



# MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

Strong Tower Bible Church  
5253 Granny White Pike, Nashville, TN 37220  
Dr. Chris Williamson, Senior Pastor

## A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR CHRIS AND DORENA

Greetings Brothers and Sisters!

Welcome to Strong Tower Bible Church! God is up to so many good things in our church and you are now one of those “good things!” We give God the glory that you responded to His call to inquire about becoming an official member of Strong Tower Bible Church!

In this document, you will be able to learn more about who we are as a church and discover the assignment God has given us. Since STBC is a non-denominational and beautifully diverse body, we enjoy taking time to share about our ministry, doctrine, and other pertinent matters of church life. Joining a church is a serious decision and we applaud you as you pray about making STBC your church home for such a time as this.

God wants to pour His Spirit into new wineskins that are flexible, stretchable, and adaptable (Mark 2:22). We encourage you to come to STBC with these qualities, otherwise you may “crack” under the pressure. As God pours into us and we pour into one another, we want to then pour into a world that needs the life, love, and hope of Jesus Christ. Strong Tower will be unlike any other church you’ve attended, so please be open to the new things God will do in you, through you, and around you.

Our mission is to make disciples who make a difference, and our vision is to experience, explain, and expand God’s Diverse Kingdom in the city and throughout the world. We pray that in the course of time you will be able to see the vision, add to the vision, and run with the vision!

Welcome home and welcome to the Tower!

Love,

Pastors Chris and Dorena Williamson



# OUR HISTORY

## PERSONAL HISTORY OF OUR SENIOR PASTOR

Chris Williamson was born July 17, 1968, in Baltimore, Maryland as the youngest of five children to Harold and Betty Williamson. He was born-again through Jesus Christ on June 29, 1984, at a Christian camp in the hills of Maryland.

After graduating from high school in 1986, he went on to attend the Christian, liberal arts institution Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Chris was called to preach on July 4, 1987, in New York City while ministering with Manhattan Bible Church.

Chris began dating Dorena McFarland on Valentine's Day of 1988 and the two were later married on December 28, 1991. While at Liberty University, Chris participated in an evangelistic music ministry called Transformation Crusade.

Upon completion of his undergraduate degree in Biblical Studies in 1990, a Master of Religious Education at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in 1992, and ordination into the gospel ministry under Dr. Allen McFarland of Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Portsmouth, VA, the Williamsons moved to Nashville, TN to further explore their musical options in gospel rap. It became quickly apparent, however, that God did not bring them to Nashville for music.

## HISTORY OF STRONG TOWER BIBLE CHURCH

When Transformation Crusade decided that God had brought an end to their musical ministry Chris began working with Christ Community Church (PCA) in Franklin, TN. He came on staff with them in January 1993 as an intern with Franklin Community Ministries. While working in the lower income communities of Franklin, God began to move upon Chris' heart to plant a church. Planting a church, by the way, was something Chris said that he would never do.

Nevertheless, God had burdened Chris' heart for black men and the need to teach them the realness and relevancy of God. He believed this knowledge of Christ would transform them personally, their homes, and subsequently their communities. He began a Bible study in his apartment complex to minister to the parents of the young people he worked with. In the meantime, Chris preached on several occasions at Christ Community Church which gave some of the white believers on hand a glimpse into his heart and burden for ministry. It appeared that God was at work in the "deep South" putting together an interracial fellowship of believers.

In the summer months of 1995, Chris and Dorena held a series of prayer and informational meetings for anyone who may have been interested in forming a non-denominational, Bible-based fellowship. Because of the outpouring of God's favor, Strong Tower Bible Church held its first service on September 3, 1995, at the Franklin YMCA in the aerobics' room. There were 68 friends, relatives, and well-wishers at that first service. The core membership of the church was about 30 people. From day one, Strong Tower Bible Church was a multiracial, multi-economic, and multicultural church.

## OUR MISSION

Strong Tower Bible Church exists to **make disciples** of Jesus Christ by being a Bible-based multidimensional fellowship of believers.

We **MAKE DISCIPLES** through R.O.A.M.:

**REVELATION:** This is Biblical

**OBSERVATION:** This is Relational

**APPLICATION:** This is Personal

**MULTIPLICATION:** This is Intentional

By **BIBLE-BASED** we affirm that the Holy Scriptures are our sole authority and source for preaching, teaching, living, worship, and governing (II Timothy 3:16 – 17, II Peter 1:19 – 21).

By **MULTIDIMENSIONAL** we celebrate the fact that we are:

Multi-Racial

Multi-Gifted

Multi-Ethnic

Multi-Political

Multi-Cultural

Multi-Generational

Multi-Economic

Multi-Denominational

**At STBC, we make disciples who make a difference!**

# OUR VISION

To experience, explain, and expand **God's Diverse Kingdom**  
in the city and throughout the world

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE VISION

### Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- **Race:** Jew nor Gentile
- **Class:** Slave nor Free
- **Gender:** Male nor Female
- **One:** Our oneness in Christ supersedes but does not deny our respective race, class, and gender differences. Our oneness in Christ gives us the proper lenses by which to view and celebrate our God-given differences. We are one, but not the same.

### We **EXPERIENCE** God's Diverse Kingdom by:

- **Worshipping** together and **Praying** together
- **Learning** together and **Ministering** together
- **Living** together and **Eating** together
- **Serving** together and **Fighting** together
- **Suffering** together and **Standing** together

### We **EXPLAIN** God's Diverse Kingdom by:

- Presenting **Biblical teaching** that unpacks ethnic and social diversity in the Scriptures
- Encouraging **interpersonal relationships** where there is freedom to ask questions and to have them answered

- Utilizing **media, current events and entertainment** as a backdrop for discussion, fact retrieval and awareness
- Hosting and participating in **conferences and seminars** that promote the principles of God's Diverse Kingdom

### We **EXPAND** God's Diverse Kingdom by:

- Standing up, showing up, and speaking up for matters of **biblical justice** as issues arise in the broader community that require the involvement of the local church
- **Advocating** for the poor, the marginalized, the victimized, the widow, and the orphan inside and outside of the church
- Building a highly competent racially **diverse staff**
- Being intentional to reflect authentic, **ongoing** ethnic, gender, economic, and cultural diversity
- Raising up, sending out, going to and supporting **missionaries** in diverse fields
- Hosting **conferences** and events that promote and educate about GDK
- Supporting para-church ministries, pastors, churches, and church plants that intentionally build God's Diverse Kingdom through the Strong Tower Association of Churches (STAC)
- Leading the charge for biblical diversity in the **local community** among churches and civic organizations
- **Writing and publishing** materials on God's Diverse Kingdom that promote reconciliation, justice, and empowerment
- Ministering locally and abroad with **teams and activities** that model and promote God's Diverse Kingdom
- Encouraging and supporting cross-ethnic adoptions and bi-racial marriages
- Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, empowering the poor, supporting the immigrant, remembering the incarcerated, and preaching the Gospel to the lost

## **OUR MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY**

Strong Tower Bible Church strives to be balanced by serving in the following areas:



## **OUR MEMBERSHIP PHILOSOPHY**

We expect every member of STBC to:

**GROW SPIRITUALLY**

**SERVE ACTIVELY**

**GIVE OBEDIENTLY**

## OUR CORE VALUES

**CHARITY**

**I Corinthians 13:13**

**INTEGRITY**

**Matthew 5:37**

**AUTHENTICITY**

**I Thessalonians 1:5**

**DIVERSE-UNITY**

**Galatians 3:28**

**COMMUNITY**

**Acts 2:44**

**FLEXIBILITY**

**Matthew 9:17**

**GENEROSITY**

**II Corinthians 9:6**

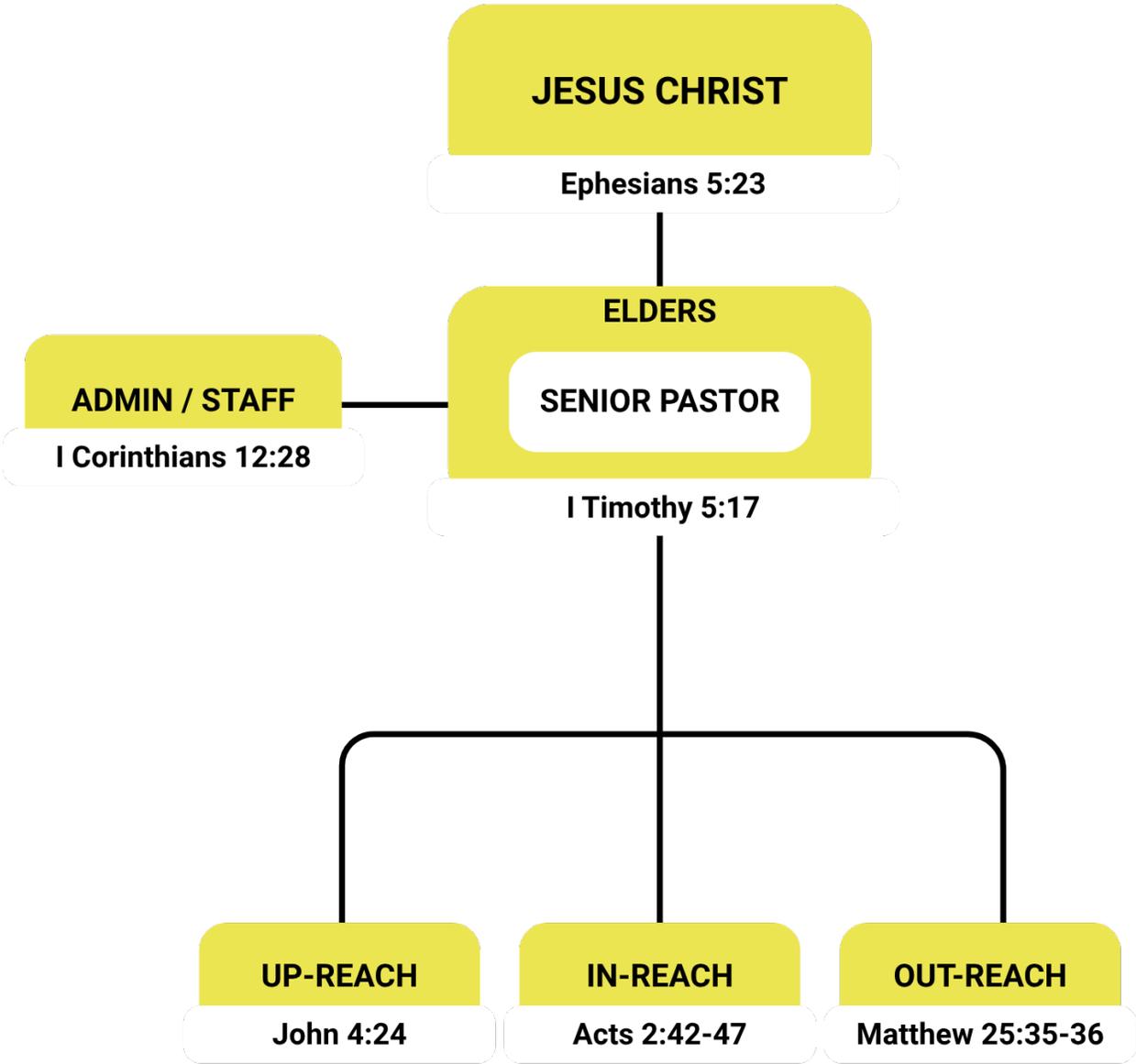
**LIBERTY**

**II Corinthians 3:17**

**QUALITY**

**Mark 7:37**

# OUR CHURCH GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



## WHAT WE TEACH

Strong Tower Bible Church is based, sustained, and directed by the Word of God and not upon man's opinion or tradition. STBC holds the Bible as our primary authority and final source of teaching, preaching, and church government.

### THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach the Holy Scriptures to be the inspired, infallible, authoritative, inerrant Word of God (in the original autographs). We also teach that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are designed for our practical instruction in faith and conduct (II Timothy 3:16 – 17; II Peter 1:20 – 21; Psalms 19:7; Matthew 5:18).

### THE GODHEAD

We teach that the one true and living God eternally exists in three co-equal Persons, those being the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and these three are one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Genesis 1:26; Isaiah 6:8; Ephesians 4:4 – 6; Matthew 28:19). The God we serve is one in essence, yet plural and distinct in Person. This is known as the “tri-united” or the “trinity.”

### GOD THE FATHER

We teach that God the Father loved the world, sent His Son to the world, punished His Son for our sins, raised Christ from the dead, elects and chooses individuals, draws people to Jesus, adopts believers in Christ as His very own children, therefore becoming their heavenly Father (Ephesians 1:3, 3:14-15; James 1:17; John 3:16, 6:44; Isaiah 53:4 – 5; Romans 8:29, 9:11; Galatians 4:5 – 6).

### GOD THE SON

We teach that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who came into the world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy, and become the Redeemer of a lost world. To this end He was born of the Virgin Mary, received a human body and a sinless human nature without ever ceasing to be God (Luke 1:3-35; John 1:1,14,18; Hebrews 4:15; Philippians 2:5 – 11).

We teach that in infinite love, Jesus voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb of God, and took away the sins of the world once and for all by dying on the cross (John 1:29; Romans 3:25 – 31; II Corinthians 5:14; Hebrews 10:5 – 14; I John 2:2).

We teach that Jesus victoriously rose bodily from the dead defeating Satan, hell, and death. Upon ascending back to Heaven with all authority, Jesus was received by His Father and is now seated on His right hand as a soon coming King (Matthew 28:6; John 20:20; I Corinthians 15:55 – 57; Colossians 2:13 – 16, 3:1; Revelation 19:11-16).

We teach that Jesus is the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, and He does not cease to intercede and be an advocate for the saved (Ephesians 1:22 – 23; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; I John 2:1 – 2).

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, being co-equal to the Father and Son in all matters and attributes pertaining to deity (Acts 5:3 – 4; II Corinthians 3:18).

We teach that in the work of redemption, the Spirit justifies, washes, and sanctifies sinners in cooperation with the Son; He regenerates unbelievers and indwells them at the moment of salvation, thus baptizing them into the body of Christ and sealing them until the final day of redemption (I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:12 – 14, 4:30).

We teach that through the Holy Spirit, God provides every believer power to live the Christian life. We further teach that every Christian receives grace from God in the form of at least one spiritual gift that enables him or her to function as a contributing member of the body of Christ (Romans 8:9 – 11; Galatians 5:16 – 25; Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7 – 13).

## **ANGELS AND DEMONS**

We teach that Satan, the devil, is the prince of demons and is the declared adversary of God and man. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, He defeated Satan and guaranteed the ultimate triumph of God and His people (Ephesians 2:2; I Peter 5:8; I Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:10; Colossians 2:13 – 15).

## **SALVATION**

We teach that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he or she is born again spiritually, and that the new birth of the believer comes only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 1:12 – 14, 3:3 – 8; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8 – 10).

We teach that our salvation has been accomplished by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this redemption is by the grace of God, which is an unmerited gift, given in love by God and is not a result of any human works whatsoever (John 3:7 – 18; II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Romans 4:4 – 5, Titus 3:4 – 7).

We teach that upon receiving the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, the believer passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life, and into fellowship with God (John 1:12, 5:24).

We also teach that once this salvation is accomplished, we and all true believers everywhere shall be kept saved forever (John 10:28 – 29; Romans 3:24, 8:35 – 39; II Timothy 2:11 – 13; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:5, 8 – 9).

## **THE CHURCH**

We teach that all who are united to the risen and ascended Son of God are members of the Church, which is the body of Christ (Matthew 16:18 – 19; I Corinthians 12:12 – 27; Acts 2:42 – 47).

We teach that the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved is to make Christ known to the whole world by showing His love to any and all, and that this is the purpose of the Church (Matthew 28:18 – 19; John 13:35; Acts 1:8; II Corinthians 5:1 – 21).

We teach that local churches, such as Strong Tower Bible Church, gather weekly for worship, practical instructions in the Scriptures, for fellowship with God and other believers, and for corporate witness to the unsaved world. Our common spiritual goal is to share God's love and represent Christ well (Matthew 28:18 – 20; Acts 2:42 – 47; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:13 – 16).

## **THE RAPTURE AND THE REVELATION OF CHRIST**

We teach that Jesus Christ will one day return from heaven to receive unto Himself His own who are alive and all those who died in saving faith. This snatching away is called the rapture and it can happen at any time. We teach that after the rapture, a future period of "Great Tribulation" on the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. At this return, Jesus will defeat the armies of Satan and the Anti-Christ and will reign on the earth for 1,000 years (I Thessalonians 4:13 – 17; Zechariah 14:4 – 11; Revelation 3:10; 20 – 22).

## **THE ETERNAL STATE**

We teach that at death the souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory. All those who rejected Jesus Christ will be eternally separated from God to endure His eternal wrath forever, first in Hell, and then in the Lake of Fire (II Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 20:11 – 15, 21:1 – 27; I Thessalonians 4:13 – 18).

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS**

We teach that God appoints Elders and Pastors to lead and govern the church, and they also guide the church in the understanding and application of Scripture. It is their responsibility to be examples of godliness as they see to the spiritual wellbeing and protection of the flock over which God has given them charge (Acts 6:1 – 8; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:1 – 3). We also teach that God appoints Deacons and Deaconesses to serve the specific felt needs of the body as hands on representatives of the Pastors and Elders (I Timothy 3:8 – 13; Romans 16:1 – 2).

## CHURCH ORDINANCES

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper to be observed by all believers until His return (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19 – 20; Acts 10:47 – 48).

We teach that the ordinance of baptism in most practical cases is the immersion of the believer in water as it sets forth the essential facts of redemption, i.e., the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:4; Acts 8:26 – 39). The church will baptize by pouring if it is ever necessary due to extraneous circumstances. STBC practices baptism in the "name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19 – 20).

We teach that the Lord's Supper is a privilege offered to all believers in commemoration of our Lord's death until He returns. The actual elements of bread and wine (grape juice) are symbolic of Christ's body and blood (I Corinthians 11:23 – 28).

## WHERE WE STAND

Strong Tower Bible Church is an elder-led, non-denominational church. Therefore, it is necessary to state where we stand on many of today's controversial topics of contemporary Christianity. In no way are we trying to say that we have the final, best, or only interpretation on these matters. Many of these topics we deem as "non-essential" matters and should not be used by the enemy to divide God's people. **STBC firmly believes that the essential issue we are to contend for is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.** This is why we strive to keep the main thing the main thing. We firmly believe that "*sound doctrine*" (Titus 2:1, which literally means healthy or balanced teaching) is to conform to the message of the gospel of God's grace (II Timothy 1:10-11 NIV), which is the premise of our teaching (Acts 20:24; II Timothy 1:13).

Therefore, we are asking you to respect where we stand even if you don't agree so that there may be unity and oneness in this particular local house of God. We believe that God's people can be one without being the same. These answers will obviously be concise and to the point. If you need clarity and further explanation on these topics or any others, please call the office to set up an appointment with one of the elders. If you have a differing perspective, please be respectful and ready to support it in writing by sound, biblical, and logical interpretation.

## WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON WOMEN BEING USED IN THE MINISTRY?

We begin with the premise that men and women are created in the image of God and are intrinsically equal in all matters pertaining to humanity and redemption (Genesis 1:27 – 28; Galatians 3:28). Secondly, STBC teaches that a woman can possess any gift of the Spirit because spiritual gifts are not gender specific. God, who is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), gives His gifts to us freely (I Corinthians 2:12). This includes the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastor, teacher, administration, and leadership. These gifts were given to various

men and women to equip and train the church-at-large to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11 – 12; Romans 12:8). We recognize that God calls women to prophesy in the church age (Luke 2:36 – 38; Acts 2:17, 21:9, I Corinthians 11:5) just as He did in the Old Testament with Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah’s wife. Prophecy includes preaching and proclaiming the word of God, and not just telling the future. God also empowers women in the church age to teach men (Acts 18:26) and evangelize men (John 4:28 – 30). Therefore, upon request and examination, STBC ordains women to become authorized ministers of the gospel, thereby qualifying them to perform weddings and receive qualifying tax benefits.

When it comes to a church’s governance structure, there are many forms a church can operate with because God’s Spirit gives us freedom (II Corinthians 3:17). Most pastors can prove from the Scriptures that their specific ecclesiological position is “biblical.” These differences in church government ought to remind us of the famous saying, “In essentials—Unity; in non-essentials—Liberty; in all things—Charity.” As a result, the various kinds of local church governments that exist today ought to be viewed as secondary or disputable matters between believers (Romans 14:1 – 23). A disputable matter should not lead to a dividable matter in the body of Christ causing believers to break fellowship. We can be one without being the same and we can love without judging. Remember, it was Jesus who separately judged each of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 – 3, and He did so by dealing with their unique, cultural issues. This is why STBC believes that utilizing women in the local church as ordained ministers, elders, or pastors is a governance issue based on a matter of conviction. Women serving in the pastorate is not a salvation issue, a moral issue, or a gospel issue. It’s an ecclesiastical issue, and those who make this a hill to die on have only succeeded in elevating this issue over the hill on which Jesus died on.

We must keep in mind that after Jesus resurrected from the dead, He first appeared to a group of women. He told them, along with the angels, to communicate a theological message about Himself to the men (Matthew 28:9 – 10; Mark 16:6 – 10; Luke 24:1 – 11; John 20:11 – 18). The women had to give the men their eyewitness testimonies and the Lord’s specific instructions about where to meet Him. Jesus was introducing a new paradigm which would soon manifest in the birthing of the church. He knew the nature of men (John 2:24-25, 4:27) and He knew His disciples would not initially heed the women’s message (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:9 – 11). This is why when Jesus made His first appearance to the men in the upper room in His resurrected state, He rebuked them for not listening to the words of the women (Mark 16:14). The irony is that these same men and women would soon pray together and wait on the Holy Spirit together in this same upper room (Acts 1:13 – 14; 2:1).

When we come to Paul’s writings in the pastoral epistles, it looks as if he strongly prohibits women from teaching men, prophesying, or even speaking in the local church. Many reach this conclusion based on a surface reading of I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11 – 12. This is why STBC practices a type of hermeneutics that goes below the surface level of Scripture to view context, culture, history, linguistics, and the whole counsel of God’s word. This helps to

keep us from taking passages out of context to support our personal agendas and cultural preferences. Knowing that God's word will never contradict itself, the best way to interpret scripture is with scripture. Apparent contradictions lie with the interpreter and never with the Bible. Therefore, when we consider all of Paul's writings about specific women being utilized in his ministry, along with the cultural issues and initial recipients of his letters, we can conclude that the admonitions mentioned to the churches of Corinth and Ephesus were prescriptive for their time and not prohibitive for all times.

Any interpretation of I Corinthians 14:34 about women "keeping silent in the churches" that does not take into consideration what Paul said in I Corinthians 11:5 about women praying or prophesying in the church, is a surface interpretation. Any interpretation of I Timothy 2:11 – 12 that does not consider the cult of Artemis/Diana, which is found in Acts 19:21 – 41, is also a shallow interpretation of scripture. Paul's admonition about a woman not being permitted "to teach or to have authority over a man (i.e. "usurp" in the KJV), but to be in silence," is not about the good act of women teaching in the church. This instruction is about women teaching in the church for the purpose of taking authority over a man or away from a man. In other words, the issue at hand was the attitude of the woman teacher and not the act of a woman teaching. Any woman, or any man for that matter, should not teach in a church with the attitude or motive of overthrowing legitimate male leadership. Besides, it's hard to believe Paul expected house-church leaders like Lydia (Acts 16:14 – 15, 40), Priscilla (I Corinthians 16:19), Chloe (I Corinthians 1:11), and Nympha (Colossians 4:15, NIV) to remain silent in the churches that met in their own houses.

We must take the same hermeneutical approach when attempting to soundly interpret I Timothy 3:1 – 7 where the qualifications for bishops or overseers are addressed. Paul wrote to Timothy during a time in Ephesus when women unhealthily elevated themselves over men through the cult of Artemis. As mentioned, the apostle gave a specific prescription for that specific church which involved specific instructions for handling that specific problem. Saying that qualified men needed to lead in the church like they were supposed to lead in their homes did not mean that qualified women were never empowered by God to lead in the local church. Like a caring doctor, Paul gave the Ephesian churches a prescription for their time, and not a mandate for all churches for all times. We know Paul did the same by answering specific questions asked by the church at Corinth surrounding marriage, singleness, and divorce.

Governing principles should be gleaned from I Timothy 3:1 – 7 for all churches, but this passage was never meant to be a one size-fits-all blueprint for all churches to always follow. If this were the case, every church down through the ages would look alike and function the same, and we know that's not the case. The instructions Paul gave to Timothy for installing overseers were like the ones given to Titus for elders, but the lists are not identical (Titus 1:5 – 9). Obviously, there has always been some level of flexibility when a church decides which principles of governance it will or will not operate with. And when it comes to flexibility, most churches have a tendency of bending the qualifications of male bishops and elders when it's convenient for

their situations. For instance, an overly literal approach to these passages would mean that every bishop, elder, or pastor must be a man, must be married, must have children, and those children must not be accused of insubordination.

At STBC, we are convinced that women can be ordained as ministers of the gospel and installed as associate pastors or elders. These actions are in keeping with I Corinthians 11:3 and other passages that speak of healthy church order and respectful ecclesiastical hierarchy. We believe it is an injustice when women are allowed to do the work of pastors in a church, but are not given the title, authority, compensation, or respect of a pastor. When ministering to the flock and making decisions in the church, female perspectives are necessary to speak into issues that men may not be able to relate to or have the benefit of firsthand experience. This is why women need women advocates in places of leadership. Seeing women in places of legitimate power within the church encourages men, women, and children. Racial, economic, and gender diversity in a church's leadership is paramount if it is to reflect God's Diverse Kingdom and serve all the King's children. STBC does not apologize for women who preach the gospel, make disciples, and serve the people of God as ordained ministers, elders, and pastors.

## WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON TITHING?

When it comes to giving, STBC teaches, encourages, and expects all its members to be **givers** (Luke 6:38) and **generous** ones at that (II Corinthians 9:5-7). Giving to God is a joy, a privilege, and an act of worship. When we give God our hearts first in daily obedience and surrender, He then moves on our hearts to be givers of everything we possess. No sacrifice is too great for Him when He calls, asks, or commands. God wants our giving to be motivated by love (I Corinthians 13:3) because it has been said, "You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving." STBC teaches that we should give the King of Kings our first and best financial gifts (Proverbs 3:9-10). We are always encouraged to be generous and not stingy with God's money because all of it is His (Haggai 2:8). Regular giving reminds us of this truth. Our use of God's money is always an acid litmus test of where our hearts are before Him (Matt. 6:21). We are most like Jesus when we give (II Corinthians 8:9). Therefore, we give because of what we become because of it, and that is, Christ-like.

With that being said, **how much** should a believer give to God? What's interesting is that the NT doesn't give specifics on how much believers are to give regularly to God. Perhaps God does this because giving is more of a heart issue than it is an amount issue (Luke 21:1-4). The examples of giving cited in Acts 4- and 5 and II Corinthians 8 and 9 were situational offerings taken to help poor, needy, and suffering saints in the body of Christ. They were not meant to be templates for ongoing local church giving among believers. Overall principles for giving can obviously be gained from these cases, but the Scriptures do not specifically tell a believer how much he or she should give in the context of maintaining the ministry of a local church. For instance, Paul wrote that pastors should be compensated from the people they minister to (Galatians 6:6, I Timothy 5:17-8), but he didn't spell out how that should actually happen. In this context Paul quotes from the OT passages of Deuteronomy 25:4 and Leviticus 19:13. Therefore,

**principles** can be gained from the OT economic system for sustaining the local church financially (I Corinthians 10:11).

STBC teaches that believers are not under the law or the tithe for that matter (Romans 6:14); instead, we are under grace and grace when properly understood should invoke a greater response in God's people than the Law of Moses ever could (II Corinthians 3:7-18). It would be impossible and unnecessary to tithe today under the parameters of the Old Covenant. However, there are principles that can be gained from the OT discipline of tithing (Romans 3:31, 15:4, I Corinthians 10:11). We can't tell you how much to give, but we can offer you from the Scriptures **a standard to start with** in your giving. Many young, new, or spiritually immature believers often need a guide and a starting place in their giving. Therefore, "**The STBC Tithe Principle**" states that giving 10% of our gross income to God at the local church is a great place to start with and launch from in our giving to God.

Why start our giving with a tithe or with 10%? Before the Law mandated tithing for the Jews, Abraham and Jacob gave God a tithe of their resources out of **appreciation** and not obligation (Genesis 14:20, 28:22). Therefore 10% can be used as a base number, a barometer, and a launching pad in the context of NT giving to show our appreciation to God. Starting our giving to God with 10% is like using training wheels on a bike. The training wheels were never meant to stay on the bike. Rather, they simply help get us started until we become mature enough to ride without them. As we grow in grace and in our commitment to God we believe our financial giving and spiritual sacrifice should grow as well. Paul said that growing and excelling in giving should be one of our goals as Christians (II Corinthians 8:7).

STBC teaches that our "tithes" are to be given to Jesus at the local church and not to a ministry, individual, or needy person. These instances call for an **offering** or a donation, but not your tithe (II Corinthians 8:5). Under the Old Covenant, the "*whole tithe*" was God's and it was given to Him at His "*storehouse*" which was also called "*My (God's) house*" (Malachi 3:10), and today we give to God all that is His at the local church, which is called "*God's household*" (I Timothy 3:15). STBC received financial gifts every week on Sunday (I Corinthians 16:2). These funds, as overseen by the Elders (I Timothy 5:17) are to be used for the furtherance of the gospel, establishment of church programs, and the support of church staff and missionaries worldwide (I Corinthians 9:14, Philippians 4:12-19, I Tim. 5:18).

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES?**

STBC believes that speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:10) that some, and not all, believers possess. This blessed gift, like any other spiritual gift, is not available or necessary for every believer to experience. All believers have been baptized by the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13), but not every believer will speak in tongues (I Corinthians 12:30). All believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit, but not every believer will speak in unknown or heavenly languages.

One expression of tongues as seen in the early church stage was when a person spoke a known human language that they themselves did not learn or know prior (Acts 2:4, 11). **These are tongues spoken to men.** It is highly unlikely that this gift will occur again in today's context with our advancements in linguistics, but with God, never say never.

Another expression of tongues in the Bible is a worship tongue (I Corinthians 14:16) or an unknown prayer language (I Corinthians 14:9) that some, and not all (I Corinthians 12:30) believers in Corinth experienced. **These are tongues spoken to God.** Paul regulates the use of this gift by suggesting that it be performed privately (I Corinthians 14:28) and not publicly in the worship service (I Corinthians 14:19) apart from an interpreter (I Corinthians 14:27-28) so as not to confuse immature believers or unbelievers who may be present (I Corinthians 14:23). This expression of tongues does not make this believer "more spiritual" than another believer who doesn't have the gift. The manifestation of this gift does not give the recipient "more power" or make them any closer to God than a Christian who does not speak in a "heavenly prayer language." God always looks at and listens to the person's heart when it comes to worship, praise, and prayer and not what comes out of their mouths per se (Matthew 15:7-9). The ultimate goal is for Christians to pray and worship God from their hearts on a regular basis whether in known or unknown languages.

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE?**

STBC starts the discussion about divorce the way Jesus did and that is with a defense for marriage (Matthew 19:3-6). STBC fights for the sanctity and perseverance of all marriages. We believe that through the grace of God, any situation can be worked out if both partners are willing to repent, submit to God's Word, counseling, accountability, time, and hard work. From the beginning, God intended marriage to be between one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:6), but due to sin and the hardness of hearts that often develop in marriages (Matthew 19:8), God allowed divorce only under certain circumstances as an act of grace and mercy.

The two clear observances for a Biblical divorce are as follows:

1. **Sexual Immorality** (Matthew 19:9)- Sexual immorality is the defiling of the sacredness of the covenant through inappropriate sexual conduct with another person. The word Jesus used as recorded in the Greek is "porneia" which means illicit sexual behavior. This can specifically cover sexual intercourse, as well as a wide range of other sexual perversions.

In this context "porneia" speaks of **a habitual lifestyle** of illicit sexual behavior and not necessarily a one-time occurrence.

2. **Abandonment by an Unbeliever** (I Corinthians 7:15)- If an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the believing (Christian) spouse, the believing spouse is not under bondage to the marriage covenant. He or she is free to remarry.

Any married couple that comes into our ministry with a prior unbiblical divorce will be loved, used, and encouraged.

### **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON ELECTION AND FREE WILL?**

STBC teaches that God's choosing and man's choosing in salvation are two truths that run parallel in Scripture but mysteriously do not intersect or contradict. The Bible makes it clear that God elects (I Peter 1:2), chooses (Ephesians 1:4), predestines (Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:5) and draws people to Himself for salvation (John 6:44). At the same time, the Bible states that men can choose Christ (John 1:12, 7:37-38) and are held responsible if they should choose to reject God's Son (Matthew 23:37, John 5:40).

STBC does not try to reconcile these two intangibles of God's election and man's free will. For instance, in Acts 27:23-25, God in His sovereignty says to and through Paul that **all** of the lives of the sailors would be spared in the storm. Yet in Acts 27:30-32 the soldiers could make their own **freewill choice** to stay on or attempt to get off of the boat which would appear to nullify the sovereign promise of God that said, *"God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you."* How can God save all the lives on one hand, and yet any man could lose his life by his own decision? This is a beautiful mystery.

We love the glorious aspect of a God whom we cannot fully define or figure out (Deuteronomy 29:29). God is not like man. He is perfect in His emotions and choices, unlike us. We must trust His loving heart, boundless wisdom, and sovereign preeminence. We know that He is not willing that **any** should perish (II Peter 3:9), but we know that **many** will nevertheless perish (Matthew 7:13). Our motivation in sharing the gospel with everyone is out of our love for God and people, as well as an appreciation for being chosen. Our peace in sharing the gospel is in knowing that God will do the saving, and not us (Acts 13:48, John 1:13, I Corinthians 3:5-8).

### **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON ETERNAL SECURITY?**

STBC believes that Jesus gives the believer eternal life at the moment of their conversion (John 3:16, 36, 5:24). If eternal life can be lost, and the key word is **"eternal"**, then it wasn't eternal to begin with. It would be conditional, temporal life, but the Bible doesn't teach that. God sees every true believer as presently glorified (Romans 8:30) and seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). We cannot be separated from God's love (Romans 8:35-39) or snatched out of God's hands (John 10:28-29). God will complete the work He started in us (Philippians 1:6, II Timothy 1:12). Jesus purchased for us with His blood an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit until heaven (Ephesians 4:30) and the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), but he will never leave (Hebrews 13:5-6).

STBC believes that salvation is the work of God and He secures those He saves. For God to take our salvation away makes Him to be a liar, which is impossible (Hebrews 6:18), and it puts the

sacrifice of Christ on a conditional basis and a limited range of effectiveness. We believe that God was capable enough to choose us (Ephesians 1:4), and He is also capable enough to keep or secure His chosen (Hebrews 7:25). Since salvation is not earned by works, how can it be lost by works? If our sins are eternally paid for by **one sacrifice** (Hebrews 9:24-28), what sin can cause a believer to lose his or her salvation? Some have suggested unbelief and turning from God but that's not possible eternally speaking because God turned the unbeliever to Himself and gave him or her the faith to trust in Jesus in the first place (Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 1:29, I Timothy 1:14). You can't turn from someone in your own strength or choice when you didn't turn to Him in your own strength or choice. If they "turn" it may be evidence that they were never truly a part of Christ to begin with (I John 2:18-19) because the saved will endure to the end (Matthew 24:13).

### WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON WATER BAPTISM?

STBC believes that water baptism is a public declaration of one's personal faith in Jesus as their Savior. Water baptism is also a symbol of the gospel, for when it is practiced by immersion it sets forth the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-4). The water also symbolizes cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16), but in no way does the water have any saving power to it (I Peter 3:20-21). The cleansing from sin comes through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:22), and not water. To be "*born of water and the spirit*" (John 3:5) means to be born again spiritually just as sure as you were born the first time naturally through water, i.e. the embryonic fluid in the placenta. The context of John 3 in no way mentions water baptism but rather the birthing experience (John 3:6).

STBC in no way believes that water baptism is essential for salvation. In Mark 16:16 where it says, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...*" is not the whole verse. The rest of the verse says, "*...but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*" If water baptism is essential for salvation the verse would have said, "*whoever does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.*" So we deduce that the thing that saves a person is belief or faith in Jesus, and the thing that causes a person to not be saved is a lack of belief or faith in Jesus. The understood principle is that if you truly come to believe in Jesus as your savior you will be baptized. We believe that any believer who has not been baptized should be baptized as soon as possible as an act of obedience (Matthew 28:19-20), as an act to follow the example of Christ and fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:13-15), and for public identification of their relationship with Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41, 10:47).

The Greek word "baptizo" literally means to identify with by way of immersion or submission. It comes from an understanding of clothing textiles in the first century. A cloth dyer would identify a plain piece of fabric with the color of dye that he dipped it into. Whatever color he dipped it into, the cloth became identified with that color. As we are dipped into, identified with, that is baptized into the Body of Christ by Spirit baptism (I Corinthians 12:13), we are to be baptized into water to show publicly of that spiritual reality (Acts 10:47). The children of

Israel were baptized (submitted to, identified with) into Moses in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:2).

STBC practices baptism by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20) for the purpose of identifying the convert with the triune God. There may be certain instances where baptism by immersion would be difficult (a crippled person) or even impossible (person on their deathbed), therefore we will baptize by pouring in these cases. If a believer comes under our ministry and they have not been baptized, we will encourage them to do so. They will not be accepted as a member of the church because they are in direct disobedience to the Lord's commission because of their refusal to be baptized. If they have been baptized prior as an infant of "covenant parents" we will acknowledge that and not demand of them immersion baptism as a prerequisite for membership. If they choose however, to experience baptism by immersion for themselves, we will be glad to oblige them.

Because it is not written anywhere in the Bible that only pastors and clergy are to do the baptizing exclusively (I Corinthians 1:13-17), we encourage heads of homes to baptize their children and family members at a church service if they so desire. We also believe that if a believer wants to get re-baptized as an act of rededication, re-identification (i.e. at the Jordan River), or celebration (spiritual birthday, church anniversary, etc.) that there is no scriptural mandate to say that this cannot happen. The "*one baptism*" of Ephesians 4:5 is spiritual baptism and not water baptism.

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION?**

If it is brought to the attention of the elders of STBC that one of its members is living in a lifestyle of known, unrepentant disobedience, the matter will be investigated based upon the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17. This passage teaches that the offended Christian, i.e. the one sinned against, is to first confront the offending Christian one on one for the purpose of seeking restoration. If the offender does not "hear" the offended Christian's case, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance, then two or three witness are to be brought in to confront the offending believer for the purpose of restoration.

If the offender does not "hear" the witnesses, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance then the church (leadership and laity) is to be notified. The church leadership will confront the sinning, unrepentant offender for the purpose of restoration. "Telling it to the church" can also imply telling the church body on a Sunday morning so that they can fervently pray for the person who is spiritually trapped by Satan to do his will. If the offender does not "hear" the church, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance then the church is to put that person out of the church (I Corinthians 5:2). The elders of the church will agree and "loose" that person from the confines of the church (Matthew 18:18-20).

The charges are to be announced to the membership during a Sunday gathering (I Corinthians 5:4, I Timothy 5:20, Proverbs 5:14), usually at communion. Putting the person out of the church is a protective measure for the state of the church itself to keep her pure and free from the leaven of un--dealt with sin and rebellion (I Corinthians 5:6-8, Joshua 7:11-12). This public and dreadful procedure causes fear to spread through the church (Acts 5:11, I Timothy 5:20) and this can turn out to be quite healthy for the church (Acts 9:31).

The disciplined Christian loses the privileges of local church fellowship, resources, and spiritual covering (I Corinthians 5:5, 9-11). In this unfortunate alternative the person is handed over to Satan (I Timothy 1:20), since it appears that they are submitting to him and not to God, for the purpose of destroying their flesh (I Corinthians 5:5, Numbers 12:10). Once the protective umbrella of God's grace is removed (Numbers 12:10, 14:22), then Satan will be used to teach them a lesson (I Timothy 1:20), destroy their flesh (I Corinthians 5:5), and run them back into fellowship with God and His people. The prayer of the church is "Lord break him/her, but please don't take him/her" (I John 5:16-17). In the meantime, until this person repents, the church members are to refrain from fellowshiping with the offender (I Corinthians 5:9-11, Numbers 12:14-15) for the purpose of shaming them (II Thessalonians 3:14-15, Number 12:14) for the purpose of seeing repentance occur. When this person repents, they are to publicly confess their repentance to the church (Proverbs 28:13). They are to then be publicly restored to church fellowship (Galatians 6:1-5, II Corinthians 2:7-8, John 21:15-17).

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON GIVING AND RECEIVING PROPHETIC WORDS?**

STBC relies more upon the "*prophecy of Scripture*" (II Peter 1:16--21) than we do upon prophetic words spoken by individuals. We abide by I Thessalonians 5:19-20, which says, "*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.*" We encourage our members to know and study God's Word (II Timothy 2:14-19) to test all prophetic words with the whole counsel of God's Word because if God does speak prophetically or futuristically through a person, it will never contradict His written Word.

If someone does have a word for the body of STBC it will be in line with the words God has already spoken to the pastors and elders (I Corinthians 14:33). Before several Christians (Acts 21:4) and the prophet Agabus spoke to Paul about his fateful destiny in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10--14), God had already spoken to Paul prior (Acts 20:22-24). Also, the test of a true prophet was specificity and 100% accuracy in the fulfillment of that which was told (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). Perfection and/or the consequences of imperfection appear to not be demanded of today's prophets or those who listen to them.

We encourage our members to walk by faith (II Corinthians 5:7) looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2) and not to look for "a word" or "a sign" (Matthew 12:39). We believe that God speaks to His children primarily through His Word and the Spirit who indwells the believer (John 14:26, 16:13, I John 2:26-27). However, we strive to maintain balance that God can speak to His children through unconventional means (Acts 21:9), but we also know we live in an age where

there are many self-promoting, self-absorbed, and self-proclaimed prophets who have “a message from God”, which is usually for a fee. Therefore, we are admonished to “*test the spirits*” (I John 4:1). Spiritual people judge all things (I Corinthians 2:15). Our goal is to be rooted in Christ, knowing His voice and His Word while maintaining sound doctrine so as not be blown away by every wind of doctrine that is so prevalent (Ephesians 4:11-16).

## WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON HEALING?

We believe emphatically that God is a healer (Exodus 15:26) and He still heals today (Hebrews 13:8), but He does not always heal in every situation (II Timothy 4:20). We are to pray with expectancy that God will heal our loved ones who are sick, but we also pray submitted to His sovereign wisdom and plan. This is not wavering faith. Rather, this is **praying with balance**. The Hebrew boys taught us to pray like this when they said to the king in the face of the fiery furnace, “*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand O king. But if not, let it be known to you O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*” (Daniel 3:17-18). We will not bow to sickness whether God heals us or not. A merry heart is our medicine (Proverbs 17:22) and God’s joy is always our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

There are times that God heals us and delivers us from sickness in this life, and then there are times when deliverance will be experienced through death in glory with God (Romans 8:18). Faith is not always the criteria for whether or not we will be healed because Jesus healed people according to their faith (Matthew 9:22, 29) and He also healed people who had little faith (Mark 9:24) or no faith at all (Luke 22:51, John 5:1-8). Whether we have faith or not, God is gracious and loving towards His children and He has made provision for them through Jesus whereby death, or the thing that causes death, loses its sting (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

God gave Paul the ability to heal others (Acts 19:11-12) and even raise the dead (Acts 20:7-12), but he was not healed himself of his mysterious infirmity (II Corinthians 12:7-10, Galatians 4:13-15). Paul didn’t heal Timothy but told him to take wine, which is a modern-day equivalent to medicine (I Timothy 5:23). He didn’t tell Timothy to “claim his healing”. Paul also left Trophimus sick in Miletus (II Timothy 4:20). This implies that healing is never to be seen as an automatic occurrence in this life, nor should a lack of healing be viewed as a defeat. The stripes of Jesus heal us first, foremost, and entirely from the spiritual effects of sin. Physical healing in this life is possible but always secondary.

STBC believes in divine healing but we do not endorse people who claim to be divine healers. We bear in mind that Satan has ability to mimic the power of God (Exodus 7:8-12, Revelation 13:12-15), therefore every “healing” is not proof that God is operating. When the focus is on healing and not on Jesus, Satan is pleased with that. We should have faith that God can heal and faith that God may choose not to heal.

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE AND INTERRACIAL ADOPTIONS?**

STBC teaches that for Christians, the only stipulation that a marriageable person should have is that future spouse be in the Lord, i.e. saved (I Corinthians 7:39). God does not prohibit or discourage interracial marriage. A marriage minded couple should receive pre-marital counseling regardless of their racial or cultural differences. As far as interracial adoption is concerned, the only prerequisites to have are love and the desire to raise the child in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

## **WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS?**

STBC teaches that God created sex to be experienced within the confines of marriage (Genesis 2:24 – 25). Marriage, as defined by Moses and Jesus, is between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24 – 25, Matthew 19:4 – 6). Therefore, STBC and its ministers only perform heterosexual marriage ceremonies.

Hebrews 13:4 states that the marriage bed is undefiled and all sex outside of a biblical marriage is forbidden. This includes, but is not limited to, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, pedophilia, pornography, rape, sodomy, polygamy, and incest. The Bible says that all of mankind is born in sin and shaped in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). The Hebrew word for “iniquity” can be defined as “having a bent or a proclivity towards sin.” All humans are born with “bents” towards certain sins due to several factors. However, our identity in Christ supersedes our bents, our sinful past, and even our current struggles. Only Jesus can deliver a person from the power and practice of any sin. For some, deliverance can be immediate. For others, deliverance can be a lifelong process.

When dealing with sexual sins like fornication, adultery, and sodomy, Paul said in I Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Thankfully, a new identity and a new nature in Christ produces new desires and new decisions that honor God, one of which includes, “fleeing sexual immorality (I Corinthians 6:18).” It must be stated that being tempted sexually is not necessarily a sin, but acting on sexual temptation is always a sin.

Christians must be warned that God lovingly disciplines His children when they sin willfully and repetitively (Hebrews 12:5 – 11). There was a man in the church of Corinth who was publicly committing sexual immorality, and the result of his ongoing defiance was church discipline (I Corinthians 5:1 – 5). Therefore, if a professing Christian is habitually committing sexual sin of any kind, and he or she doesn’t sense or fear God’s discipline, it may be that this person is not a true child of God (I Corinthians 6:9 – 11).

STBC does not teach that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship. We believe and teach the two men had an extremely strong and platonic friendship. David had many broken

and disappointing relationships in his life starting with his father, his brothers, and his first wife Michal, and apparently his friendship with Jonathan surpassed all of his other earthly relationships in support, encouragement, and faithfulness (I Samuel 18:1 – 4, 20:17, 41, II Samuel 1:26). Likewise, STBC does not teach that the men of Sodom were consenting, homosexual adults who only sinned when they sought to sexually assault the two angels who went into Lot's house (Genesis 19:1 – 5). Instead, STBC teaches that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because their sin was very grave in the sight of God (Genesis 18:20, Ezekiel 16:49 – 50), and one of those sins was homosexual intercourse, which is an abominable act in the sight of God (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:18 – 32).

In loving our neighbors, no matter what their shortcomings and classifications might be, Christians have an awesome responsibility to model a Savior who did not condemn sinners or condone their sinful behavior. Jesus simply loved people and called them to follow Him. Somehow, prostitutes felt safe with Jesus to the point where they sat down with Him, ate with Him, listened to Him, and many eventually repented of their sins and entered the kingdom of God (Matthew 21:31). We believe when compassion is displayed without biblical compromise, the church can be a safe place for all people.

## HOW STBC CONNECTS

### SUNDAY MORNING DISCIPLESHIP: APOLLOS TRAINING INSTITUTE

Before worshipping together in the corporate worship service, Strong Tower Bible Church connects through our Discipleship Hour from **9:00 – 10:10 am** called Apollos Training Institute (ATI). ATI is taken from Acts 18:24-28 where a Jewish man from Africa with a Greek name learned the word from a man and his wife. The ATI Discipleship Hour is designed to provide age-specific opportunities for children, students, and adults to study God's word.

ATI class descriptions can be found on our website at:  
**[strongtowerbiblechurch.com/ministries/ati](http://strongtowerbiblechurch.com/ministries/ati)**

### WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY

A tremendous **impact** was made in the Jerusalem church when the people chose to not only gather on Sundays, but to also get together as often as possible during the rest of the week to study God's word, pray, and meet together in one another's homes over food. Acts 2:42, 46-47 says, *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."*

Strong Tower Bible Church has approached communal Bible study in various ways over the years.

We recently launched Gather & Grow, a virtual gathering for us to engage in Bible-centered conversations, connect with one another, and grow in community.

This new approach combines the worlds of **tech** and **touch**. It allows us to expand our reach, extend our online community, and offer a more diversified experience that reflects the beautiful diversity of our church family. We also offer fun, periodic, in-person opportunities at the church and abroad to Gather & Grow face-to-face.

No matter the format, our heart is simple and sincere: to stay connected, to be intentional, and to provide opportunities outside of Sundays for the spiritual growth of adults and children in our church family.

**[Join us online: strongtowerbiblechurch.com/gatherandgrow](http://strongtowerbiblechurch.com/gatherandgrow)**

# HOW STBC SERVES

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

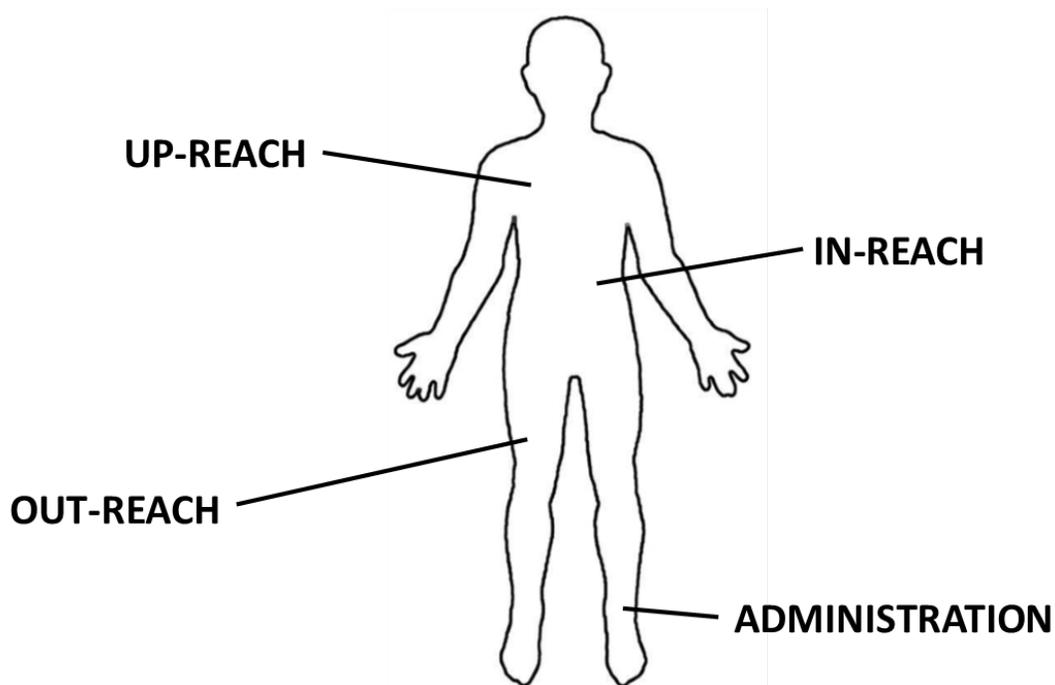
The Apostle Paul wrote about the importance of **spiritual gifts** in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. When a person is born-again and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, he or she receives at least one spiritual gift from God. A spiritual gift is a divine enablement give to each believer through the Holy Spirit, so that, when used, one may **glorify** God and **edify** the church. There are several different spiritual gifts listed in the Bible.

**What are your spiritual gifts?** If you aren't sure what spiritual gifts you have, you can take a test by going to: [www.strongtowerbiblechurch.com/spiritual-gifts-assessment](http://www.strongtowerbiblechurch.com/spiritual-gifts-assessment).

Your spiritual gifts will be linked to your passions for ministry. When it comes to serving others, what are you passionate about? Serving? Teaching? Giving? Leading? Evangelizing? Shepherding? Preaching? Organizing?

## THE BODY OF STBC

As members of the local church, we are called by God to play a role (and sometimes multiple roles) within the body of believers. The body of Strong Tower Bible Church is comprised of four sections: Up-Reach, In-Reach, Out-Reach, and Administration.



## THE FINAL STEP

**Receive the Right Hand of Fellowship** - Once you give us your “YES” to join Strong Tower Bible Church, you will be officially welcomed as a new member of the church in a Sunday morning worship service with other new members. The senior pastor, associate pastors, elders, and their wives will call you forward, shake your hand, hug you, and pray over you. You will also be presented with a membership certificate. The Right Hand of Fellowship allows the current members to see the new people God is adding to the church.