, and understand. It allows us to live in freedom, honesty, and transparency before our loving Father.

There is no opportunity for salvation following physical death.

Every person is faced with the opportunity and the choice regarding how they will respond to Jesus and the offer of eternal life. While we are still breathing the opportunity avails itself. However, at death the door closes. At death our choice has been made.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting him.

Hebrews 9:27-28

In this life each person has many opportunities to respond to Jesus through faith. It is a choice every person

must make while we are still alive, because physical death seals the door. The decision we make while here on earth determines our eternal destiny. This reality places urgency and importance on how we live today.

The Gospel and its liberating power should be proclaimed to all people, so that all who believe may be saved.

As we read the Bible⁴ we see throughout the Old and New Testament that God's intent and purpose is to reconcile the world back to Himself. Sin has had a maddening and eternal affect on all. His desire is to make known to all His eternal plan of allowing each individual to forsake sin and secure their position and right standing before God. The Gospel, God's plan to allow each person the ability to experience complete and full forgiveness, is the only true and liberating option for a sin-tainted world. As Christ followers, nothing carries more importance and value than to purposefully and intentionally seek to invest our lives in God's cause.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making

his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

We have the privilege of living out and proclaiming to others this incredible reality.

The Gospel alone is able to offer liberation for all from the effects of sin that plagues our lives. Only through faith in Jesus can we experience this freedom. Then, as followers of Jesus, we can live in such a way that honors and expresses our appreciation to God for eternal life and the reality of living life free from the bondage of sin.

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: *The Bible*, page 39.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Every believer should be baptized by immersion as a symbol of their new birth in Christ. Every believer should participate in the Lord's Supper as a symbol of remembrance of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection; to celebrate our unity in Christ; and to anticipate His return in victory.

Pastor Joe Testa



BAPTISMA ///
EUCARISTIA ///



“The primary reason anyone would get baptized is obedience.”

Christians all around the world practice two symbolic acts that can seem, at first glance, to be very odd: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (also known as “Communion” or “Breaking Bread”). These same Christians practice them a little differently from each other and even believe a little differently about why they do them at all. In this article, we'll take a look at what Riverview believes about each of these important acts of worship¹ and what the Bible² has to say about them.

BAPTISM

Throughout the New Testament, we see that baptism was an opportunity for someone who had become a follower of Jesus to stand before the church community and publicly profess their faith in Christ. Unfortunately, some misunderstand this declaration and think that the act of baptism is necessary for salvation.³ But the Bible couldn't be clearer that salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9) that comes when someone puts his or her faith⁴ in Christ (Romans 3:21-22; John 1:12). Sin caused

1 For further reading, see Pastor Dan's article: *Worship*, page 53.

2 For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: *The Bible*, page 39.

3 For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *Salvation*, page 61.

4 For further reading, see Pastor Paul's article: *Grace And Faith*, page 69.

a separation between God and us. Our broken relationship with God was mended because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. It was on the cross that Jesus took all of our sin onto Himself and for those who respond to His finished work, He makes them righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). The big theological term that is taught in the New Testament about this idea is “justification.”

Justification simply means that because of Jesus’ death for sin and our appropriation of His gift to our life, God rendered us “not guilty” for all eternity.

All of that was said to press the point home that we cannot do anything to earn God’s favor. Baptism doesn’t become something we do to earn God’s forgiveness, because again that’s impossible to do apart from responding to Jesus’ death on the cross for our sin.

So what is baptism and why would we do it if it doesn’t save us?

The New Testament teaches that baptism is a picture or a symbol of what has already happened to someone who has put his or her faith in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Colossians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized

into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:1-4

The word for baptism in Greek is the word “*baptizo*,” which means, “to immerse.”

The idea Paul was presenting was that when you had been immersed into Christ you were immersed into His death. As followers of Jesus, when we put our faith in Christ, the old self is crucified with Jesus (Galatians 2:20). As a person goes under the water, this symbolizes that they are dead to their old life and raised up out of the water to walk in newness of life. Baptism, in a sense, is a Christ follower saying to their church community: “*I have believed in Jesus, and I am putting to death the old life and will live the resurrected life of union with Jesus.*”⁵

That’s an essential part of the symbolism of baptism and it’s why we practice baptism by immersion at Riverview. Baptism was viewed in the New Testament times as symbolic of the inner work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Titus 3:6 says, a “*washing and renewal*.” The death, burial, and resurrection⁶ to newness of life pointed to one’s

5 Swindoll, Charles R. and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 1152.

6 For further reading, see Pastor James’ article: *Resurrection*, page 113.

identification with both Christ and His Church. As Robert Saucy has pointed out, *“One is not united to the Head (Jesus) without at the same time being united with the body.”*

Apart from the mode being connected with the significance of baptism, another key reason why we do it is found in the New Testament. Followers of John the Baptist were baptized “in” the Jordan River (Mark 1:5). Jesus’ baptism was one of immersion. Matthew writes in Matthew 3:16 that *“after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water”* showing that His body was fully immersed. The other evidence that we have for full immersion baptism comes from two other places in the New Testament (John 3:23; Acts 8:36). Both references refer to baptisms taking place because there was sufficient water available to fully immerse the person being baptized.

Additionally, there is a pattern in how baptism was practiced throughout the book of Acts. This is important because Acts gives us a picture of how the Church took shape over its first 30 or so years. When we look at the book of Acts, we need to note two things to correctly understand what Luke (the writer) wants us to know and do. First, the book of Acts is written as historical-narrative, which means it is a history of the early Church as it explodes into existence by the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. Second, when we look at historical-

narrative, we see a description of what happened as opposed to a prescription for how we are to do something (we look to the epistles in the New Testament for prescription or doctrine).

As we look at the pattern in the book of Acts, a clear description of baptism can be assessed (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-13; 8:34-36; 9:18-19; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8; 19:1-6). If you look at every description of what happens in these accounts, someone believes in Jesus and then is baptized.

At this point, it would be good to answer one common question many people ask. Why was Jesus baptized? Did He need to get baptized as a next step after becoming a follower of Himself? On the surface, it does seem strange that Jesus would be baptized. Some think He did it to model for us what we need to do, but that wasn’t the primary reason Jesus was baptized. John the Baptist was the camel hair wearing, locust and wild honey-eating prophet who preached repentance to the people of Israel. He was the one who was *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight’”* mentioned in the book of Isaiah that Matthew records in his gospel (Matthew 3:1-3). So John’s job was to prepare Israel for the coming Messiah. How would you do that if you didn’t know who that person was? If you look at what John the Baptist says:

I saw the Spirit descend from heaven

like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

John 1:32-34

The key reason that Jesus was baptized was so that John the Baptist would know who God's Messiah was and be able to proclaim Him to all Israel.

The primary reason anyone would get baptized is obedience. Jesus, after His resurrection, gave a commission to all of those who would follow Him:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

Baptism is part of obeying Jesus in making disciples. God would not give a command that we would teach to others, but not obey ourselves. That would be hypocrisy. Secondly, baptism is a chance to proclaim to the Church that you belong to Jesus. It's a chance to proclaim

your identity as a child of God, and that your desire, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is to live for Jesus.

Some traditions baptize infants of believing parents as a covenantal act. These groups link baptism with the Jewish rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant community. They would look at household conversions in Acts 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8 and Colossians 2:11-12. However, when you look at the practice of the New Testament church, you see no evidence of infant baptism. When you look in the New Testament, we also do not find any command to baptize infants. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that those who have believed in Jesus are to be baptized.⁸

A few arguments speak against the idea of infant baptism. One is that infant baptism was introduced after the apostolic period of the Church. Second, when proper emphasis is given to repentance and faith, the maturity of the one being baptized becomes important. Third, infant baptism may create a false sense of security. Some adults might think that they are followers of Jesus because of an act that was performed on them when they were infants.

Most parents who baptize their infants do so with the understanding that they are committing to raise this child as best they can to respond to the message of the Gospel and one day be a maturing

⁸ Swindoll, Charles R. and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 1153.

follower of Jesus. Our practice as a church is to dedicate a child when their parents (or parent) want to commit to raising them to follow Jesus.⁹

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Besides baptism, the other decree that Jesus gave the Church was the Lord's Supper, often called Communion. We take the Lord's Supper during our Weekend Services and Life Groups for several reasons.

As a symbol of remembrance of Jesus' suffering death and resurrection

Jesus, as he was in the upper room sharing the Passover meal with his twelve closest amigos, took bread, broke it and said this:

'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of

⁹ As a church we have one policy and one caution as it relates to baptism.

If you're still living with your parents or supported by your parents, we ask that you get their blessing first before getting baptized. It's a great chance for you to share your new faith with unbelieving parents. Our heart as a church is to help young people learn to honor and respect their parents.

We want to express gentle caution to parents about having their child or children baptized. The main issue has to do with the challenge in discerning if faith is real in a child and if they will be able to remember their baptism. This requires you as a parent to express wisdom and discernment.

it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

Matthew 26:26-28

Luke's account says it with just a little nuance.

'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Luke 22:19

Jesus used bread and wine as a symbol or an illustration of what His death on the cross would mean for anyone who would respond to Him by faith. The bread and the cup, according to Luke's account, were to be taken as a way of remembering.

All throughout the Bible, God gave His people ways to remember Him. In the Old Testament, He instructed His people to build monuments when they experienced God. Why would God command His people to do certain activities as a way of remembering? It's because we're prone to memory lapses. We're prone to forget Jesus and just how amazing His death, burial, and resurrection was for our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote this short verse to his friend Timothy:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.

2 Timothy 2:8

Look at the church in Galatia. They struggled to remember what the Gospel¹⁰ was all about. They were turning to a false gospel – one that had to do with doing something to make them acceptable with God. Just like the Galatians, we're prone to forgetting too.

That's why Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper – to regularly refresh our memory about the truth of the Gospel.

To celebrate our unity¹¹ in Christ

Not only are we prone to forgetting, but Christians are prone to dividing. The church in Corinth struggled with division. Those issues were even highlighted as the church met for the Lord's Supper. Certain people in the church would show up early, eat and drink way too much. Then others would show up and wouldn't even be able to participate in this celebration because all the food and wine would be gone. So some were getting drunk at these celebrations, while others didn't have any food or drink.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we're proclaiming Jesus' death for ourselves and other Christians. We're reminded that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is core to the faith. We may disagree about minor issues, but if we agree on the Gospel, we agree

on the most important of matters. As a church, we talk about open-handed and closed-handed issues. Open-handed issues are issues where there's freedom to disagree or have a different perspective. These would be things like the color of carpeting in the church or the style of worship music. Closed-handed issues are matters that relate to the Gospel and salvation (Questions like: *Who is Jesus? Was His death enough to pay for all my sin? Is there any other way to God besides Jesus?*). Those closed-handed issues are the ones that we're reminded that we agree on as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

To anticipate His return in victory

Often during the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians is shared:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

10 For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

11 For further reading, see Pastor Greg's article: *Unity*, page 87.

Paul ends this passage with the phrase “you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The Bible is clear that Jesus is returning¹² for His Church. His first appearance provided salvation for all who believe. Through the Lord’s Supper we proclaim His death until He returns. In this proclaiming, we remind those who have put their faith in Christ that our hope is to one day be with Christ. We remind Christians that He is returning and that His return will be the end to sin, suffering, and death – a day that Christians wait for in anticipation.

Different traditions have viewed the Lord’s Supper as more than symbolic and celebratory. Some have held that the bread and the cup actually become the body and blood of Jesus (called transubstantiation). Some hold it as an essential part of salvation. Often the passage that is referenced is from John:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:53-54

This is often misinterpreted to imply that you have to take the Lord’s Supper to have eternal life. The problem with this interpretation is that you have to look at the greater context. Jesus said that

He was “the bread of life” (John 6:35), that He was the bread “that came down from heaven” (John 6:41), that He was the “living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51), and that His flesh is “the bread that [He gave] for the life of the world” (John 6:51). His point was that He would suffer and die for the world.

Those who ate His flesh would be anyone who would put their faith in Him, trusting in His death, burial, and resurrection for eternal life. Another key idea from this passage happens later in John 6 where many disciples decided to stop following Jesus based on this teaching. People don’t stop following Jesus over communion – eating a piece of bread and drinking a small portion of wine. They stopped following Jesus because they recognized that following Jesus involved personal sacrifice and devotion. Based on a careful read of the Bible in context, we see that the Lord’s Supper doesn’t have merit in salvation, but it’s a great reminder to us of salvation.

Since we are prone to forgetting, God graciously reminds us as we celebrate His death, burial, and resurrection with the juice and the bread.

¹² For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *Jesus’ Return*, page 121.

UNITY.

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Pastor Greg Van Nada



UNITAS ///



“Our differences, which are many, disappear in comparison to what we have in common. In our new life, what matters most is Christ and that He lives in us.”

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT UNITY?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Ever since mankind was separated from God, it has been God's plan to reunite us with Himself. He started with choosing Israel as one nation to be His people. Then, in Christ, the Gentiles were brought together with the Jews as one people.

This unity is extended to all people through the spread of the Gospel.

Regardless of religious background, social position, or gender, all people on the planet who have faith in Jesus Christ are united, or “one,” with each other. This is an effect of Christ's work; it is true whether we like it or not, and whether we act like it or not. God's Word tells us that we are members of one body, one family, and one army. Carried out as God intends, our unity with one another is a picture to the world of greater truths about God and His people.

WHERE DO WE SEE UNITY MODELED?

Unity is modeled in the Trinity¹ in the person of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one God, who has one purpose, carried out through the three persons of the Trinity.

WE ARE UNITED WITH CHRIST.

This is the basis of our salvation² and in fact every spiritual blessing.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 NLT

OUR ONENESS WITH CHRIST IS THE BASIS OF OUR UNITY WITH EACH OTHER.

Unity was seen in the New Testament Church. Acts 2:42-48 describes how the

early Christians devoted themselves to the same four things: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, sharing meals

(including the Lord's Supper),³ and prayer. They also shared all things in common, even selling their property and possessions and sharing the money with those in need. They did more than just meet together once a week; they shared their lives with each other. The Apostle Paul continued to encourage this oneness in his letters. The church had slave masters and slaves, Jews and Gentiles, males and females, tax gatherers and taxpayers. People were saved out of all walks of life, whether good citizens, religious leaders, prostitutes, thieves, slanderers, sexual deviants or even murderers. Paul reminded them that they were no different in Christ; all in need of their Savior.

At Riverview, we unite with two national church networks and with Lansing area churches to spread the Gospel⁴ and plant new churches. We have put on a statewide conference called Sola 13 with a neighboring church, and allow another church to use our facility as we unite to reach our community together. We don't agree with everything each of these churches believes, but we unite in the basic truths of Christianity.

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Tony's article: *The Trinity*, page 29.

² For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *Salvation*, page 61.

³ For further reading, see Pastor Joe's article: *Baptism And The Lord's Supper*, page 77.

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

REVELATION DESCRIBES THE UNITY THAT WE WILL LIVE OUT IN THE FUTURE.

I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

Revelation 7:9-10

Tim Keller calls this the “high and far, yet sure horizon we are all journeying toward.”⁵ No matter what conflicts we experience with a brother or sister today, we will one day stand with that same person, side by side before God’s throne, and praise Him together for what Jesus has done for us.

WHAT DOES UNITY LOOK LIKE?

*Here there is not Greek and Jew,
circumcised and uncircumcised,*

⁵ Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. Dutton Adult, November 2011.

*barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but
Christ is all, and in all.*

Colossians 3:11

Our differences, which are many, disappear in comparison to what we have in common. In our new life, what matters most is Christ and that He lives in us.

WE ARE UNITED IN ONE BODY.

Unity requires that we share something in common. What we have in common is Christ.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

As Christians we receive the same Spirit, as we exercise the same faith in the same Lord, and are baptized with the same baptism⁶ into Christ where we are called to the same glorious hope for the future, all under the same God and Father. We all depend on the Father drawing us to Himself, Jesus’ payment for our sins, and the Holy Spirit to complete the work started at salvation.

⁶ Ibid.

*The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up **one** whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.*

1 Corinthians 12:12 (emphasis added)

If a physical body has a part that is not united, or in step, with what the rest of the body is trying to do, the whole body is considered handicapped. Every part of the body must work in unison to function properly. Unless the body of Christ functions together, it's considered dysfunctional and likewise handicapped. Agreeing on the essentials of the faith allows us to function as a healthy body.

THE PARTS OF THE BODY WORK TOGETHER.

Differences are necessary in a body. They do not interfere with our unity, but actually enhance it. Beyond the essentials of the faith, God wants differences among His people. In the body of Christ, God has put each part right where He wants it. He created us with differences that actually make the body of Christ stronger and more functional.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God

arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

1 Corinthians 12:17-18

Far beyond being disabled, an entire body that consisted of one kind of body part would simply be impossible.

The way God designed us to need each other and care for each other makes for harmony among the members. In the music world, harmony has a much richer, more beautiful sound than a single melody line. In the body of Christ, the beauty of harmonious, rich relationships draws the attention of those outside our community. It is also a reflection of the triune God.⁷

We do not share the same talents and gifts. Different gifts, and different outworking of those gifts, are essential to the health of the body of Christ.

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; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

⁷ For further reading, see Pastor Tony's article: *The Trinity*, page 29.

Embracing our oneness is important for unity, but so is a proper working together of our differences. It is the exercise of these different gifts for the good of all that builds up the whole body, “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith.*” Differences are not the enemy of unity, but actually the beauty of unity.

If we are all different, then how do we stay united?

UNITY HAPPENS WHEN WE FOCUS ON THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Here at Riverview we talk about closed-handed and open-handed issues. Closed-handed issues are the ones that we must hang onto because they are crucial to salvation. They define whether someone is a Christian.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

The core beliefs of Christianity tell us who Jesus is and what He did for us. Jesus is God, who took on flesh as a human and lived a sinless life. Jesus died in our place on the cross, was buried,

and rose from the dead on the third day. These are the central beliefs of our faith, and they define who we are united with in Christ. All other issues, while important, are not worth dividing us from fellow recipients of Jesus' work on the cross.

We were created to have a relationship with God, but our sin separated us from Him. Jesus' death paid for our sin, satisfying God's justice. Jesus made peace between God and us, reuniting us. None of us are superior to anyone else; we all stand in need of a Savior. If we can approach others as equally in need of God's grace, and in equal standing with God because of His grace, then we can accept others as they are, not thinking we're better, forgiving each other just like Christ forgives us. We can be at peace with each other, united in our shared relationship with Christ. Competition is eliminated; we don't need distinctions between us to prove that we are more right, more spiritual, or just better than others. Jesus wants us to rest in our position with God because of His righteousness alone. We were all completely lost and enslaved to sin before; we are all completely forgiven and justified by Christ's death. With respect to our standing with God, every believer is exactly the same.

If we miss the heart of the Gospel; if we think our own efforts make any difference in our standing with God; we will constantly feel the need to prove ourselves. This is the source of the basic

human desire to have contempt for those who are different. It is why we look for things that make us distinct, and promote and defend those things. It is not because they are so important in the larger scheme of things, but they are vital to our own sense of worth. If we let go of them and find our justification, identity, and security in Christ, we can focus on what unites us instead of what separates us.

We do not have to look and dress the same way, share the same meeting place, become one denomination, practice our faith and worship the same way, share the same political party, educate our children in the same school system, or interpret and apply every aspect of the Bible⁸ in the same way. These are open-handed issues that have no bearing on salvation, and have no importance worth dividing us from our brothers and sisters.

UNITY IS MAINTAINED WHEN WE YIELD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in

love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Walking in a manner worthy of the Gospel includes eagerly maintaining the unity of the Spirit. The Gospel placed us all in Christ and created the bond of peace; both peace with God and peace with each other. We do not have to manufacture it; we have it because of Christ. With this as our basis, we can allow the Spirit to work in our lives so that He is the unifying factor.

Notice the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in this passage. Gentleness, patience, love, and peace are qualities the Spirit produces in us as we depend on, or yield to Him. We are not naturally humble, gentle, patient, or loving. We all have the same Spirit, so if we all yield to Him, then we are united around Him. Once we yield to God, we have the power and wisdom to yield to each other.

Humility allows us to admit we are in Christ only because of what Jesus did for us, not because of anything we have done for Him. If I am humble, I can admit that I might be wrong with the non-essentials and practices that I hold dear. In Philippians 2, Paul tells us to humble ourselves to the point that we consider “others as more important than [ourselves].” That is, to consider a person that Christ died for as more important than our personal ideas and preferences.

⁸ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: *The Bible*, page 39.

Gentleness allows us to avoid arguments with believers who differ from us, not pushing our agenda at the expense of others.

Patience allows us to make allowances for each other's faults because of our love for a family member. We know that we too need mercy and understanding for our own faults. Jesus is our model in His patience towards us.

Humility, gentleness, and patience allow us to make every effort to let go of petty differences, focusing on what really matters, and keep ourselves united in the Spirit, binding ourselves together with peace.

MOTIVATED BY THE POWER OF UNITY.

Genesis 11 tells the story of the Tower of Babel. When the people decided to build this great tower, listen to what God said about the power of unity: "Look! The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them. Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other." In other words, in their unity, there would be no stopping them.

At Babel, the builders' purpose was for self-glory, to make themselves famous. God knew their need for Him, but if the builders succeeded, they

would be drunk with their own power. Their need to depend on their Creator would be obscured by their united accomplishments. In love, God thwarted the power of their unity.

If God's people get behind God's purpose, to draw people to salvation in His Son, and no longer let the little things divide us, oh, the power for good! There will be no stopping us. The person and work of Christ are the only things that matter, and the rest of the issues are not to divide us but aid us as we share His love demonstrated in the Gospel.

MOTIVATED BY THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY.

Jesus prayed for our unity.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:20-21

What an opportunity and privilege to be part of God's answer to Jesus' prayer. Jesus made it clear that He was not only praying for His current disciples but for all of us who would believe in Him through their word.

Our obedience to Jesus' will for our unity brings praise and glory to God. It is God's work in our lives that makes unity possible, so He gets the credit for bringing such diverse people under the same umbrella of His Church.

Jesus knew that the answer to His prayer for our unity would point to His unity with the Father, and would result in the world believing God sent Him. Unity is a powerful evangelistic tool, giving credibility to the message of the Gospel.

Seeing that the purpose of unity is not for unity's sake, but for God's glory and the salvation of the world, we want to participate in this most effective method of evangelism. We want to fight to maintain unity with our fellow believers.

The Apostle Paul understood this. In 1 Corinthians 6, he emphasized unity to the point of telling us not to take disputes between other Christians to a secular court, but to find wise people in the Church who can resolve things. He said that to attack each other before outsiders is shameful.

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

1 Corinthians 6:7

Our unity is more important than any disagreements we have, even ones that mean we might be taken advantage of, or suffer wrong.

Our Lord's prayer for unity demonstrates its importance and motivates me to pursue it, even if I need to let go of pet ideas and practices, and even wrongs that have been done to me. God planned for unity, Jesus prayed for and died for unity, and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live in unity.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross united us with God and with one another in Christ. The security of our position before God allows us to let go of competition with other believers. His Spirit empowers us to maintain unity in spite of disagreements. Our unity with believers in Jesus Christ glorifies God, and is a blessing to us and to the world.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS.

The Church is made up of all believers worldwide and should meet together in local churches for worship, prayer, teaching, and mission.

Pastor Mark Brett



ECCLESIA ///



“We are a new creation; we receive eternal life, every spiritual blessing, redemption, grace, approval, and the presence of God in our daily life.”

Depending on your experiences and if you ever attended church as a kid, the word church can mean many things. For me, growing up, the idea of church from a very early age was that it was a building, it was a meeting, and it was boring. The word church is one of the most misunderstood and vague terms in society. But sometimes when defining what something is we should start with what it is not.

For starters, the Church is not a building. Of the 75 or so times the word “church” is used in the Bible,¹ it never refers to a building. The first century churches met in people’s homes, oftentimes in secret due to persecution. The Greek word for church

is “*ekklesia*,” which means “assembly” or “called out ones.” This idea of an assembly describes a group of people coming together for a specific purpose. In Ephesus, the riot that formed in Acts 19 fits this definition; it assembled to attack the Gospel. But, the purpose of this assembly we call the Church is Jesus Christ.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

The Church is a body of believers who have received new life and have been called out from the world by God to live as His people under the authority of Jesus Christ. God’s plan to communicate

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *The Bible*, page 39.

to the world the Gospel² of salvation³ through Jesus Christ alone is through His Church. Simply put, that is the mission of the Church.

The metaphors or descriptors used in the Bible for the Church are many (family, vine, etc.), but we will focus on the following: the body of Christ, the people of God, the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Each metaphor provides a different viewpoint from which to better understand this community God wants us to be a part of. All of these are great ways of looking at the Church and why God made the Church so important in His overall plan. Though only God can see our hearts (the invisible church) the Church is one of the few theological concepts we can actually see in action.

BODY OF CHRIST

Let's start with an interesting metaphor the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the head of the body of which all believers are individual members or parts.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we

2 For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

3 For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: *Salvation*, page 61.

were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27

I have worked in the field of medicine most of my life. It takes years for a nurse, physician, or therapist to understand the complex nature of the human body. They study the nervous, digestive, pulmonary, and many other systems and how each part of the body works together. Each of these separate systems and body parts do radically different things. Take for example, your arm. What really is taking place under the skin is bones, muscles, nerves, connective tissues, blood vessels, and a mass of chemical reactions all working together with other parts of the body (brain, spinal cord, lungs, glands, hearts, etc.), so you can lift up a cup and drink your morning coffee. We all play a role as a member of the body.

In Romans, Paul spends eleven chapters laying out the truth of the Gospel with great insight and passion. Based on this foundation, he moves on to chapter twelve where we see the application for our lives.

For as in one body we have many members and the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

The amazing link is the phrase “one body in Christ.” When someone believes and trusts in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, a bond is made between them and Christ. This connection “in Christ” means everything that can be shared will be shared. We are a new creation; we receive eternal life, every spiritual blessing, redemption, grace, approval, and the presence of God in our daily life. You and I belong to and are in Him. What adds to this marvelous reality is that we experience all of this together in one body. Forgiven together, loved together, created anew together, eternally secure together, and embraced by our Father together.

This interconnectedness of all believers who make up the Church runs counter to the rugged individualism of postmodern culture. We have been given spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12) not for our own personal benefit or gain, but to strengthen the body as a whole. The body is to support all the parts in unity,⁴ working together. Even to the point of “bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

When I lived in Texas some years ago, I heard a burly Texan once comment “I go to church because I can’t afford a country club.” The Church is not a social gathering, a place for single believers to find a date or for young families to get free child care. This body of Christ is expected to have authentic relationships.

It is where people from all walks of life can experience understanding, acceptance, encouragement, empathy, and, at times, tough love. Paul says it well when he says “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

PEOPLE OF GOD

The second picture we see in the Bible is the people of God. A unique group “set apart” by God himself.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord; I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

Hebrews 8:10

God declared centuries before Jesus Christ walked the earth that He was going to fulfill His promise to restore His people by the death, burial, and resurrection⁵ of His Son, the Messiah. By doing so He was going to bring His chosen people together.

In the Old Testament God initiated with Abraham and chose a people to become an exclusive nation, the nation of Israel. Abraham had nothing to do with it. Woven throughout the 1,500 years of the Bible is this reality of God choosing

4 For further reading, see Pastor Greg’s article: Unity, page 87.

5 For further reading, see Pastor James’ article: Resurrection, page 113.

a people whom He would protect, care for, cherish, be present with, sustain, and expect to be loyal to Him and His commands. As amazing as this covenant was, the chosen people failed miserably to keep their end of the bargain.

In this old covenant, the people of God was the nation of Israel, the Jewish people exclusively. The new covenant that we are living in today was established by Christ and includes “even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles” (Romans 9:24). The new covenant is totally dependent on the promise, faithfulness, and character of God Himself.

The people of God, while experienced locally, are also universal. All barriers are now destroyed. Paul explained it to the Colossians this way:

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Colossians 3:11

Millard Erickson explains, “The Church includes all persons everywhere in the world who are in a saving relationship with Christ. It goes further to include all who have lived and been a part of his body and all who will live and be part of his body.”⁶

BRIDE OF CHRIST

The most challenging of these descriptors is the bride of Christ. Paul reminds the Church of this idea.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:31

Marriage in many ways is a mystery in itself. God designed it in such a way that a husband and wife should pursue their own joy in the joy of each other.⁷ Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame of our sins and rebellion for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). In Revelation 19:7-8, the disciple John is speaking of the last days, Jesus’ second coming,⁸ and the end of the world. There a great multitude of angels declare, “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.”

The King of the universe came into the world to betroth to Himself a bride at the price of His own blood so for all eternity we will experience the riches and

⁶ Millard, Erickson. *Christian Theology* Second Edition. Baker Academic Press, 1998. Page 1045.

⁷ John Piper. <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/marriage-a-matrix-of-christian-hedonism>

⁸ For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *Jesus’ Return*, page 121.

depth of a relationship with Him in love and joy forever. As the Church wrestles with and lives this truth we experience the fullness of joy that Jesus intended for all believers. There is not a wedding reception that has ever occurred that will compare to what awaits us at this wedding feast. King David states this of God in Psalm 16:

In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11

TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit was right there at Pentecost (Acts 2) when the first-century Church began. The Church is indwelt by the Spirit both individually and as a whole.⁹

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

With Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, the old temple and its systems and rituals to approach God went away and we, as believers, became God's temple where His Spirit dwells. God the Father lays this cornerstone, Jesus

Christ, as the foundation for His spiritual temple. Christ gathers people worldwide and builds this temple as an eternal dwelling place for the Spirit of God. As Jesus was preparing to ascend back into heaven He gave His marching orders for His disciples. Throughout His ministry He had hinted several times at this idea of the Holy Spirit working in and through His people, the Church. He told the disciples that it was good for them that He was leaving. He blew their minds with the statement that they would do greater works than He had ever done during His earthly ministry. This boils down to one simple reason, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus pulls all these conversations together into one powerful truth.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

The Greek word for power here is “*dunamis*.” It is the root word for our English word of dynamite. The power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is alive and living in us. It is a dynamite power in the Church today through the Holy Spirit.

Now let's take a look at some of the functions of the Church.

⁹ Ibid.

CHURCH IN ACTION

Regardless of culture, denomination or size, if you go to any church in the world you will see activities centered on worship,¹⁰ prayer, teaching, and mission. There is a paradox in the Church today: worship, prayer, teachings, and mission can easily become things “we do” to earn God’s love, approval, and acceptance, and how we view ourselves as righteous. But, from a biblical standpoint, we do these things to celebrate and praise God, and remind ourselves what God Himself has done for every believer: that we are already loved, approved, accepted, and declared righteous by the Creator of the Universe.

Volumes have been written on the topics of mission and prayer. You can download and listen to thousands of messages from great teachers all over the world or pick any style of worship songs to sing on your way to work. In spite of all this, there will always be a tendency for churches and individual believers to “drift away” from our main purpose and action (Hebrews 2:1).

In Acts, the Church was exploding in growth. Along with that growth were challenges, busy schedules, and headaches. It would have been tempting for the leaders to get caught up with the urgency of the daily needs, issues, and concerns that engulfed them. Instead,

the leaders huddled, assigned some men to help with these needs, and reinforce to the entire Church the priority.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:4

This holds true for the Church and believers today. We must not allow the urgency of the day to distract us or pull us away from our main purpose. Prayer, worship, and teaching help us to “fix our eyes on Jesus” and to keep Him the main mission in our lives (Hebrews 12:2).

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to go on a mission trip with my 15 year old son to Mexico to serve in some orphan homes. On Sunday we attended a church where the entire sermon, music, and conversation were in Spanish. We were greeted with smiles, acceptance, and encouragement. The worship was loud, lively, and filled with people expressing themselves in a manner different than what my son had ever seen. Afterwards we were embraced by people who could not communicate with us but clearly shared a deep connection. When we left I asked my son what he thought of it all. “It was awesome dad, I didn’t understand a word they said, but they sure were excited about Jesus.”

At the end times, the Church universal will come together in Heaven—as one body, a chosen people, a temple of the Holy Spirit—and celebrate a wedding feast for all eternity the majesty, greatness, and glory of our God.

¹⁰ For further reading, see Pastor Dan’s article: Worship, page 53.

WHAT THE CHURCH DOES.

The Church must be faithful to unchanging biblical doctrine; must be faithful to minister in the context of a continually changing culture; exists for the redemption of lost people. Using the gifts and talents God gave them; should be actively involved in planting new churches.

Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen



ANNUNTIO ///



“We aren’t given freedom to change this message, or even worse, make it about us. We preach Jesus, week in and week out.”

Take a second to answer this question in your head: *“What does the church do?”* Based on your answer to that question, I may be able to tell you a lot about your church experience or theological convictions. If your answer was “preach,” “study the Bible,” “pray,” or that very churchy word, “fellowship,” it’s quite possible you have been part of an “inward church.” If, instead, you answered with “take care of the poor,” “go on mission trips,” or something like that, you have likely been part of an “outward church.”

So which is it? Well, it’s both...and neither...and something else.

It’s both in the sense that all churches should be involved in inward and outward activities.

We are to “*be devoted to one another in brotherly love*” (Romans 12:10), “*instruct one another*” (Romans 15:4), and “*serve one another in love*” (Galatians 5:4).

We are to “*admonish one another*” (Colossians 3:16), “*pray for each other*” (James 5:16), and “*not [neglect] to meet together, as is the habit of some*” (Hebrews 10:25). Heck, we are told four times to “*greet one another with a holy kiss*” (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26).

But the Church isn’t merely focused inward! We are called to “*proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9) and to “*go and bear fruit*” (John 15:16). A Psalmist tells God’s

people to *“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked”* (Psalm 82:3-4). Jesus’ half brother challenged *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction...”* (James 1:27).

The Church has a lot on its plate! We are inward and outward focused people, giving to and caring for whomever needs it physically, emotionally, and most of all spiritually.

It’s neither in the sense that the inward and outward are not the end goal of the Church’s mission. Rather, the end goal is glorifying God in all that we do. If this is not the end goal, then the Church becomes a glorified country club, complete with members, dues, and initiation rites or a social service organization that helps those with temporary physical needs but never deals with their eternal needs.

It’s something else in the sense that both the inward and the outward are all wrapped around the same thing that gives God all the glory: proclaiming the Gospel¹ of Jesus. That’s why we say our mission at Riverview is “to proclaim the liberating power of the Gospel as we grow, serve, and go.” See that “as we” in there? It means that the growing, the

serving, and the going are all about the proclamation of the Gospel.

It’s what we (the Church) do. So how does this play out? Obviously (as we have seen in the previous paragraphs), there is no way we can cover all that the Church does, but here are a few things we believe are core to our mission.

We believe that the Church must be faithful to unchanging Biblical doctrine and must be faithful to minister in the context of a continually changing culture

We like to say we are “doctrinally conservative and culturally fluid.” That simply means the message we proclaim is the same old message that has been proclaimed for the last two thousand years of Church history and at the same time, in every way morally possible, we proclaim this unchanging message in a way our culture can understand.

When you read through the Gospel accounts, you see that Jesus did this all the time. He talked about seeds (to describe the Kingdom of Heaven), stuffing a camel through the eye of a needle (to describe how hard it is for a rich person be saved), sons, fathers, thieves, pennies, lamps, dogs, snakes and on and on and on. Jesus grabbed imagery from the world around Him and connected it to the message He wanted to communicate. The Apostle Paul quoted pagan Greek philosophers (who were

1 For further reading, see Pastor Noel’s article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

talking about Zeus) to make his case for God as the creator of all things. Both Jesus and Paul challenged and rebuked anything that went counter to the Gospel message (often religious people) and mercifully extended their arms of grace to those who were steeped in sin and needed to be saved.

John Stott, one of my favorite old dead guys to read, says the job of a pastor is to be a bridge between two worlds, bringing culture and the Scriptures together.² Someone once said “*we are to preach with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.*”³ As we seek to do this very tricky thing, we do so understanding that every week there are two kinds of people sitting in our chairs and pews: those who profess to follow Jesus and those who don’t. And we do so understanding they both need the same thing: the Gospel.

During our Weekend Services, we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus every week. It doesn’t matter if we are preaching through the story of Noah and his Ark or if it is Easter morning and we are talking about the empty tomb. Jesus is, and *must be*, the hero of every single story. The Bible⁴ is the eternal, unchanging message of God to His people and it is

all about Jesus. We aren’t given freedom to change that message, or even worse, make it about us. We don’t preach moralism (get better), fatalism (life sucks and then you die), or triumphalism (you are the greatest!). We preach Jesus, week in and week out.

This proclamation doesn’t just happen in our preaching (which, admittedly and appropriately is the center of our ministry). It happens in our music (you’ll notice a lot of songs about Jesus), in our celebration of the Lord’s Supper⁵ (Jesus is that Lord), in baptism⁶ (declaring Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection),⁷ and in our interactions with one another before and after the services (physically representing the unity⁸ we have in Jesus).

It also doesn’t just happen during our services, it happens when the Church leaves our services and goes into the world on mission. As each of us grows, serves, and goes, we carry the Gospel message with us. That leads us to our next conviction.

We believe the Church exists for the redemption of lost people.

2 Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* Reprint Edition, Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1982.

3 It’s hard to figure out who actually said this first. Many people attribute it to anyone from Charles Spurgeon to Karl Barth.

4 For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *The Bible*, page 39.

5 For further reading, see Pastor Joe’s article: *Baptism And The Lord’s Supper*, page 77.

6 Ibid.

7 For further reading, see Pastor James’ article: *Resurrection*, page 113.

8 For further reading, see Pastor Greg’s article: *Unity*, page 87.

Let's be honest, no one likes to be called "lost," but "lost" is a very biblical term. In fact, Jesus described His own mission this way: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10).

What does it mean to be lost? It's like that day many parents have faced when they are shopping with a small child and they turn around and that child is gone. Their heart drops and they go into a panic, quickly looking up and down the aisles, calling the child's name. In John 15, Jesus describes God this way in three stories in a row. He is looking for the lost.

Often, when my kids were lost in a store or somewhere else, they had no idea they were lost. They were just happily walking down the aisles, looking at shiny stuff. That's exactly how we are. This world has lots of shiny stuff to keep us distracted from our lostness. The mission of the Church is to tell those who are lost that they are lost and then to point them to the one who is looking for them: Jesus.

Why doesn't he just write that in the clouds or something? Because He has a different plan: the Church.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18–20

We are a people on the move for Jesus. We go into our community, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and schools and we do it in the name of Jesus. We aren't just HVAC repairmen, we are missionaries who happen to install HVAC systems. We are proclaimers of the Gospel of Jesus who make their livings in the context of being teachers and students and social workers and law enforcement officers. We are people who go and we go with a purpose. We go in order to make disciples (that means followers) of Jesus. These disciples are added to our numbers and taught about Jesus.

We believe the Church has a mission to train people who respond to the Gospel to go into the culture as missionaries with the Gospel, using the gifts and talents God gave them.

Recently, when I was shopping for a used car, the salesman tried to share the Gospel with my wife and I (he didn't know I was a pastor). It was obvious he had been trained on how to share the Gospel and the opportunity presented itself.

Often, people think about the church as the place where a pastor or other "professional Christians" do ministry stuff. The Bible, on the other hand, gives the ministry stuff to a different group of people.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets,
the evangelists, the shepherds and
teachers, to equip the saints for the work
of ministry, for building up the body of
Christ,*

Ephesians 4:11–12

See that? The leadership in the church has the job of training all the other Christians in the church to do the ministry stuff. I was asked by a reporter recently how Riverview got so much done in our church and community with so few staff and such a small budget. I pointed to the nearly 1000 people who volunteer in some capacity in any given month. And that's just the people I know about, I'm sure there are more! Every single Christian has a vital role to play and we are each given talents and abilities that help define our unique role.

There is a man at Riv who vacuums at one of our venues once or twice a week and he is one of the few people who consistently shows up earlier than I do. He does it as a cheerful volunteer. I was at a car dealership recently and met a sales manager who has been coming to Riv because a guy who works with him has told him about Jesus and invited him to come. These stories just scratch the surface of what the Riv family is doing in this city and around the world for Jesus.

We believe the Church should be actively involved in planting new churches.

Study after study have shown that new churches have a greater ability to reach new people for Christ than existing churches. I'm sure there's lots of reasons for that, but the bottom line here matters: we need more churches. The world needs them, Michigan needs them, and the Greater Lansing Area needs them.

At Riv, we are so serious about planting churches that two of our pastors serve as national leaders for two different church planting networks. We plant churches, give 10% of our budget to financially support church planters, and send people to join church plants.

What does the Church do? A lot. But we do it all for the glory of God and fame of Jesus.

*...whatever you do, do all to the glory
of God.*

1 Corinthians 10:31

RESURRECTION.

After physical death the believer goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, and waits for his or her body to be resurrected to eternal blessing and glory with God. The unbeliever waits for his or her body to be resurrected to eternal suffering, judgment, and condemnation.

Pastor James Granger

RESURRECTIONEM ///



*“Because Jesus has conquered death
He is also the source of life.”*

What happens when we die?

No, seriously. What really happens when we die? For as long as I can remember people around me have been fascinated with this question. When you consider the sheer volume of movies (*It's a Wonderful Life*, *Field of Dreams*), books (*The Five People You'll Meet in Heaven*, *Heaven is for Real*), and TV Series (*The Walking Dead*) that explore the afterlife, it is clear that this is an ongoing conversation that is happening in our culture. How do we respond? Well, it's not enough to simply “make our best guess” on this one. The Bible has a lot to say about life after death. Let's dig into God's wisdom on this topic, so we can engage our friends with Gospel truth when we encounter situations or conversations around this

whole idea of living and dying. After all, the Gospel itself is all we need when it comes to matters of “life and death!”

RESURRECTION

The word “resurrection” simply means to “rise again.” Throughout the New Testament the idea of resurrection is commonly associated with a transition from death back to life. Resurrection in the Bible¹ describes a person who has literally, physically died and then risen again to supernaturally become once again literally, physically alive. Naturally, there were many people in the first century world who had doubts about

¹ For further reading, see Pastor Steve's article: *The Bible*, page 39.

whether resurrection was even possible, just as there are many people today with similar hesitations. Yet, resurrection was (and is) a belief that is central to the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul addresses the resurrection questions this way:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Many people in Paul's day were openly questioning the reality of resurrection. You can sense the concern in Paul's voice when he asks, "how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" This doubt represents a threat to the Gospel itself, and Paul's response

is decisive. He asserts that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead and that His resurrection is central to our Gospel hope and proclamation. In this passage Paul talks about three key realities about resurrection that are going to be helpful for us to remember:

Jesus is our example, because He rose from the dead.

All who have died will rise again.

Resurrection is central to the Gospel.

Let's look at each of these truths one by one, as together they will help us develop a more complete Biblical understanding of resurrection.

JESUS WENT FIRST

On the Monday following Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene went to visit the gravesite of her dear friend and instead found an empty tomb. Over the next few hours and days Mary and the disciples went through a whole range of emotions. They experienced shock, fear, confusion, and grief. It wasn't until Jesus Himself appeared alive that His friends began to grasp the powerful reality that He had overcome death. John remembered it like this:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

John 20:19-20

Jesus had died. Really died. It wasn't that He was just sick, it wasn't that they were uneducated and couldn't tell if a person was dead, and it wasn't a figure of speech. They had seen Jesus die, they had buried Him in a tomb, and now here He was talking with them as they were touching the wounds on His physical body! Resurrection. The miraculous transition from death back to life. It says the disciples were "glad," from the word "*chairōs*," which means "rejoice" and is also the Greek word for "grace." In that moment I think the disciples rejoiced in part because they experienced God's saving grace.² Not only was their friend and teacher alive, but because of His resurrection their eternal future was secured. Paul's words later in 1 Corinthians 15 confirm this reality:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:19-20

This is not a fairy tale! You do not need to commit intellectual suicide to believe in the fact of Jesus' resurrection. In his excellent book *The Case For Christ*, Lee Strobel dedicates an entire section to the mountain of evidence that shows that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. Strobel divides his findings into four categories, applying both tangible evidence and critical thinking to the resurrection question.³ It's fascinating to read about the medical, historical, and circumstantial evidence that exists to support the biblical claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

For me the most compelling proof comes from eyewitness testimony. In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul says Jesus appeared to "*more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive.*" That's a *lot* of eyewitnesses! In fact, many of the New Testament writers saw the resurrection first hand, while others spoke with witnesses who talked about what they saw. Even more convincing is the change that occurred in people who encountered the resurrected Jesus. Men and women who were at one time fearful and hesitant suddenly became bold and courageous, often to the point that they would rather die than stop proclaiming Jesus. Why the change? Simple. The risen Christ!

2 For further reading, see Pastor Paul's article: *Grace And Faith*, page 69.

3 Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. Zondervan, 1998.

EVERYONE WILL RISE

Theologians refer to Jesus' rising as the resurrection, because of its significance to all of humankind. By rising from the dead Jesus gives everyone hope that we too can (and will) do the same. Like John, Peter was one of first to see the empty tomb and encounter the risen Jesus. Here's his take on the resurrection:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

1 Peter 1:3-4

Peter's letter was written to encourage a group of people who were being persecuted for following Jesus. That's why His words are so filled with hope. But that's not all! Not only is Jesus our example of hope, showing us that the dead can be raised, He is the doorway to salvation,⁴ providing the "means" through which God has chosen to save us. It is through Jesus' resurrection that we are able to experience eternal life in Christ even after our physical death. This is simply the best news we could ever hear!

Can you picture the "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" that is being kept in heaven for you? Remember, Peter was writing to believers, so he is describing the eternal future for that audience. Most of us are familiar with the idea that "Christian" people, those who have trusted in Jesus to save, will be "born again" as Peter describes. But the reality is that all people, whether they believe in Jesus or not, will indeed experience resurrection. Take a look at Luke's statement in Acts 24:

*But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that **there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.***

Acts 24:15-16 (emphasis added)

We've already learned from Peter that the "just" have the hope of heaven. Upon dying a believer goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, and waits for his body to be resurrected to eternal blessing and glory with God. But what about the "unjust," those who don't choose Jesus? Luke says there will be a resurrection for them as well. What will that be like? This is described in chilling detail in Revelation 20:

⁴ For further reading, see Pastor Noel's article: Salvation, page 61.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:12-15

Whereas upon death a believer waits in hope for eternal life, the unbeliever waits for his body to be resurrected to eternal suffering, judgment, and condemnation. This tragic reality serves as motivation to all believers to live and proclaim the Gospel,⁵ because we do not know when death is coming for us or for those who might not yet know Jesus.

GOSPEL IMPERATIVE

This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul said, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and

your faith is in vain.” Essentially what Paul is saying is without the resurrection of Jesus the Gospel loses its teeth. It’s pointless to put your trust in a man who is still dead, and certainly then pointless to preach about Him. In fact, Paul says, apart from the resurrection our faith would be “futile” and we would be “misrepresenting God” if we preached a Gospel that didn’t include the resurrection. Wow! Strong words from Paul. It’s almost as though Paul is saying that without the resurrection there would be no Gospel.

Which is why I’m so thankful that Jesus did rise from the dead!

I recently officiated a funeral on a Tuesday, and then attended a different funeral on a Saturday. It was a sobering week, with lots of dialogue and questions about the meaning of life and the reality of death. My 15 year old son, Luke, was particularly shaken by the second funeral. It was the first time he had seen an open casket, and he was filled with a deep sadness for the person who had passed away. Words are rarely adequate in moments like those. What do you say?

Jesus was faced with a similar situation in John 11. His friend Lazarus had died, and Jesus was at the funeral along with Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha:

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you

5 For further reading, see Pastor Noel’s article: *The Liberating Power Of The Gospel*, page 23.

had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

John 11:20-21

Death is tough stuff. Martha is wrestling with the loss of her brother, and at the same time she has confidence in Jesus. We all face the same tension.

I love Jesus' response to His friend Martha:

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

John 11:21-27

This is the Gospel. Jesus is the resurrection, and because He has conquered death He is also the source of life. Those who believe in Jesus will pass away, as Lazarus did, but will also rise again and live for eternity. How comforting it must have been to Mary and Martha to know that, as painful as it was to see Lazarus die, there

was tremendous hope for their brother because of Jesus! Oh, and by the way, later in the story Jesus backed up His words by raising Lazarus from the dead. I'm sure that brought comfort beyond words to Mary and Martha as well!

What happens when we die? Perhaps you're unsure. Maybe you've had doubts about God or about Christianity, or maybe you've never thought much about it at all. Consider the resurrected Christ! Jesus didn't merely claim to be our Savior, He backed up His words by miraculously rising from the dead. Through Him, we have the hope of an eternal future. That's the Gospel that is worthy of our faith, worthy of our lives, and worthy to be proclaimed to all who don't yet know Jesus.

JESUS' RETURN.

Jesus is coming back to judge all people and when He returns, He will set up His kingdom on earth and rule until a new heaven and a new earth are created to be the final eternal home of all who have believed.

Pastor Steve Sommerlot



REDITIO ///



*“May we be a people who worship
Jesus, long for His return, and
proclaim His Gospel in our own
neighborhoods and to the ends of
the earth.”*

One of the most exciting coming events is the return of Jesus to this earth! The second coming of Jesus is called “the hope” of those who believe in Him. It shows that God is in control of all things, and that He’s faithful to the promises and the prophecies in His Word. In the first coming, Jesus came to earth as a baby in a manger in the city of Bethlehem, exactly as prophesied. Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies as Messiah in His birth, life, work, death, burial, and resurrection.¹

Just like Jesus fulfilled prophecies in His first coming, when He returns a second

time, He will fulfill many yet unfinished prophecies. In His second coming, Jesus will be a conquering king, rather than a humble suffering servant. Imagine the day when Jesus comes! All that has been foretold, will suddenly come to pass. Jesus will fulfill the role of Israel’s deliverer and king. He will set up His kingdom from His throne in Jerusalem, and rule until God creates a new heaven and new earth—which is the eternal home of all who believe.

Almost 2000 years have gone by since Jesus ascended into heaven. After His ascent, angels appeared and said to those gazing up into the sky,

¹ For further reading, see Pastor James’ article: Resurrection, page 113.

*Men of Galilee, why do you stand
looking into heaven? This Jesus, who*

*was taken up from you into heaven,
will come in the same way as you saw
him go into heaven*

Acts 1:11

Zechariah explains that the location of this second coming will be the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. And Titus calls the second coming a “blessed hope” in which we should be eagerly anticipating.

In fact, Jesus predicted His own second coming. When He was near the very end of His ministry with the disciples, He began to clearly explain to them that He must be betrayed, handed over to the authorities, killed, and raised from dead on the third day according to the Scriptures (in other words, all this was prophesied). As the disciples began to grasp the fact that Jesus was going to be killed even Peter protested! It must have been very troubling news. So, at the last supper, Jesus calmed their anxieties, with the reassurance and promise that He’d come back again to get them.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:1-3

The Bible² explains that the second coming is “near.” Many Bible scholars use the word imminent to describe the second coming. This means that Jesus could come back at any moment. There’s nothing more in Bible prophecy that needs to happen before Jesus comes again. Interestingly, the first century Christians, many of whom were facing physical persecution, encouraged each other with the nearness of the coming of Jesus. The Apostle Paul spoke of the second coming to the Corinthians: “as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7-8). James reminded his readers to “be patient, therefore brothers, until the coming of the Lord” (James 4:7). The Philippians were told that “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). And John wrote in Revelation that “the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). Since the disciples and the early Church were to expect the coming of the Lord at any time, how much more should we be waiting in eager anticipation?

Some controversy has surrounded those who try to predict when Jesus will return. The disciples even asked Jesus, “When will these things happen?” (Mark 13:4). Jesus responded to them:

Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,

² For further reading, see Pastor Steve’s article: *The Bible*, page 39.

but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.

Mark 13:32-33

It's wise for us to understand that in discussions of the end times, God does not intend for us to fully understand the timing of His plans. We are simply told to wait, to be alert, to watch, and to be ready, because the return of Jesus is near; it is imminent.

The second coming and the events attached to it, are both words of comfort and of warning! Jesus said,

And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Revelation 22:7

This speaks of a response to the truth of learning of Jesus' return. It's a general command at the end of the book of Revelation encouraging those who have read the book and understood it, to long for Jesus' return, to hope for their resurrection bodies, and anticipate eternal rewards! It's also a warning that awful judgment waits for those who choose to turn away from the truth of Jesus. When the Apostle John heard these words, look at his response:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet

of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'

Revelation 22:8-9

In the gravity of this scene, John wrongly placed his response, but he did show a heart to immediately worship!³

Responding with worship to the truth of the second coming is certainly appropriate! Jesus' return is spoken of in the greatest detail:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the

3 For further reading, see Pastor Dan's article: Worship, page 53.

*winepress of the fury of the wrath of
God the Almighty. On his robe and on
his thigh he has a name written, King
of kings and Lord of lords.*

Revelation 19:11-16

It is shortly after the days of the second coming, seeing Jesus on His throne, that many in Israel and in the whole world will look back to Jesus' death, and mourn for not having accepted Him the first time He came. May we be a people who worship Jesus, long for His return, and—knowing the future—continue to proclaim His Gospel in our own neighborhoods, moving outward to the ends of the earth.

CONVERSATION.

Life is meant to be lived in community. Read these articles and take some time to really engage with others and see if this credo carries over to your life. Does your mission line up with Jesus' mission?

THE LIBERATING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

Page 23

What are a few ways that Christians live that aren't very "free" or "liberating?" Have you struggled with this at any point in your life?

How has the Gospel freed you from the power of sin in your life? Can you think of any examples?

How does our understanding of the Gospel affect the way we live? How could an improper understanding of the Gospel affect that negatively?

How has our culture around us misinterpreted true Christianity or the Gospel? How can we live in a way that shows the people around us the freedom that Christ has given us?

One of the hardest things about sin is that it often has earthly consequences. That may look like a broken relationship or legal trouble; sometimes the effects of sin are internal. How does knowing we are justified in God's eyes affect the way we deal with the earthly consequences of sin?

THE TRINITY.

Page 29

Think about other religions or belief systems that people hold. What are their views of God? Of humanity? Of how God works in the world?

How does the truth of the Trinity set God apart from other belief systems?

The Trinity shows us there is value in believers being unified, yet we are diverse in our roles and giftings. How do you think God has gifted you to love and serve the Church? How has He gifted others that you know?

What do you think of when you hear the words "authority" and "submission"? How are those terms thought of in our culture?

How is the Trinity similar to, as well as different from, a marriage relationship?

THE BIBLE.

Page 39

How have you seen people outside the Church characterize the Bible? How do those descriptions live up or contradict with the what you know to be true of the Bible?

How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God, and not just filled with myths and fairy tales?

How is the Bible unique from any other book?

Jesus based His whole earthly mission on the grounds of Scripture being true, He often quoted the prophets in His teachings. How does Jesus' assurance of the Bible's accuracy encourage you?

As stated in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, how can we use the Word for "reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness?"

DIGNITY.

Page 47

What are some ways that culture defines value and worth?

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? How does this reality change your view of yourself?

In what ways do you misplace the source of dignity, value, and worth?

What does it mean to be "hidden in Christ?"

Take some time as a group to pray together, confessing and repenting of the places where you misplace your source of dignity, value, and worth.

WORSHIP.

Page 53

As people designed to worship, why do we tend to worship things and people rather than God?

Think about your life. What has God done for you that would compel a response of worship?

What things or people do you have the temptation to worship besides God?

How do you balance interest, preferences, and desires in this life with your worship of God?

Read Romans 12:1-2. What do you think it really means to offer your body as a living sacrifice?

SALVATION.

Page 61

Oftentimes people believe they are “good with God.” What are the most common ways people think this is true of them?

There are many Scriptures that illustrate the fact that God chose us and gave us faith to believe He has saved us. Is this an encouragement or discouragement to you?

Think about your life as a Christian and go back to the time when it started for you. When did you realize that God had saved you? How was your life different then than it is now? How has God grown you spiritually since He gave you faith to believe? Or what is the hardest thing for you to accept about faith in Christ?

The doctrine of Heaven and Hell is hotly debated. What does the Bible say about eternal life? What does Jesus say? How does our view on this doctrine change how we live?

When God saves us, we are free from the penalty of our sin and we have freedom in Christ. Who in your life do you hope God will save? Take some time to pray for these people by name.

GRACE AND FAITH.

Page 69

How did the truth of God's love and justice being met through Jesus' sacrifice first become a reality in your life?

How you would explain to someone exploring the person of Jesus what it means to trust or put faith in Him?

Why is it so vitally important to understand God's forgiveness toward us in order to be able to extend forgiveness to someone who sins against us?

If someone objects to the truth that salvation is received through "Christ alone," how would you respond?

How should the fact that our eternal destiny is secure in Jesus influence how we live our lives on a daily basis?

What sort of urgency should we have in telling others about Jesus if we know that at death an individual's decision has been made?

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Page 77

A lot of people think doing religious activities is a way to earn God's favor. Read John 6:28-29. What is the "work" that God requires for salvation?

Read John 14:21. We encourage people who become Christians to get baptized as a first step of obedience. How does obedience fit into faith that is all about God's grace?

Some people are apprehensive about getting baptized. If you haven't been baptized, what are some of the fears you wrestle with when you think about getting baptized? How do you think your Life Group or church might be able to help you step through those fears?

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a Gospel reminder. How can we prevent the Lord's Supper from becoming a ritual, and instead experience it as fresh reminder of what Jesus did for us in His death, burial, and resurrection?

UNITY.

Page 87

Think about unity in your family, church, and your workplace. What creates unity with those around you? What creates disunity?

Too often, people think that unity and uniformity are the same thing. How are these different? How is this seen in the Church?

There are many passages about how believers are gifted in different ways to love and build up the church body. What roles do you think are important for the church body to thrive?

Recall a conversation where you and someone else disagreed about something. Why do people divide over certain issues? What does this reveal about their heart and what they believe? List certain beliefs/doctrines that believers should be willing to fight for.

Throughout the Scriptures, there were times when people were unified and it was not a good thing. In our time and culture today, when can unity be a bad thing? Where is this happening?

WHAT THE CHURCH IS.

Page 97

Describe your past experiences with the Church. What was church like for you growing up? What were your impressions? What effect has that had on your life to this point?

Of the four metaphors focused on in this chapter (the body of Christ, the people of God, the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit), which metaphor for the Church is the greatest encouragement to you? How so?

Culturally, there are many who think negatively of the Church and what it stands for. Why do you think this is? How can we, as members of the body, strive to change this?

When thinking about a local church family to be a part of, what should be present? What is the responsibility of the local church?

How can you be praying for the universal and local Church?

WHAT THE CHURCH DOES.

Page 105

Does your view of theology and what the mission of the Church is tend to drift into one of these categories: Moralism (get better) Fatalism (life sucks and then you die), or Triumphalism (you are the greatest!)? How is the true Gospel different than each of these three worldviews?

Do you view yourself as a missionary where you live? If so, how does this affect your everyday mindset and actions?

Are there opportunities to show the liberating power of the Gospel to those around you that you haven't taken?

What does it mean for you to personally be "doctrinally conservative, but culturally fluid?" How is that different than "doctrinally fluid and culturally conservative?"

Is it harder for you to be doctrinally conservative or to be culturally fluid? Why?

RESURRECTION.

Page 113

How can we be encouraged by and have confidence in the Gospel knowing that Jesus conquered death?

What are some different beliefs about the afterlife that people today tend to hold?

What evidence exists that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead?

Why is *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ important to your life today? To the world?

Consider the hope we have for our own resurrection, because of Jesus' resurrection. Take a moment to thank God for saving us through Jesus, and to pray for friends and family who are not yet saved.

JESUS' RETURN.

Page 121

Read John 14:1-3. What descriptions have you heard of “my Father’s house?”

Why are some Christians fascinated with trying to figure out the date of Christ’s return? Is it even possible to know when Jesus will come again?

Since Jesus is God, why didn’t He know when the return of Christ would take place?

In what ways does the return of Christ comfort you? In what ways does it warn you? Or scare you?

What does it mean that the second coming is imminent? How should that imminency affect our lives and actions?

Credo.

VIEW THE MESSAGE VIDEOS.

This book has corresponding messages that were taught across Riverview Church's venues in the fall of 2015. Visit *rivchurch.com* or download Riverview Church's app by searching "*rivchurch*" in your App Store to view the videos.