

## Life Bridge Christian Church

### Perspective on the Doctrine of Salvation

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, there has been very little disagreement that the salvation of man is only available by God's grace, through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). The controversy has never been in regard to what saves us, rather, the division is in regard to how that takes place and whether or not man has a role in his salvation. These doctrines have split the church into two primary camps which disagree in the doctrines of God's sovereignty, man's free will, election, predestination, and perseverance of the saints. Why we feel it is important to clearly state what we believe as an eldership on these topics is because we believe that whatever position one holds in these areas, determines how they perceive the character of God and the personhood of men.

It is not our purpose to label ourselves as followers of any man when considering these doctrines. We prefer to just be known as Christians who look at the Bible in its entirety and adopt a doctrine that we believe depicts the character of God as He has revealed Himself throughout Scripture. The Bible clearly states that God's very nature is love, and we feel that we must view the rest of scripture through that understanding of His character. We understand that there are Christian brothers and sisters who disagree with our understanding of these doctrines, but we still consider them our brothers and sisters in Christ. But, because there are two very distinct views on this topic, as well as many interpretations that contain parts of both, we must declare what we will teach at Life Bridge to be unified as a congregation.

We do not claim that somehow we have all the answers regarding this doctrine, we simply desire to state how we at Life Bridge Christian Church understand the Bible's teaching regarding these matters. After all, as Paul writes to the church in Corinth *"But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes."* We do not believe that your position on this doctrine is what saves you, only faith in Jesus Christ can do that, rather this doctrine is about our need for salvation and how we interpret what the Bible says regarding how that is accomplished.

Someone who is a member of Life Bridge may hold a different view in one or more of the following areas; however, the following is what will be taught as the position of Life Bridge Christian Church.

#### 1. DEPRAVITY OF MAN

We believe that since the fall, all human beings have a nature that is bent toward evil (Genesis 8:21), and all will sin and have sinned (Romans 3:23), and are thus spiritually dead in their sin and unable by human performance to earn, deserve, or merit salvation (Titus 3:5). We believe that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and that apart from

God's grace, no one can be saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). We believe that none are righteous, or capable of doing anything to be restored to a relationship with God (Romans 3:10-12), and that apart from God's grace through the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, none can be saved (John 1:12-13; 16:8-11; I Peter 1:23-25). Mankind is clearly fallen and dead in sin and can only be restored by God's grace through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## **2. ELECTION**

Because election is a doctrine that is discussed in the Bible, all Christians believe it to be part of God's plan, the difference is an understanding of what the Bible means by election. The two prevalent doctrines regarding election we believe can be simply stated as follows; "anyone who was chosen as elect will be saved", verses "anyone who chooses salvation becomes part of the elect". Our understanding on this issue would be the latter. We believe that all who believe and are in Christ are elect onto salvation. God determined this before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-6), and based on His foreknowledge, God predestined anyone who He knew would believe in the provision of Christ's atonement to be part of the elect. These believers are also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29-30).

We believe that God offers salvation to all who will call on His name. Romans 10:13 says, For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The Bible also teaches that an invitation (or call) is given to all, but that only a few will accept it. We see this balance throughout scripture. Revelation 22:17 states, *"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."*

Matthew 22:14 says, *"For many are called, but few are chosen (elected)."* Clearly, not everyone who is called by God accepts His call to become one of the elect. Because of that, we believe that it is up to each individual, once enlightened by God's grace, to decide or reject the offer of salvation. It is only through an act of Divine revelation from the Holy Spirit (prevenient grace), and through the hearing of the Gospel that one is able to understand their condition before God and use their now "freed" will to either accept or reject God's invitation of salvation.

We want to always portray God's character in a way that is consistent with the entirety of Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter says the desire of God is that all men would come to repentance.

In this area of election, we feel that the sovereignty of God is best demonstrated in His sovereign decision to allow man a choice in loving Him. We believe that God's sovereignty and man's free will can and do coexist and that we don't have to choose one or the other.

## **3. ATONEMENT**

We believe that Jesus Christ died as a propitiation (a satisfaction of the righteous wrath of God against sin) "for the whole world" (I John 2:2; 4:9-10), and that He redeems and

forgives anyone who will believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as their only hope of salvation from sin, death, and hell (Ephesians 1:7; I Peter 1:18-19). We believe that eternal life is a gift of God (Romans 6:23), and that "whosoever believes" in Jesus Christ will not perish, but will have eternal life (John 3:16-18). I Timothy 4:10 says *"we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe."* Hebrews 2:9 states that Jesus, *"was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man."* It is clear to us that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ was clearly sufficient to save the entire human race, but, not all of the human race is willing to repent and receive it. For those reasons, our view would be consistent with what is known as an unlimited view of atonement. We do not believe in Universalism (all men will be saved); but that all men have an opportunity to be saved.

#### **4. GRACE**

We believe that God's grace is not the result of human effort or worthiness (Romans 3:24-28; 11:6), but is the demonstration of God's mercy and love to those who will believe in His Son (Ephesians 2:4-10). Grace gives to us what we do not deserve nor can earn by our performance or obedience (Romans 11:6). We do believe that God's grace and mercy can be resisted by us. Jesus said in Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let Me".*

We are not condemned because we have no opportunity to be saved, but a person is condemned because he makes a choice not to repent and accept God's gracious gift (John 3:18). In John 5:39-40 we read, *"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me! Yet you refuse to come to Me to receive this life.*

John 6:40 states, *"For it is my Father's will that all who see His Son and believe in Him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."*

In John 7:37-38 Jesus said, *"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in Me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'"*

Jesus Himself acknowledges the fact of human resistance and rejection. In John 12:46-48 He said, *"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in Me will no longer remain in the dark. I will not judge those who hear Me but don't obey Me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject Me and My message will be judged on the Day of Judgment by the truth I have spoken".*

In Stephen's message in Acts 7:51, he concluded by saying, *"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!"*

In Romans 10:21, the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2 when he speaks of God's words to Israel, *"But regarding Israel, God said, "All day long I opened my arms to them, but they were disobedient and rebellious."*

Clearly, God's grace can either be resisted or received by the exercise of a human's choice once they have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

## **5. PERSEVERANCE**

All Christians believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 8:38-39), and that there is no condemnation to those who are "in Jesus Christ" (Romans 8:1).

We believe that the promise of Jesus in John 10:27-29 is clear: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from Me, for My Father has given them to Me, and He is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand."*

The conflict seems to come in Scriptures such as II Timothy 2:12, which says *"if we deny Him, He also will deny us"*; or Hebrews 3:12-19 which says, *"Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says: "Today when you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled." And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard His voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when He took an oath that they would never enter His rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed Him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter His rest";* or I Timothy 4:1 that states, *"Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.";* or II Thessalonians 2:3 which speaks of "a falling away" or an apostasy.

II Peter 2:20-22 makes these remarkable statements: *"And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit." And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud."*

So can true believers ("brethren") depart from the living God? We believe that although the Bible is clear in many places that someone can have assurance of their salvation, it is also clear that there are many warnings to believers that if not careful, you can fall

away. We believe that because we are saved by faith, it is only when we remain in faith that we can be assured that we are saved. It is not specific sins that would cause someone to fall away, but rather a conscious rejection of Christ. Some would say that they were never saved in the first place, but we think Scripture is clear that these warnings are given to those who are true believers. Our goal is to constantly be challenging one another to be walking with Christ daily, as it is only then that they we can walk in assurance. We do not believe that this falling away is a common occurrence, but we also don't want anyone to assume they are right with God when they are not.

## CONCLUSION

As we have said, we don't claim to have all the answers to these matters, but we desire to be faithful to the Lord and His Word. When we keep our eyes on the Lord, and trust in Him alone and in His power, we say with Peter in 1 Peter 1:3-9, *"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by His great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by His power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love Him even though you have never seen Him. Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls."*

We realize that it is not always easy to maintain the unity of the Spirit among us on these matters. It seems that the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are like two parallel lines that do not seem to intersect within our finite minds. God's ways are "past finding out" (Romans 11:33), and the Bible warns us to "lean not on our own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). To say what God says in the Bible - no more and no less - is not always easy, comfortable, or completely understandable. But Scripture tells us that the wisdom from above will be loving and kind toward all, seeking the unity of the believers, not trying to find ways to divide and separate from one another.

May God help us all to love each other, to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Jesus Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32)! In difficult doctrinal matters, may we have gracious attitudes and humble hearts, desiring most of all to please Him who has called us to serve Him in the Body of Christ.

Our prayer is that all Christians exercise in their theology what was stated by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius; "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, and in all things Love!"