

Name:



STEPS BEFORE FIRST CLASS BEREAN BAPTIST CHURCH



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Our Covenant

As a bond of unity among us, Berean Baptist Church accepts for its members the following covenant:

Having been led by the Holy Spirit to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and upon our profession of our faith in Him, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we do now solemnly and joyfully enter into this covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We fully realize that the strength to uphold this covenant comes from the grace of God our Father, the shed blood of God the Son, and the power of the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

We promise to actively pursue personal holiness; to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church's spiritual growth and unity; to faithfully abide by the doctrines and behaviors outlined in this church's Articles of Faith; and to give cheerfully of our time, talents, and finances for the support of this ministry and its missionaries.

We further promise to faithfully attend the church's worship services, to maintain personal spiritual disciplines; to teach our children the Word of God; to share the gospel with our relatives and acquaintances; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements; and to avoid all gossip. We promise that we will love and pray for each other and in times of distress help one another.

We promise to endeavor to obey the commandments of our Lord Jesus and to abstain from anything that would cause our fellow brother or sister in Christ to stumble or that will bring reproach to the name of Jesus Christ.

We further realize that if we should fail to live up to the promises we have made, our brothers and sisters in Christ will always strive for our reconciliation and spiritual restoration. However, if we partake in a sustained and unrepentant violation of an Article of Faith, we will be brought under church discipline in accordance with the Church Constitution.

We make this covenant with each other for the express purpose of glorifying God as the visible representation of the body of Christ.

This booklet is for those who are contemplating participating in First Class, the pre-membership class for Berean Baptist Church (BBC). It is a collection of articles that describe who we are as the BBC family.

Please take some time to walk through each topic. Take one topic a day, so that you have time to process what you read and to answer the question at the bottom of each page. Once you have walked through all the topics, and if you feel like God desires for you to be part of the Berean family, please call the church office (910-868-5156) to sign up for First Class. NOTE: All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

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“Berean”

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed... (Acts 17:10-12)

Why Berean? (pronounced “Buh-REE-uhn”) Berea was a city in southern Macedonia (Greece) located at the foot of Mount Bermius. The Apostle Paul visited the city during his second missionary journey where he found a substantial number of people ready to receive the Gospel. Paul preached to them that the God of the Universe now requires all people everywhere to repent and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and many citizens of Berea did exactly that (Acts 20:21). The people of Berea were very faithful with God’s Word. We at Berean find the only way to truly be a Christ-centered community is to follow the Bible.

In Acts 17:10-12, Luke describes the Berean people using four descriptions. These descriptions seem to connect with their faith and their biblical foundation.

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica.” The Greek word for noble in this passage is eugenēs (εὐγένης), which highlights their generosity. It would seem that their faith had created an environment of being generous. Scripture and Jesus clearly challenge all believers to be generous with what they have. Later in this booklet you will find a related topic of stewardship.

“They received the word with all eagerness.” When the people of Berea saw that Paul was going to bring a message from God’s Word, they leaned in. The Greek word for eagerness here is prothymia (προθυμία). There was a forwardness in their mind, they were ready, and they had an expectation. This is an example of how all believers should be ready and look forward to hearing a message from the Bible.

“Examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Even though they were ready and had a great expectation for Paul’s message, they did not just take him at his word. Each day, the people of Berea would examine the Scriptures for themselves to determine the truth. Believers should be in the Word of God daily, feeding themselves from what God has provided. This will also help them know the truth and falsehood when they hear it from someone else.

“Many of them therefore believed.” “Therefore,” in the Bible, is a conjunction that tells us what comes next is based on what was just mentioned. This allows us to conclude that the reason the people of Berea believed was based on their faith and the handling of God’s Word. The Word of God is powerful. It is necessary for us to surrender to Jesus as Savior, and the Bible is necessary for us to also surrender daily to Jesus as Lord.

We call ourselves “Bereans” because we seek to be like the; energetic, enthusiastic, and eager to learn what the Bible teaches us and what God reveals about Himself through Scripture. We rejoice in the risen Savior and worship Him continuously, individually and through corporate worship, preaching, and teaching based on the Bible.

What part does the Bible play in your life?

The Bible: God's Holy Word

All Scripture is breathed out by God... (2Ti 3:16)

At Berean, we believe the Bible to be God's Word which reveals the only hope for humanity, Jesus Christ (Tit 2:13). Furthermore, we believe Scripture to be entirely true in every sense because its author is God, who Himself is Truth (Isa 65:16, Heb 4:12).

We believe that Scripture is God's special revelation to humanity in a unified narrative. That narrative ultimately leads to Jesus Christ, our Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and Lord, and is profound wisdom for the modern world. Furthermore, we believe this epic story began with God creating the heavens and earth and will culminate with God creating a new heaven and new earth where His people will dwell with Him forever. This holy book shows us just how unholy we are (Psa 51:5), how holy our God is (Isa 6:3), and how Jesus' sacrifice makes believers holy (Heb 10:10).

We believe that every word in the original manuscripts of each book in the canon of Scripture was God-breathed without error, and is, therefore, useful for teaching, correction, reproof, and training in righteous living such that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Ti 3:16-17).

We believe that the canon of Scripture has been closed for over 1,900 years and consists of 39 OT and 27 NT books originally written in the languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Furthermore, we believe nearly 40 authors wrote in their own language and dialect according to their customs and culture, yet were simultaneously and verbally carried along by the Holy Spirit such that humans wrote God's Word (2Pe 1:21). This work of the Holy Spirit took place over 1,600 years, on three different continents, through shepherds, farmers, judges, kings, prophets, priests, fishermen, government officials, craftsmen, and even a doctor.

We believe that God did not stop His work of giving us His Word in inspiration, but continued to ensure that accurate copies of the original manuscripts were preserved so not the smallest letter or stroke of His Word would ever pass away (Mat 5:18, Mark 13:31).

We believe God sovereignly worked not only in inspiration and preservation, but also in the discovery and revelation of the canonical books. We deny any suggestion that the church conspired to choose which books it wanted in the Bible or that inspired books are missing or lost.

We believe the Bible is the sole authority for the church and our final authority for faith, practice, and conduct. We are commanded to read the Bible both privately and publicly (1Th 5:27), and it must be the primary source document for all teaching and preaching in the church (Psa 1:2, 2Ti 4:2). This leads us as believers to hide God's Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Him and that His Word should be a lamp to guide our feet and a light for our path (Psa 119:11,105).

We believe that the copies through the years and today's translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original text. Furthermore, we believe that because the Bible is God's Word, it is to be both believed and obeyed by all who profess Christ as Savior.

What do you believe about God's Word?

The Flock

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

(1Pe 5:1-3)

1) Joining Berean is like getting married. Membership brings you into a covenant relationship with this local church. You don't attend here—you are a member! You are officially part of the church. Without a membership role, how do we know who comprises the church? Is it anyone who attends on Sunday mornings? Is it anyone who shows up to a members' meeting? How are local disciples of Christ supposed to follow the protocols outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18 without a church membership? The Apostle Peter exhorted the elders to "shepherd the flock that is among them" (1 Peter 5:2). Who is the flock? "The flock" is the local church in covenant one with another.

2) Joining Berean brings you under the authority of the local church. Uniting with us is profitable for your growth as a disciple and perseverance in the faith. If you wander from the Gospel, the elders, deacons, and members of the church have a formal obligation to speak into your life, and you have made a formal commitment to respond appropriately. The elders of Berean cannot watch over the souls of every believer in Fayetteville. Membership formally communicates, "I want Berean's spiritual leaders watching over my soul for my spiritual growth." Read and study 1Th 5:12-13, 1Ti 5:17-18 and Heb 13:17.

3) Joining Berean gives you a legitimate voice in the church. Our church polity is pluralistic elder-led congregationalism — members of Berean have a voice. If you are not a member, you cannot approve or disapprove of recommendations brought before the church. You do not see the reports and know the health of the church. Why wouldn't you want to be able to participate in making important decisions? Read 1Co 5 and see the church doing its spiritual duty.

4) Joining Berean sets the conditions for you to be able to use your spiritual gifts to the fullest ability in the body of Christ. God's will may be for you to teach or lead, but non-members are not permitted to teach or lead. You may have spiritual gifts that will not be used at Berean because we believe it is prudent to limit the office of teacher, deacon, and elder to church members. I trust you understand the necessity of vetting all teachers of the Bible in the church.

5) Joining Berean is helpful for the corporate witness of the church in the community. Your formal commitment to membership speaks volumes to your level of commitment to Christ and the Christ the unbelieving world sees. We don't go to church—we are the church. In a day and age when people are struggling with commitment and apathy, we need to be counter-cultural. We are salt and light. Formal membership declares loud and clear—"I am committed to being a faithful and engaged member until God moves me to another city or church."

What is God saying to you about joining Berean?

Purpose, Mission and Vision

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1Co 10:31)

Why do we exist? Why did God create us? The answer to these questions is our purpose. God created us for His purpose, to glorify Him.

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)

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.” (Mat 28:18-20)

How do we accomplish our purpose of glorifying God? The answer to this question is our mission. Our mission is the Great Commission. Our mission statement is: “Proclaim Christ in the 21st Century, in Fayetteville, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and the world: to make fully-functioning followers of Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God the Father”.

Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law. (Pro 29:18)

So, what will it look like as we proclaim the Gospel and make disciples? The answer to this question is our vision. The Person and Work of Jesus Christ and His Gospel is the center of our vision. Certainly, the church must be concerned about people perishing and if we as a people of God are to be holy, we cannot be casting off restraint. Instead, we must be committed to the vision our Lord has for His church under the leadership of God, the Holy Spirit.

Above all, in a fallen world, we seek to be a God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, Gospel-centered and Biblically-based church which shows the love of God. We are a city within a city – a community of believers seeking to be radically changed by the power of the Gospel and the love of God. We are a family, a Gospel community, called to take the Gospel to the lost community around us. God’s vision for Berean, personally and corporately, is to live a life full of the aspects below:

- ❖ Share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ
- ❖ Preach and Teach the Word of God
- ❖ Baptize and Help Converts Grow in Their Walk with God.
- ❖ Create a Community of Believers Profoundly Impacted by God’s Love
- ❖ Train and Equip Members to Serve Others
- ❖ Worship in a Way That Ignites Passion in Believers and Glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ
- ❖ Engage the Next Generation with the Lord Jesus Christ
- ❖ Contend for the Faith
- ❖ Practice Church Discipline
- ❖ Maintain and Build Facilities that Meet the Needs of the Ministry and Proclaim the Excellency of God
- ❖ Partner with Baptist Church Planters, Missionaries, and Organizations that Promote Global Outreach

How does the above purpose, mission, and vision, touch your heart?

The Constitution

The church constitution, plain and simple, is a man-made document created to establish how to govern the church. It is biblical only inasmuch as it reflects the truth of the Bible. You, the potential church member, will want to read the church constitution to determine if you think what it communicates is, in fact, in alignment with the truth of the Word of God and, in particular, the NT.

Berean's constitution is available for all to read on the church website, and we provide paper copies to everyone who attends our pre-membership class, First Class. The most important part of the constitution is Article III: Articles of Faith. Since Berean is not formally affiliated with a larger denominational entity, it is necessary for us to individually communicate what we believe to be true about the essentials of Christian doctrine—that is, the dogma of our religion. The Articles of Faith cover what we believe about the Bible, God, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Satan, sin and humanity, salvation, the church, and the end times. The section on the church is the longest with clarifying details about who comprises the church, the ordinances, civil lawsuits, marriage, gender, giving, sexual sins, the sanctity of human life, and other similar themes. Some churches choose to align themselves with particular confessions of faith like the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 or the Westminster Confession of Faith. We do not. Berean uses its articles of faith in that manner. Only the church as a whole can approve a change to the articles of faith, and that change requires approval by three quarters of the church. You will find many Scripture references in each Article of Faith.

The constitution also contains the church covenant. The covenant communicates what it means to be a member of the church. It is seven short paragraphs that outline the expectation of all members in the form of promises. The covenant is on the back cover of this booklet. If you are not willing to live according to the expectations in the covenant, you should not join the church.

The constitution explicitly outlines our formal membership. Because we believe in congregational governance, it is critical to establish a membership. A person's attendance at Berean or monetary gifts to the ministry do not make them members. The constitution outlines the particulars and the process, including a minimum age of 16.

At Berean, elders provide the necessary leadership and oversight. We have volunteer elders, paid elders (usually called pastors), and staff, including assistant pastors who may or may not be elders. The details of all this is found in the constitution. The constitution specifically addresses the senior pastor, lay elders, deacons, treasurer, church clerk, and trustees. It prescribes the qualifications for each position and the duties and responsibilities.

Finally, there is much in the constitution dealing with corporate governance. We own property, invest money, pay bills, borrow money, pay employees, provide insurance, and on and on. We are a Christian ministry and a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Because of this, the IRS requires specific things found in articles X through XVII.

[Have you read the articles of faith yet?](#)

Jesus-Ruled, Elder-Led, Staff-Facilitated, Deacon-Assisted, and Member-Accountable

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in His teaching; the one who exhorts, in His exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:3-8)

At Berean, every person is part of the body and has different roles and responsibilities. The term polity speaks to the operational and governance structure of our church. Below, you will find five statements along with a brief description that summarize our polity.

Jesus-Ruled – Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Col 1:18, Eph 1:22-23). He alone is our leader and ruler. Our elders recognize Jesus as the Chief Shepherd and endeavor to shepherd this flock of believers in submission to Christ (1Pe 5:1-4).

Elder-Led – The Bible uses three terms – elder, pastor, overseer – to describe the same office (1Pe 5:1-4) and the qualifications of those men (1Ti 3:1-7, Tit 1:6-9). The Bible also clearly models a plurality of elders in a local church setting (without ever setting a specific number) (Acts 14:23, 16:4, 20:17, 21:18, Tit 1:5, Jam 5:14). Our elders are servant leaders as they shepherd, teach the Word, and lead us toward God’s vision.

Staff-Facilitated – In the Bible you will not find a clear term for church staff. But at Berean, God has blessed us to have paid staff who serve with their whole hearts for the glory of God (Col 3:23-24). The staff support and make it easier for members to join in our ministries as they fulfill their roles and assigned duties in the day-to-day operations of the church.

Deacon-Assisted – The word deacon means servant and the origins of that office are often traced to Acts 6:1-8. The Bible also gives clear qualifications for what it means to be a deacon (1Ti 3:8-12). Our deacons assist church members as each believer is called to serve, while the deacons, themselves, focus on the widows and the orphans.

Member-Accountable – While we recognize God’s calling of elders to lead our church through the voice of the congregation, we also recognize that members have a voice in important decisions. The elders, deacons, and staff are responsible to the congregation, but each member of the congregation is responsible to join in the carrying out of our ministries.

At Berean, we are a local body of Christ with each of us fulfilling our roles and responsibilities.

Where do you see God using you within our body of Christ?

Church Covenant

A covenant is a formal, solemn, and binding agreement: a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties: esp. for the performance of some action (Webster Dictionary)

All members of Berean make the same covenant before God and each other. You will find our covenant on the back cover of this booklet.

Every New Testament (NT) church should hold to a covenant, “A NT church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth.” (Baptist Faith and Message 2000)

While our Articles of Faith outline what we believe, our church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live. More importantly, it is a summary of how God would have us live. It does not include every explicit command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ in Berean Baptist Church.

A church covenant is a biblical standard which helps a church when practicing biblical church discipline. It also provides a pathway for members to exhort one another to live holy lives and a means to challenge brothers and sisters who persist in sin.

Our covenant starts by setting the standard that every member of Berean has publicly professed that Jesus Christ is their personal Savior and Lord. To be in a biblical covenant relationship as church members, we must first be in a personal relationship with God. A member must also be baptized (see Believer’s Baptism).

As members, we understand that our strength to live in accordance with this covenant comes only from God and not ourselves. This strength comes through surrender to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit each day.

The middle portion of our covenant highlights specific promises and expectations. When we have a clear understanding of what is expected, we then know what we are agreeing to before we unite with each other on this journey of church membership.

At this point, please turn to our covenant on the back cover and carefully read it. As you read, think through your life in comparison to what is stated. Are there any places in which your life does not presently align?

How do you feel about uniting with us at Berean through making this covenant?

Gospel

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, if you hold fast

to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 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, (1Co 15:1-4)

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died for the sins of the whole world, was buried and rose again on the third day in order to deliver from sin's penalty and power all who turn (repent) to God and believe the Gospel (this truth). Furthermore, He grants to believers His Holy Spirit, Christ's perfect righteousness, and eternal life.

We reject any suggestion that salvation is secured outside of the sovereign gracious work of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ alone, such as praying a sinner's prayer or asking Jesus into one's heart. We deny anything that modifies the Gospel by adding a social or economic focus, water baptism or any requirement that could be construed as a work accomplished by man or that teaches there is more than one way to be saved. Moreover, we believe that because many mistakenly think themselves to be saved, all should work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, examining themselves to see if they are in the faith, and ensuring that their calling and election is sure. Due to the critical importance of the Gospel, below you will find a more detailed examination of the Gospel with footnoted Bible passages that should help with clarification.

The Eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ: The eternal¹ Gospel² is the good news³ that God is redeeming⁴ and reconciling⁵ sinners⁶ to Himself eternally⁷ through the sacrificial⁸ and substitutionary⁹ death, burial, and resurrection¹⁰ of the man¹¹ Christ¹² Jesus through authentic¹³ faith¹⁴ in what Jesus¹⁵, the one and only¹⁶ sinless¹⁷ Son of God¹⁸, accomplished¹⁹ on a tree²⁰ in the city of Jerusalem²¹ 2000 years ago²².

Gospel Glossary // Authentic: that which is real, true, genuine and from the heart // Christ: the promised king²³ and deliverer²⁴ of the Jews, Messiah²⁵ // Crucify: to put to death by nailing or binding to a cross // Faith: belief and trust in Christ alone and the salvation He provides²⁶ // God: the Supreme eternal triune²⁷ Being who created everything and governs all things²⁸ // Gospel: the message of salvation²⁹ found in Jesus // Jesus: the second Person of the triune God who is fully God³⁰ and fully man born of a virgin³¹ // Reconcile: bring back to a former state of harmony, to eliminate hostility³² // Redeem: to free from the consequences of sin including the wrath of God³³ // Sacrificial: the death of Jesus as a sin offering to God // Salvation: deliverance from the power of sin and punishment in hell³⁴ // Sin: any violation or trespass of God's law³⁵ // Sinners: individuals who acknowledge their guilt before God and their need for a Savior³⁶ // Substitutionary: Jesus taking the place of sinners // Tree: the cross on which Jesus was crucified³⁷

¹Rev 14:6, ²1Co 15:1-4, ³Acts 8:35, ⁴Rom 3:24, Gal 3:13, Eph 1:7, ⁵Rom 5:10, Eph 2:16, ⁶1Ti 1:15, Rom 3:23, 5:19, ⁷John 3:15, ⁸Heb 9:26, 10:1, ⁹Rom 5:8, ¹⁰1Co 15:4, ¹¹1Ti 2:5, ¹²John 1:41, ¹³Rom 10:10, ¹⁴Rom 5:1, Eph 2:8-9, Jam 2:14-17, Rev 14:12, ¹⁵Mat 1:21, ¹⁶1Jo 4:9, ¹⁷2Co 5:21, ¹⁸1Jo 4:5, ¹⁹John 19:30, Heb 10:10, ²⁰1Pe 2:24, ²¹Mark 10:33, ²²30 or 33 AD, ²³Rev 19:16, ²⁴Rom 11:26, ²⁵Dan 9:25, ²⁶Gen 15:6, Acts 16:31, ²⁷Mat 28:19, ²⁸Isa 46:9-10, 1Ti 6:15, ²⁹Acts 4:12, Eph 1:13, ³⁰John 1:1, ³¹Mat 1:23, Luke 1:27, ³²Gen 3:15, ³³John 3:36, Rom 1:18, 5:9, ³⁴Rev 20:14-15, ³⁵1Jo 3:4 AV, ³⁶2 Tim 1:10, ³⁷Mat 26:2

How has and does your life connect with the Gospel?

God's Plan of Salvation

Below we have a diagram that highlights key passages of Scripture which lay out significant points within God's plan for a person to surrender their life to Him.

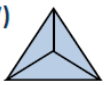


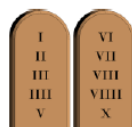
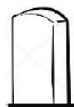



God of the Bible	Man the Sinner (Bad News)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triune God¹ (Mt 3:16-17) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ God the Father ○ The Son of God ○ God the Holy Spirit • Creator God (Gen 1:1; Rom 1:25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Uncaused Cause"² (Rom 4:17b) ○ God made mankind "in our Image" (Gen 1:1,26-27) • The Sovereign (1 Tim 6:15) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Law-Giver³ (Gen 2:16-17) ○ Omnipotent (Rev 19:6) ○ Omniscient (Is 46:10) • God is Holy (Is 6:3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Just (De 32:4) ○ Judge (Gen 18:25) ○ Righteous (Psalm 11:7) ○ Merciful (Ex 34:6-7; Eph 2:4) ○ Love (Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8; 1 Jn 4:8) ○ Angry (Ps 7:11) <div style="text-align: right;">    </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall of Man <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adam and Eve ○ 1st human sin (rebellion) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gen 3:1-7; 15⁴ ○ Death (Gen 2:17) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical and Spiritual • God's Commandments (Beatitudes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex 20:1-10; Mt 5 & 6; Mk 12:29-31 • You are a sinner⁵ (guilty before God) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rom 3:10,19, 23; 5:8,12,18 • The wages of sin is death <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rom 5:12, 6:23a; Eph 2:1 • God's wrath abides on you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jn 3:36; Rom 1:18; Eph 2:3 • Unbelievers go to hell <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mt 10:28, 25:41; Rom 2:8-9; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Rev 21:8 • You must be born-again <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jn 3:3,5; 1 Peter 1:23 <div style="text-align: right;">    </div>
Christ the Savior (Good News)	Man's Response (& Results)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mt 16:16) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sent from the Father as the only way to God (Mt 3:17; Jn 3:16, 8:16, 14:6; Acts 4:12) ○ Born of a virgin (Mt 1:23) ○ God Incarnate (1 Jn 4:2-3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All God & Man (Jn 1:1,14) • The Gospel (Christ died for you⁶) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Christ knew no sin⁷ (2 Cor 5:21) ○ Christ died for our sins⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jn 19:23; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3; ▪ 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 2:2 ○ Christ was buried (Mt 27:60) ○ Christ rose again (1 Cor 15:4) • More Good News <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Gospel is a promise⁹ of salvation from God (Rom 1:2; Tit 1:2; 1 Jn 2:25) ○ Christ is presently interceding for you (Advocate) (1 Jn 2:1) ○ Christ is coming again (Acts 1:11) <div style="text-align: right;">   </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repentance¹⁰ (turn) toward God and Faith¹¹ (trust or belief) alone in the gospel are inseparable experiences of grace (gifts) and are what one must do to be saved.¹² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mark 1:15 & Luke 13:3,5 ○ Jn 1:12; 3:16,36; 20:31 ○ Acts 3:19; 8:37; 11:18; 15:11,19; 16:31; 17:30; 20:21 ○ Rom 1:1-2, 16; 6:23b; 10:9-10 ○ Eph 2:8-9 & 1 Jn 5:1 • By God's grace salvation¹³ results in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eternal Life (Jn 3:16) ○ Conversion (Acts 3:19) ○ Justification (Rom 1:17, 5:1, 8:1) ○ Adoption (Rom 8:15) ○ Being sealed with the Spirit (Eph 1:13) ○ Being given spiritual gifts (Rom 12:4-6) ○ Discipleship; Sanctification¹⁴ ○ Preservation (Jude 1:1, 24-25) ○ Glorification (Rom 8:30)

Diagram Footnotes:

1. God's plan of salvation began in eternity past (Eph 1:4, Rev 13:8) and ultimately will end with the creation of a new heaven and new earth (2Pe 3:7-13, Rev 21:1-4).
 2. The triune God of the Bible is the self-existent, "I am that I am," eternal God who is the ultimate cause behind all that exists (Exo 3:14, John 1:3, Rom 4:17b, Col 1:16-17).
 3. As the sovereign of the universe, God has the right to give His creatures any commandment or law He sees fit; the first was given to Adam and Eve.
 4. Given to Eve, this is the earliest record of God promising a coming Savior; the seed of a woman would ultimately be Jesus born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Gen 3:15, Isa 7:14, Mic 5:2, Mat 2:1).
 5. A failure to acknowledge one's guilt before God during a Gospel presentation may be an indication that the Spirit of God is not working in the heart of a potential convert (John 16:8).
 6. As our (all believers) representative, Jesus—the Lamb of God—paid our penalty and suffered death in our place to remove the wrath of God, thereby ransoming, redeeming, and reconciling humanity to God; this is the doctrine of penal vicarious (substitutionary) atonement (Mark 10:45, John 1:29, Rom 4:25, 5:19, 2Co 5:18-19, Tit 2:14, Heb 9:26, 1 Jn 4:10).
 7. Christ died for "our" sins not His own sins; Christ's life was perfect; He kept the law perfectly because no man or woman could keep the law. (2Co 5:21, Heb 4:15)
 8. On the cross, Christ shed His precious blood and gave His life to satisfy the wrath of God, remit sins, and purchase the church (Acts 20:28, Heb 9:22, 1Pe 1:19, 1 Jn 2:2).
 9. The Gospel is a promise from God of forgiveness of sins and eternal life to anyone who repents and believes the Gospel; one does not have to ask for this gift (Eph 2:8-9). It has already been promised to all who will believe on His name (John 1:12, 3:16, Rom 10:9, Eph 1:7, 2:8, Tit 1:2).
 10. All sinners are responsible to repent of any and all sin that is keeping them from turning to God (repentance) and placing authentic faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ (the Gospel). In Thessalonica, the believers turned from idols to serve the one true and living God (1Th 1:9). In Jerusalem, the Jews needed to repent of their failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 2:38). Subsequently the Christian life will be characterized by repentance from sin (Acts 3:9, Rom 2:4, 1Jn 3:19, Rev 3:19).
 11. Faith in Christ is synonymous with authentic belief, dependence, trust in, and reliance upon Him. It is much more than intellectual assent; it includes followership (John 2:23-24, Jam 2:19).
 12. This is the answer to the "what must I do to be saved?" question, and it can never be understood to be more than one expectation or step (Acts 16:30-31).
 13. Salvation is past, present, and future in its tenses; believers have been saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin, and will be saved from the presence of sin in the new heaven and new earth. After one is saved, water baptism is often the first public profession of faith in Christ (Mat 28:20, Acts 2:38-41, 8:12, 36-38, 16:31-33).
 14. The concept of being saved without being a follower of the Lord Jesus is foreign to the NT (Mat 16:24, 28:19-20, Luke 14:27, John 10:27, 2Co 5:17). Sanctification is both instantaneous (1Co 6:11) and progressive resulting in being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) by God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 17:19 1Th 4:3, Tit 2:11-12, 1Pe 1:15, 1Jn 2:3).
- ❖ You can find a full-size version on the website and one will be given to you in First Class.

Gospel Community

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

(Psa 133:1)

Community is hard. Not only is it challenging because all relationships between sinners are difficult, but it is hard because we often have no tangible reason to remain in the relationship that seems to be causing more trouble than it's worth. In addition to those factors, we live in a time in which it is easier and neater to associate with like-minded people on the far side of the planet than to deal with our next-door neighbor who may differ from us on any number of areas. But we have to see that God is calling us to be a Gospel community to the lost community around us.

First century Christians would have seen community as essential to their survival. In Acts 2:41-47, Luke describes what Gospel community looks like and what Christ can do through it. Because we live in 21st century America rather than first century Judea, most of us are removed from day-to-day subsistence living. In that regard, our wealth has made it harder to see that the fellowship of believers needs community, even if our daily bread is not in question.

But the primary purpose of community within the body of Christ was never about meeting the material needs of that community. Clearly, it was an important task, but it was not their purpose. Paul tells the Galatians—and by extension, us—to gently restore those who have gone astray, to bear one another's burdens, to teach, and to never grow weary of doing good, especially among the “household of faith” (Gal 6:1-10).

“Household” here implies proximity, closeness, interdependence, a familial relationship. Believers are like a family. Do we desire this close, interlocking relationship within the body of Christ?

The data indicates we do, even if we don't know it. A recent study indicated that most American adults have between two and five “close” friends, but one in five of those surveyed regularly feels lonely or alone (Cigna Health, 2018). A more recent study done by Harvard University's School of Education paints a bleaker picture with more than a third (36%) of all adults, including 51% of mothers with young children, and a staggering 61% of young adults feel isolated and lonely (2021).

That's the bad news; the good news is that we've been adopted into the household of God (Rom 8:15; 9:26; Gal 3:26)! Our God, the head of that household, cares for widows and orphans (Jam 1:27) and cares for those who stray (Galatians 6:1). We worship and serve a God who hears us when we are powerless. We are grafted into a family with many brothers and sisters with Christ as the Firstborn among us.

And just as an ordinary family living together divides the responsibilities and chores, God's family does too. How does that work, exactly? According to God's gifting and equipping each of us, God has designed us to live “on mission” together (Eph 4:11-17, 1Co 12:4-7). The mission we should be living on together, each and every day, is the Great Commission.

How are you living in Gospel community with other believers, using your gifting and equipping daily, to love, serve, and glorify God?

Proclaiming Christ

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim

The Gospel to the whole creation. (Mark 16:15)

Proclaiming Christ in the 21st Century

A motto is a short expression of a guiding principle, and for Berean, this short expression is “Proclaiming Christ!” But what does it mean to proclaim Christ? According to Merriam-Webster, to proclaim is to “declare publicly.” And this is what we must do. We must insist that the world recognizes that Jesus of Nazareth, the boy born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, is “the Christ.” At the first Pentecost celebration after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the Apostle Peter declared, “Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know for certain that God has made Him [Jesus] both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Both Lord and Christ are titles. Jesus is the Lord, and He is the Christ (Messiah).

The Christ is quite literally “the Anointed One.” In the Old Testament (OT), priests and kings were anointed with oil as a visible sign of being set apart for God. Each of these individuals was a foreshadowing of the Ultimate Anointed One whom the Lord God of Israel would send to make all things right. In John 4, the woman at the well expresses this when she says we know the Messiah is coming, and He will make all things right. She knew that because the OT prophet Daniel promised a coming Messiah, a Prince (Dan 9:25).

Today what we proclaim boldly and publicly is that the man Jesus, whom the Romans crucified, is the eternal Son of God. He was and is the final Anointed One who functions as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Or we could say He is our Teacher, Savior, and Lord. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses promised that “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen.” When we proclaim Christ, we are saying He is the prophet Moses prophesied about and to Him we must listen. Throughout the world, Jesus is to be declared Lord. Often Lord is put before Jesus; thus, He is the Lord Jesus. The Greek word here, *kyrios* (κύριος), emphasizes that He is the Master, the Owner, and Possessor. He is the Sovereign, Prince, and Chief. Finally, inasmuch that He speaks to us in His Word, and we don’t always obey Him as Lord, we sin. And this sin separates us from God. What we need is a Mediator, a Savior, a Priest who will go to God on our behalf. The book of Hebrews presents Jesus as the final “High Priest,” who has appeased the wrath of God on our behalf through His sacrificial and substitutionary death, burial and resurrection.

When we proclaim Christ, we are declaring to the entire world that Jesus is the Lord and King who died for the sins of the whole world to be the ultimate Priest who offered Himself to pay for the sins of all who believe.

Is Jesus your Prophet, Priest, and King? If “yes” how do you know this?

Local Outreach

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Mat 5:13-16)

Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry is a clear example of this Scripture. While His primary focus was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, we also have numerous examples of Jesus healing others without any mention of sin or salvation. Our King, our Lord, our God made it better for someone because it pleased the Father for Him to do so.

We at Berean believe that while we can look to Paul, Peter and the other disciples as examples, the perfect example was given by Jesus Himself. It may never be said of King Jesus that He was uninvolved, that He was an absentee ruler. Far from it! He engaged children (Mat 18:10-14, Luke 18:16,17), celebrated marriages (John 2:1-12), and gave of Himself to all who approached in need (Mark 2:1-12).

As we await His return, a primary agent of continuing that work on earth is the Body of Believers, the redeemed church, that seeks to honor Him and bring glory to His name and be imitators of Him to the degree to which we are able (1Co. 11:1). We Bereans believe that we have been much loved. We have been forgiven of a great debt, and the result of that love and the indwelling of the Spirit of God, is to love much.

Notice also that Jesus commands us: “...let [our] light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The implication of this directive tells us that these deeds occur outside the church. While we never separate our work in outreach from our commission to make disciples—the primary function of outreach is evangelism—we are also secure in the knowledge that when we do “good,” when we try to make it better for another image-bearer of the living God, we are always successful, in that we are doing our best to be obedient, to be emulators of Jesus.

At Berean, we claim to be servants and students of Jesus Christ, collectively and individually. We try to live in such a way that reflects that. In any of the infinite number of bad situations that are constant reminders of living in a fallen world, we are God’s agents on the ground, His servants, indwelt by His Spirit, with access to the throne room, and the attention and affection of God bestowed upon us.

How is God using you in Gospel ministry? How are you serving the lost around us through love relationships?

Discipleship

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.” (Mat28:18-20)

But what is a “disciple”? According to Merriam-Webster, a disciple is “One who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another, such as Christianity; one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ’s followers according to the Gospel accounts”. The alternate definition is “A convinced adherent of a school or individual”. At Berean, you will often hear disciples described as fully functioning followers of Christ. This total surrender can be seen through maturing in:

- ❖ **Thinking** like Jesus.
 - ❖ **Being** like Jesus.
 - ❖ **Doing** like Jesus.
 - ❖ **Proclaiming** Like Jesus.
- And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. (Mat 4:19-20)

A simpler explanation could be given: developing believers to move them from being consumers to being contributors (Eph 4:12). Discipleship is such a critical element to the health and growth of the church that Jesus didn’t so much teach His disciples how to do it; He showed them, He demonstrated it, He lived it.

His earthly ministry lasted about three years, with almost all of it walking with His disciples from one end of first century Judea to the other and back. Imagine the conversations that weren’t recorded in the Gospels. Imagine the shared activities of daily life. Often the most important conversations in life happen when we’re working together with someone on something else.

With that in mind, the process of creating disciples requires a level of involvement, and more critically, investment, by two or more parties. Involvement can be thought of as a willingness to be present, to be available, even when it’s messy. The investment is more than simple commitment because it speaks to the idea that the relationship has a mutually beneficial purpose in addition to the primary goal of advancing God’s Kingdom. Neither comes easily or naturally, but we also believe that what God commands, He also supports and enables through His indwelling presence (Mat 28:20).

What does a disciple do? If we look at the biblical examples, it becomes clear that disciples of Jesus Christ worship Jesus, obey His teachings, and make more disciples, who, in turn, worship Jesus, obey His teachings, and make more disciples. We do this because we are commanded to do so. We do this because it is the manner God providentially chose to advance and expand His Kingdom while we await His return. We do this because it is the primary means by which we insert godly influence into a largely godless culture (Mat 5:13-16).

Who are you in discipling relationships with?

Stewardship

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” (Mat 25:21)

Stewardship is the function of taking care of something. It can be applied to the environment, health, talents, abilities, property, economics, and a variety of other manageable entities. All that we have is from the Lord so being good stewards of everything in our lives is honoring to Him. But how you view stewardship reflects who controls your heart.

What gifts has God given us? Of course, His greatest gift is Jesus, but what else has He given us? The answer: our talents, skills, abilities, time, and assets, which have been entrusted to us. Then we ask, how do we use those things to glorify God and serve His kingdom? Do we even think of the issue in that way, or do we believe that once we’ve contributed our ten percent tithe, we’re good? Do we tithe?

Any offering to the church – time, energy, talent, money – is an act of faith, but it’s not an act of blind faith. Typically, people choose not to contribute for only a few reasons, one being they don’t think they can afford it. They cannot afford to give ten percent, so they contribute nothing. Faith counters this. Our God has promised His provision (Mat 6:25-26).

When we choose not to invest our energy and talent, it’s often because we just don’t see a need, or a place where we can make meaningful contributions. Again, faith counters this. What we do, even when unseen, is seen by our God and rewarded by our God (Mat 6:1-4).

We opened with the Parable of the Talents (Mat 25:14-30) so let’s go back to it. A talent was a unit of weight measurement that varied over time and by place, but in the NT, it probably represented a few days’ wages. The master entrusted various amounts to his servants according to their abilities and expected them to increase his money. One servant received five talents and traded with merchants to earn another five; another servant was given two talents and earned an additional two. The final servant was given one talent, and he hid it in a hole in the ground until the master’s return. The first two servants were praised and rewarded for their faithfulness and industry, while the third was harshly chastised and cast out.

The point of the narrative is simply this: every good thing we have has been given to us by God. We use these things to provide for ourselves and our families, including hobbies, vacations, and many other things. Unsaved people do the same.

But we are different. We are called. We are saved. We are distinct. We, more than anyone, know the source of these gifts, and the purpose behind their giving. We enjoy the fruits of our labors, but we know the reason we have been called is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Who has your heart and how will you use your time, talents, and tithe to glorify God today and tomorrow and forever?

Worship in Song

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing

One another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

One question many people ask themselves before visiting a church for the first time is, “Will I like the music?” But that’s the wrong question. What we should be asking is, “Does this church worship together and do the songs they choose represent God’s Word in Scripture’s language and tone?”

You see, this question has less to do with preferences, style, and popularity, and gets to the heart of the issue. Men should give glory to God rather than themselves, period. It’s what we struggle with the most. So, here at Berean, we strive to worship God first and not man-made ideas.

Our music is primarily congregational. We believe you should join us when you come. We reject the notion that the music is for a few awesome musicians who excel in their area. We want our worship to be uncomplicated and encouraging.

We also strive to select songs that are obviously born out of Scripture. We reject songs that are generic or vague and can work in any religion or faith calling on a higher power. Our songs are specifically Trinitarian and Christian Orthodox. We don’t just choose songs because everyone knows them from the radio, internet or because they have a good beat.

When you come, be prepared to sing about the historical, literal, God-Man, Jesus Christ Who made the world; was given by the Father to bear the wrath of our sin; and literally rose from the dead and is sure to come again. Be prepared to be confronted, through song, with your need for salvation because of your guilt from sin. Be prepared as well to be encouraged by the great salvation we have in Christ.

Who can participate in worship you might ask? Those who play instruments, sing, and some who help with technology behind the scenes. Our goal is to get the church at large, including you as a visitor, to participate fully. We have professionals, students, and just regular folks leading worship together every week. Our music is arranged and planned in advance from the first note to last note, but we also strive to be flexible and conversational together. We exalt, celebrate, cry, despair, thank, and reflect together.

Most of our instrumentalists have individual appropriate parts with notes to read, not just chord charts. Chord charts and lead sheets are available to all of our worship music for musicians who read those only. At our 10:45 service, we have strings, woodwinds, a rhythm section and brass. At our 8:30 service, we usually sing the same songs the same way, but with fewer people leading.

We sing songs that are hundreds of years old and songs that came out last week. We do not sing songs just because they are popular or in our hymnal, but we don’t sound like a church from 100 years ago either. Even if you haven’t been in church for a while, we’re sure you’ll recognize at least one song each service. We sing familiar songs of the faith and songs from church friendly sources such as Sovereign Grace Music, the Getty’s, CityAlight, and more.

[How does this approach to worshiping in song connect with your spirit?](#)

Believer's Baptism

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John

in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

(Mark 1:9-11)

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells the apostles to "go [into all the world] and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit." Shortly after that, the Apostle Peter instructs new followers of Christ to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). Since then, and following Jesus' example, churches like the first one in Jerusalem have been baptizing converts to Christ by immersing them in water. Berean follows the pattern set forth by the Lord Himself when He entered the Jordan River, and He insisted that John the Baptist baptize Him.

From Matthew 3:16 we read, "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water." It is from this particular description, "He went up from the water," and our understanding that the Greek word baptizō (βαπτίζω) transliterated "baptize" means to immerse or submerge, that we, the church of Jesus, insist that the candidate for baptism be dipped or immersed in water. Sprinkling or pouring water does not follow Jesus' example. Candidates for baptism enter into the water and then are fully submerged, replicating the resurrection of Christ when they come up out of the water. This mode of baptism best pictures what the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 6:4 where he writes, "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." Baptism by immersion is the only method of baptism that pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, Berean affirms that only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for their salvation should be baptized. We get this from Christ who told us to make disciples and baptize them. The pronoun "them" in Matthew 28:19 refers to disciples. Disciples are men and women who have trusted in Jesus for their salvation and are committed to following Jesus as their Lord. These are the ones the church is to baptize as a public profession of faith in the Christ. By obeying Jesus' command of baptism, believers are sharing a visible picture of the surrender that is within them. This is a powerful testimony to those people in their lives. At Berean, candidates for baptism must complete a separate booklet on baptism and then be interviewed by one of the pastors or elders. Anyone baptized as an infant should be baptized again to follow the pattern of the NT. The same would be true of those baptized before God saved them. In Acts 10:48, Peter "commanded [a group of new converts] to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." This is why baptism is often referred to as a disciple's first step of obedience. Believer's baptism is a requirement for church membership at Berean. It is also one of the two ordinances that we celebrate, the other being the Lord's Supper.

Have you followed the Lord Jesus in believer's baptism?

Lord's Supper

At Berean, we normally celebrate the Lord's Supper 5-6 times per year. Some of those are times during the morning services and some during the evening services. We believe the Lord's Supper is an ordinance established by the Head of the Church—Jesus Christ. All pastors, elders, teachers, deacons, ministry leaders and church members are fully expected to participate in the Lord's Supper unless they are providentially hindered.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is an active, outward remembrance of Jesus' death; it should be observed periodically until He comes again and should always be preceded by self-examination (Mat 26:17-30; 1Co 11:23-28).

We believe the Bible teaches that believers are spiritually strengthened in at least four ways by their active participation in the Lord's Supper. They—by faith—gain strength in:

1. Their knowledge of the remarkable love Jesus demonstrated toward them through His death.
2. The realization that their sins have been pardoned by the grace of God.
3. The awareness that they are part of a large spiritual family—the body of Christ.
4. Anticipation of the return of their Lord Jesus and the reality of everlasting life with God.

A correct understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper and an appropriate response in faith are both necessary for the believer to be strengthened. We believe the act of observing the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Gospel; therefore, we make no effort to hide the time of the Lord's Supper from the general public; nor do we dismiss those who are not members of our church.

Our communion table is both open and closed. It is open to born-again Christians, who have been baptized by immersion after salvation and are members in good standing of BBC or another Bible-believing, Christ-exalting, NT church (or are seeking God's will concerning church membership). It is closed to adults and children who have not repented and placed their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior; have yet to obey the Lord in believer's baptism and/or are living in blatant disobedience to the commandments of our Lord, being unworthy to partake (1Co 11:27).

BBC uses grape juice with no alcohol content as a symbolic representation of our Savior's blood and small square pieces of unleavened bread as a symbolic representation of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. A combination of the pastor(s) and/or elder(s) will administer the Lord's Supper, and the deacons will assist in serving the congregation. While we hold in great reverence the symbolic wonder of the Lord's Supper, we adamantly reject any doctrine of transubstantiation (the doctrine that the elements change into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ). We do not believe that the Lord's Supper provides justifying grace. We affirm with great conviction that repentance of sins and faith in the work that Christ did on the cross are the gifts of God by which He saves us.

Is there anything keeping you from participating in the next Lord's Supper?

Global Partnerships

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.” (Mat 28:18-20)

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And

how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how

are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful

are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:14-15)

Berean Baptist Church takes these commands from Jesus very seriously. We endeavor to support and encourage men and women who have felt the call to go and make disciples as their full-time work. We believe it must first start with our own body of believers here in Fayetteville and surrounding communities. Beyond our own neighborhoods, we support a variety of ministries and missionaries.

Locally we support both community urban ministries such as Operation Inasmuch, and benevolence opportunities among our own church family.

We also support The Anchorage, a youth and adult camping facility at Lake Waccamaw.

On the larger national scene, we support Appalachian Bible College of Mount Hope, WV, a fundamental bible college. We support a young couple, who received their schooling at Berean and are now serving as missionaries as part of a church plant at Kings Hill Church, in Boston, MA. We sent another couple to lead in planting a church in Hannibal, MO. Additionally, we support National Center for Life and Liberty, a legal team that defends Christian ministries in the US who are facing religious freedom issues.

Outside of the USA we support missionaries in Bolivia, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Malta, Mexico, and Spain. The goal of these missionary endeavors is to establish and strengthen local NT churches and leaders who will reproduce other like-minded believers and churches.

The specifics of these various partnerships may be explored in greater detail from the “Outreach” tab on our Berean Baptist Church web site:

www.bbcfnc.org

What do you think about joining the Berean family as we support our missionary partners?

Giving Through the Church for the Advancement of God's Kingdom.

What about giving? It's never a popular topic but it is critical to the local church and the advancement of His Kingdom.

The OT has a plethora of examples of tithes and offerings throughout its pages. One of the earliest is Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:20. In the days after the Exodus, God commanded the Israelites to tithe, or give 10%, of their yield to the priests for the function and service of the Tabernacle in Leviticus 27:30, and the priests were to likewise tithe to the Lord in Numbers 18:26. This command was reiterated in Deuteronomy 14:22-29, with the occupations of Canaan. Additionally, Solomon admonishes his reader to, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce" (Pro 3:9). Israel's failure to properly give to Yahweh that which rightfully belonged to Him is what led to their rebuke in Malachi 3:6-12. These passages permit us to draw the conclusion that the whole of the OT is concerned with offerings to the Lord since it is found in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Transitioning to the NT, the word "tithe" is only used twice in condemnation of the Pharisees, but the concept of giving is still very much prevalent. In Luke 6:38, Christ exhorts His followers to give and it will be given to them, a concept reminiscent of Proverbs 3:9. Later in Acts 4:34-37, the early church demonstrated giving to care for the needs of the people in the church. Additionally, Paul's instruction to the church could summarize all that has been stated thus far, "God loves a cheerful giver." (2Co 9:7) This comes right in the middle of Paul's talking about the principle of sowing and reaping that was also mentioned by Solomon and Christ. It has been aptly said that one cannot out-give God.

What are we to do with giving today, since we are not in the OT or the NT? Many believers still strive to practice giving a tithe, or 10%, of their gross income to the Lord, some are striving to someday achieve the ability to give 10%, and some give more than 10%. The Christian does not have a mandate upon themselves to tithe, but to give. Even as people strive to give regularly, not everyone may be able to tithe, especially during seasons of extreme financial stress. This is demonstrated by the widow in Mark 12:42-44. However, what is demonstrated in the NT is that individuals gave willingly, sacrificially, lovingly, and worshipfully to the God who redeemed them. (If you would like to research more passages about giving, check out Gal 6:6-10, Eph 4:28, 1Ti 5:17-18, and 1Jo 3:17.)

What will Berean do with the money that I give? As a congregationally-accountable church, we believe it is essential to be transparent with the membership about how we use the money that has been given. We take 10% of all that has been given to us and allocate it for mission partners and projects. This enables every giver to be able to participate in global missions. Additionally, we devote 1% of our general fund giving and place it into a benevolence account for widows, orphans, and adoptions. The church voted to place a cap on this account to \$35,000 and use any surplus toward debt retirement. Whenever the benevolence account drops below \$35,000, we resume placing 1% of the offerings into the account. The remaining 89% of offerings goes to the annual budget voted on by the membership each year.

Would you consider yourself one who gives willingly, sacrificially, lovingly, and worshipfully to God who redeemed us?

Getting Involved

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 were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

(1Co 12:12-14)

The “Body of Christ” is probably a familiar term, so much so that we often take it for granted or, at least, allow the concept to go unexamined. Paul’s language is intentional, inspired by the Spirit, to convey both the unity of purpose and distinct functions of each part of a living body.

Consider the difficulty people face when they have lost the use of a part of the body or have lost a body part entirely. They can and do find workarounds, they make do, they figure it out, and many remain effective contributors to family, society, and the church, but it’s not ideal. It’s not optimal.

Berean is a large church, and the thought may be that everything is already taken care of. One may think, “They don’t need me!”, but nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that virtually every ministry within the church, our Body, operates precariously short on people. Put another way, every domain of church life can use more energy, more talent, more willingness to get one’s hands dirty in the service of God’s people and, by extension, service to God.

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” (Romans 12:6). What are your gifts? How do you use them in the service to God? How do you glorify God with the gifts He has given you?

The first church, depicted in Acts, would have known automatically what we must discover more deliberately. Because of the era and the relative poverty of many believers in that body, they would have had a concept of community and interdependence that is largely foreign to 21st century Western culture. But within the Body of Christ, that concept of community and interdependence remains ideal because we are family.

Most of us do not rely on our fellow believers to provide for our material needs; sometimes we do, but that’s rarer now than it would have been. But we do often need someone to watch and care for our children while we are fed from God’s Word. Church facilities are high-use, and the maintenance staff undermanned. Can you help? We don’t plan to be sick or incapacitated, but it happens, and when it does, a brother or sister willing to visit and assist is a blessing indeed. No one plans to spend the last years of life in isolation and loneliness, but even within the Body, this is common; how can you make it better? How can you be involved within the body of believers here at Berean?

We are greatly loved by Jesus Christ (John 15:13), as we can see His sacrifice for us. As part of a local body of believers, we are called to sacrifice for each other, to serve one another. There are moments and opportunities all around us, where we can show our love for Him, His people, and those who do not know Him yet.

How will you sacrificially get involved within Berean, to love God and others?

Recovering Biblical Manhood

“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” (1Co 11:3)

In a day of unprecedented gender confusion, Berean remains committed to the reality that in the beginning, God created them male and female – both in God's image, but nevertheless different. God has ordained that males lead in both the church and home. This is not to disparage the role of women in either institution, but the Bible is clear. God created Adam first and then Eve to complete Adam. We take a complementarian perspective, that men and women have different roles and responsibilities. Males must assume the leadership calling and the role God has directed and then live up to their calling.

At the fall of man, a complete reversal of the roles God assigned took place. Adam followed the leadership of his wife, who followed the serpent instead of her Creator. Since the fall, men and women have struggled with leadership and authority in an ever-increasing conflict, but the Bible is clear: God created men to procreate, protect, provide and lead.

Gender segregated teaching events are incorporated into the church calendar to ensure we give special attention to helping males understand what God expects and how to get there. Boys are taught to grow up to be men who marry, procreate and lead families. Males dress differently, behave differently, and are different because God created them distinct from women. A godly man finds his security not in his masculinity, but in the knowledge that God made him, including his gender. While all this may seem sexist or culturally outdated, Berean is not concerned with how the church aligns with current cultural trends.

Biblical manhood embraces the role of protector and provider in society and the home. Again, this in no way minimizes the contribution a Proverbs 31 woman brings to the family. But, if a godly woman strives to live out her Titus 2 responsibilities, including submission to her husband, the husband must be the primary leader in the family. Men must possess a strong work ethic, which must be developed in the home. Finally, in the same way Christ gave His life for the church, men must be willing to give their lives to protect their wives and children.

At Berean, only males serve as pastors, elders, and deacons. This does not mean women cannot teach or serve, but we follow Paul's admonishment in 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” And this does not mean women do not have input in the decisions in the church or home. Husbands must live in submission to the Lordship of Christ and diligently work to be the servant-leaders that Christ modeled for all, but especially males.

Do you want to be a part of a church that still supports biblical gender roles and distinctions?

Titus 2 Women

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine...Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Tit 2:1-5)

The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, a pastor on the island of Crete, because instruction was needed for the church which was made up of new believers who resided in a culture of wild living and false doctrine. Paul gives instructions for the responsibility of the leadership of the church, and additionally, he explains the responsibility of believers one to another (Titus 2:1-15). Paul instructs believers to, first of all, be faithful to sound doctrine and to lead by example in such a way as to make visible the attractiveness of the Gospel, and to demonstrate its power to transform and change lives. Paul makes this real by instructing each member to take responsibility for not only “living” according to sound doctrine, but that each man and woman is to teach it to younger believers (Titus 2:1). What follows is not a list of rule-based teaching; rather Paul addresses the specifics of godly living, making it clear that our behavior flows from the Gospel. It is the Gospel and sound doctrine that gives godliness its form (Titus 2:2-10), and it is the grace of God that teaches us to reject ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12).

At Berean, we emphasize this Titus 2 charge for women. This calling to live out and teach sound doctrine along with godly living through mentorship is the foundation on which the Berean Ladies’ Ministry is established. There are several specific character traits of a “Titus 2” woman that we seek to reflect in our own “behavior” and in “teaching what is good” to others (Titus 2:3).

A Titus 2 Woman:

1. Loves her husband and children
2. Stays pure and self-controlled
3. Manages her home well
4. Practices kindness and hospitality
5. Is submissive to authority

At Berean, we strive to achieve this biblical mandate of living out and teaching sound doctrine through personal, intimate, relationship development with a goal of discipling as its mission, older coming alongside younger. We strive to model this in our own lives and personal relationships with each other, as well as in all of the ministries in which we serve. Some practical ways we live this out are through active fellowship that builds community. Throughout the year the women of Berean facilitate and engage in:

Bible Studies and Workshops • Sunday School Classes • Retreats • Conferences • Fellowship Activities • Meals • Wedding/Baby Showers • Community Outreach

At Berean we pray and strive for all of our ladies to have a heart to become godly Titus 2 women; Ladies who have a confident trust in God and an inner strength that comes from a deep knowledge of His Word and sovereign purpose, but, most of all, ladies who live as women who fear the Lord.

How are you living as a Titus 2 woman?

Nursery and Student Ministry

At Berean, we take seriously the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:5-7, that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and might and teach the commands of Scripture to our children. This is first and foremost the responsibility of the family, but as a church, we strive to partner with the parents in the discipleship and evangelism of our children.

To ensure the safety and security within our BBC Children's Ministry, BBC has partnered with KidCheck to bring you the best experience at check-in. Every child sixth grade and younger must be checked in by a parent or guardian. This program provides a coordinating sticker for the child and the parent to ensure safety.

All adult volunteers in nursery, children's ministry, and youth ministry are required to submit to a formal background check and are not permitted to serve until the report clearing them for service has been received.

In the nursery, each new volunteer trains with a supervisor and is teamed up with an experienced nursery worker. Volunteers are always in team of two or more individuals. Each room is equipped with age-appropriate toys, cribs, and rockers along with snacks chosen specifically for every age level. We keep the weekly bulletin up to date of all services with child care. Because we understand that some families prefer not to use childcare, we have a nursing mother's room and an indoor playground where the services are live streamed.

On Sunday mornings, at the 8:30 and 10:45 services, we host Powerhour (our children's church) for student's aged K5-4th grade. We rotate through three books of curriculum from Truth78 that teach Bible doctrine at a level children can comprehend. During the Sunday school hour, children of all ages work through Generations of Grace curriculum. In three years time, a student will have worked their way through the complete Bible narrative. Each grade level hears the same lesson at an age appropriate level to assist parents in continued discipleship in the home.

Wednesday evening is AWANA club night. AWANA is an acronym for Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed from 2 Timothy 2:15. AWANA blends Bible teaching, evangelism, Scripture memorization, and tons of fun. Our clubs meet on Wednesday nights during the traditional school year from 6:15-7:45pm. Check-in begins at 6 pm. The Cubbies are 4-5 year olds, Sparks are K5-2nd grade, and T&T (Truth & Training) are 3rd-6th graders. Each club rotates nightly through a game time, handbook time, and counsel time.

During the summer, we have Summer Sizzles for our children to participate in. Wednesday evenings are spent between age-appropriate Bible study and activities.

Older students in 7th-12th grades have a combined youth group that meets on Wednesdays from 6:30-7:45pm in the youth building. On Sunday mornings, the 7th-8th grade students split off from the 9th-12th students during the Sunday school hour for another time of discipleship.

Does this sound like the environment you would want your children to be part of?

Adult Sunday School

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, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

The Berean family takes seriously God's desire for believers to help equip each other for the work of the Lord. Being an active part of an adult Sunday School class is an excellent opportunity for this equipping. We have a number of adult Sunday School classes with different makeups to provide a context that everyone will be able to feel a part of. Each class focuses their equipping on God's Word, but with their own personality. We do this by having 3 primary goals that every class sets out to accomplish, but we also allow for each class' leadership to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Our 3 Primary Goals for Sunday School:

- 1) Teaching and facilitating discussion of God's Word, that equips everyone to become self-feeders of the Bible, which then leads to Christlike transformation.
 - ❖ Supporting Scripture – Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Timothy 2:1-2

- 2) Developing personal and relational interactions around God's Word inside and outside of Sunday morning, equipping them to multiply love relationships, resulting in a growing gospel community.
 - ❖ Supporting Scripture – Matthew 22:37-40 and Acts 2:41-47

- 3) Coaching and connecting with God's Story (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration) in a way that equips the saints for the work of the Lord as His neighborhood missionaries having gospel conversations, where we listen to the stories of others for opportunities to share God's story through our story.
 - ❖ Supporting Scripture – Romans 10:14-15 and Acts 1:8

How is connecting with a Sunday School class going?

Corporate Service Sabbaths

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:3)

And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28)

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mat 11:28-30)

God established the Sabbath in His resting after creation as He saw that it was good, but Jesus brings a whole new depth to the understanding of Sabbath in the NT. To a disciple of Jesus, Sabbath is more than one day a week. Sabbath rest is the surrendering of life to put God first, pausing from the regular life activities to intentionally rest in the worship of God. Below are some life examples of Sabbath rest, but Sabbath rest is not limited to this list:

- We experience weekly Sabbath as we worship with other believers each Sunday, if at all possible, as we follow the example of the early church (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- Having a daily quiet time is another aspect of Sabbath, where we take time to focus on God through His Word and prayer as Jesus did (Mark 1:35).
- Even sleep, is part of Sabbath. God allows us to gain the physical refreshment that our bodies need, but we are also resting our lives in God as we sleep peacefully (Psalm 127:1-2).

At BBC, we try to equip each member to live a life with Sabbath balance. In creating this Sabbath environment corporately, we have and will always provide opportunities of corporate worship. In a typical year, we have over 200 opportunities for our church to assemble for worship, preaching, and/or Bible study on Sundays and Wednesdays. On a typical Sunday, a Berean can participate in a morning worship service and a small group Bible study (Sunday school) and then come back that night for another worship service and time of teaching from God’s Word. Then on Wednesdays, they will be given a chance to serve or participate in a Bible study or corporate worship/preaching depending upon the time of year.

For the servants of God, who serve in various ways, including nursery, preaching, teaching, leading music, AWANA, Power hour, media/sound, etc., all this can become exhausting. Therefore, to help all members with Sabbath, we have designated strategic times throughout the year where we will take a Sabbath from corporate gathering. We refer to these breaks from our normal schedule as “Corporate Service Sabbaths.”

A Corporate Service Sabbath is when the church would generally be open for worship and Bible study, but a deliberate decision has been made to close the doors and turn the lights off, so the servants of God can rest. God ordained the work/rest routine, and we believe this is pleasing to Him. The goal is to create greater participation when the doors are open with the knowledge that rest periods are coming. For example, three Wednesday nights are set aside for Sabbath services during summer. This allows the church to plan Wednesdays where they participate and serve with the knowledge that a summer break is part of the plan. But the church is not closing entirely and eliminating the mid-week worship/Bible study opportunity. Sabbath services also occur during the holidays. For example, during the Christmas holiday, Berean will go from hosting 5 services per week to one. Again, this is a deliberate decision to still assemble to worship but also to rest.

Hare you living a Christlike life with a Sabbath balance?

Our Citizenship, Heavenly and Earthly

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Phi 3:20)

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jer 29:7)

As believers, our identity is firmly grounded as citizens of Heaven. Heaven will be our eternal home. But as we are still living out the mission of God here on earth, we will also be citizens of a country. So, our heavenly citizenship defines us, but as we are called to be good stewards, we need to be good stewards of the nation in which we reside. A citizen is someone who officially belongs to a nation, follows the rule of that land, and has their rights and protection.

As a citizen of heaven, we officially belong in God's Kingdom, will follow the rules of the Bible, and are afforded the rights and protection found in our personal relationship with God. People should know that our eternal residence resides with God as we are salt and light in this dark world. When others think about us, their first thought has to be that we believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. They should see that we identify first and foremost as God's.

But as the old saying goes, we do not want to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. If we are still walking the earth, it is because God wants us here to live out His mission. As we live on mission, part of loving God and others is taking responsibility as an earthly citizen.

As a citizen of earth, we officially belong to a country, will follow their rules and are afforded the rights and protection of that government. Part of being an earthly citizen means loving and caring for our neighbors, being part of our communities, and being informed and educated about our country's political leaders and policies. Christians should demonstrate their citizenship of God's heavenly kingdom by being the best earthly citizens they can be.

As earthly citizens, we understand that our hope does not reside in the government, but the government can bring order and direction. As a citizen of the United States we are afforded the ability to be part of the democratic process of this republic. Our vote counts, "win or lose." Since no earthly politician or government employee is perfect, we will never agree with them on every issue. Having said that, we need to vote for people and policies that most closely align with the Word of God. God has given us a great earthly opportunity as citizens of the US. We should not stick our head in the sand and avoid participating and contributing. One more thing to consider is that there is not one political party that is godlier than the other. So, as an earthly citizen, pray, be informed, be educated, promote, serve, and vote, as a morally engaged heavenly citizen.

So, in a sense, we have a heavenly and earthy dual citizenship. But clearly, our big "C" Citizenship is in heaven with our little "c" citizenship here on earth. As a disciple of Jesus, our earthly citizenship does not affect our heavenly citizenship, but as a citizen of heaven, everything is affected, here and now, as well as for all of eternity.

How are you striving to be an engaged citizen of Heaven? How are you striving to be an engaged earthly citizen?

B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S

Being Baptist is part of who we are at Berean. You have already read many of the characteristics of being Baptist through this booklet. To help make some of those key characteristics of who we are easier to remember, we have created an acronym out of the word Baptist. Each letter, B-A-P-T-I-S-T-S, connects to an important belief.

B – Bible: Baptists believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is also the supreme and sole basis for faith and practice in the Christian life and church. Confessions, church councils, creeds, and traditions may be used to articulate distinctives, but are never presented equal to the Bible. Berean does not subscribe to a particular confession of faith. Berean has its own covenant and articles of faith.

A – Autonomy: Baptists believe in the autonomy of the local church. Churches may partner or be members of para-church organizations or assisting associations, but these do not rule over the local church. Churches are to govern themselves from within the church. We reject the idea that a higher entity with authority, like a presbytery, is Biblical. Berean owns its own property and governs itself

P – Priesthood: Baptists believe in the individual priesthood of each believer in Jesus Christ. We confess sin before our Savior and one to another – not before a priest. We insist that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Because of this, Baptists insist upon true congregational government under the leadership of pastors/elders.

T – Two Offices: Baptists believe there are two offices in the local church: pastor/elder and deacon. We do not see a distinction in the office of elder, pastor, or bishop (overseer). We do not believe that the office of apostle, pope, cardinal, etc. exists for the post-apostolic church age. Berean insists that those in the office of pastor/elder and deacon be males.

I – Individual Soul Liberty: Baptists respect the differences individuals may have on issues, preferences, standards, and convictions. We extend liberty to each other to disagree on political, minor theological, and other non-essential matters. We believe that there is no higher law than a God-given conscience.

S – Saved Church Membership: Baptists insist upon regenerate (converted or born again) church membership. Members must publicly profess faith in Christ and be baptized by immersion after salvation before they will be admitted into membership. Those who were baptized as infants must be baptized again.

T – Two Ordinances: Baptists believe that the church should have only two ordinances, Believers Baptism and the Lord's Supper (see separate articles).

S – Separation: Baptists insist upon the separation of the church and state. We believe the authority of the state should never be used to force conversion, baptism, attendance, or compliance with church ordinances. We believe that Christ is the Lord of the church and reject any suggestion that an earthly king has authority in the church. We do not believe this separation prevents church members from involving themselves in the affairs of the state or serving in the defense of their nation.

Church Discipline

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all,

so that the rest may stand in fear. (1Ti 5:20)

Most people have negative thoughts when they hear the word discipline; however, the writer of Hebrews tells us, "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." (Heb 12:5-6). Discipline gives us assurance that we are part of God's family. So as God's family here at Berean, we believe in church discipline.

Church discipline was started in the early church. Paul writes to the church at Corinth and addresses a member who was living in sin with his step-mother and refused to repent. Paul told the church leaders in 1 Corinthians 5:2-5, "...Let him who has done this be removed from among you...You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." The goal of church discipline is either restoration for the one who is saved or to show the individual that they are not saved and to bring them to Christ. This makes church discipline an act of love not hate.

Berean utilizes two methods for church discipline. The first is preventative and includes the teaching and preaching of God's Word as well as counseling and encouragement to become a fully devoted follower of Christ.

For those who fail to respond to the informal, formative discipline and refuse to repent of a sin, the second form of discipline that is used is corrective. This looks like what Jesus describes in Matthew 18:15-17, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If He listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." One Christian (church member, deacon, elder, Sunday school teacher or pastor) will confront the one in sin and seek restoration. If this is shunned or ignored, then two or three Christians will strive to confront the one in sin to seek restoration. Often this process takes weeks or even months where the individual is being met with and counseled regarding their sin and their struggle to repent. When it becomes clear that the individual is not wanting to repent or does not want to be restored, then, as a last resort, the matter is brought to the church membership and the individual's membership is revoked until such time as they repent and seek to be restored.

Will you live your life above reproach and strive to honor God in all aspects of your life?

What Constitutes a Church?

I ask this question because it is becoming increasingly popular to abandon the church for a relationship with Christ and other believers. Organized religion is “out” but being spiritual is “in” and so it goes. Church membership all over the US is at an all-time low. Young people are graduating out of church and most are not returning. Should this be a concern? Certainly Covid-19 has done nothing to help deter this trend. So, what constitutes a church?

We know it is not the buildings, the grounds, the property, or brick and mortar, but does this mean that three people who meet for a Bible study are a church? Jesus, Himself, gave us our first two NT references to ‘church.’ In the Greek, the word is *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which is a derivative of “out” and “called.” Thus, the word connotes a group of people who have been called out to assemble. Inasmuch as we are talking about church within the context of Christianity, we can superimpose the idea that these people who assemble must be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one and only Son of God, who died, was buried, rose again, and is coming again with life everlasting for all who believe. Thus, a group of skydivers who routinely leave their homes and assemble publicly to celebrate skydiving would not be a church. But what about a home Bible study? Is that a church? Certainly, it could be! Have these believers banded together with the express purpose of forming a church? Do they see themselves as a church? We know that NT churches met in homes, at least initially.

At this point it seems reasonable to look at the characteristics of a NT church and then ask a series of unanswered questions to start the conversation. Is this a church plant? Is the objective to be a church? Does the group assemble on the day Christ rose from the dead? The early church consistently met on the Lord’s Day—the day after the Sabbath. Are the ordinances of the church practiced? Christ gave us two. Is there a membership? That is to say a recognition of who is in the fellowship of believers and who isn’t? If I show up, am I now part of the assembly? Or is there a requirement to confess that Jesus is Lord? Must I be baptized? If there isn’t a membership, how can the steps of Matthew 18 be followed?

Is there an elder (or elders)? Who holds the office of overseer? Has the leader of the Bible study been examined to meet the Bible qualifications of an overseer? Is he a novice? Is the goal to create multigenerational relationships so that the disciple-making described in Titus 2 can happen?

I take Berean Baptist Church being a NT church very seriously. There are particular characteristics of being a church, and I know as the lead under-shepherd, I will be judged for how well we do this.

Will you join me in this journey?

Pastor Sean