



ARTICLES OF PRACTICE

ORDINANCES

We teach that the Christian ordinances are two in number, baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are the outward rites appointed by Christ to be administered in each local church, not as a means of salvation, but as visible signs and portrayal of its reality.

BAPTISM

We teach that baptism had its origin in the command of Christ to make disciples and baptize them. Baptism by water is a public declaration that the believer has been united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection by faith. Being baptized in the name of Christ proclaims identification with Christ. Baptism is therefore to be administered by immersion to those who have heard the gospel, understand it and respond to it through faith and repentance. The outward sign of baptism does not automatically convey the realities signified. The power of baptism is not in the water, but in the power of God.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

We teach that the Lord's supper was instituted by Christ himself on the night of His betrayal. We teach that it is a memorial of Christ's death, a center of communion and fellowship, a testimony to saving faith, and a visible portrayal of Christ's redemptive covenant. It is to be observed only by those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and consists in partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, which symbolizes His body and His blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. It also expresses our continual dependence upon Him for life and sustenance and is to be observed until His return.

Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-24

DEDICATION OF CHILDREN

We teach that the Scriptures illustrate our Lord's divine concern for the spiritual being of little children and their commitment to God. We, therefore, heartily encourage the formal dedication of little children in a public service of the church demonstrating the parents' desire to commit themselves and their family to following the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:24-28; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17

RESTORATION THROUGH BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

See Biblical Restoration in Section 1

One of the most important commitments of Northwest Community Church is to reveal the holy character and caring heart of God to a perishing world. Restoring an erring brother through church discipline is an essential part of church responsibility to attain and maintain this stated objective.

We teach that church discipline is not applicable just to formal members but to all who name Christ as Savior and fellowship with us. The objective is to protect the integrity of the name of Christ, to purify the Church, to reconcile an erring believer, to deter sin, and to demonstrate the reality of righteous living to the unsaved world (1 Corinthians 5:2-13). The heart attitude of the Elder Board in discerning and dealing with erring believers through the means of church discipline must therefore demonstrate the following:

1. They are to avoid both vengeance and arrogance while humbly praying for God's guidance. (*Galatians 6:1*)
2. They are to view the individual as an erring brother and not a bitter enemy. (*2 Thessalonians 3:15*)
3. They are to approach him with sorrow and not sarcasm. (*1 Corinthians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 2:4*)
4. They are to maintain a forgiving spirit and be ready to extend forgiveness and reconciliation when repentance occurs. (*1 Corinthians 2:7; 7:10-11*)

We teach that church discipline should be exercised in every case of habitual, willful sin or deviation from the truth when the erring party is not willing to make any attempt to resolve the matter. Though not an exhaustive list of concerns, Scripture indicates the following critical issues:

1. Divisiveness (*2 Thessalonians 3:11; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17-20*)
2. Unruly, disorderly and undisciplined living (*2 Thessalonians 3:6,11,14; 1 Thessalonians 5:14*)
3. Conflict between members (*1 Corinthians 6:5; Philippians 4:2-3*)
4. Sins of the flesh (*1 Corinthians 5:11*)
5. Denial of the great doctrines of our faith or advocating of unbiblical heretical teaching (*1 Timothy 6:3,5; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Titus 3:10; 2 John 1:10-11; Revelation 2:14*)

We teach that church discipline is to be handled prayerfully, carefully and justly, and only after several individual attempts of corrective or preventive action have been taken as follows:

FIRST STEP

The individual who is aware of the violation should arrange a private meeting with the offender (*Matthew 18:15*). The first objective is to guard that precautions have been taken to assure accuracy of perception of conduct and clarify the biblical basis of concern and if he repents, forgive him (*Luke 17:3; Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14*).

SECOND STEP

If necessary, set up a second meeting, this time with others present (*Matthew 18:16*). During these preliminary private and semi-private meetings, the individual should be repeatedly beseeched (*2 Corinthians 5:20*), rebuked (*2 Timothy 4:2*), warned (*1 Thessalonians 5:14*), and assisted in any way possible to honor God's Word. The intent of others being involved is to guarantee clear communication as well as assuring that it is not just a private matter.

THIRD STEP

If previous efforts have not resulted in resolve, the unrepentant one is to be mentioned before the church (*Matthew 18:17; 1 Timothy 5:20*). This is done by bringing elders into the process if they were not included in the previous steps. After the elders have confirmed the information and proper process, they shall inform the church at one of the occasions the church is assembled. The congregation will be instructed to pray for the individual and to pursue the person for the purpose of restoration.

FOURTH STEP

Upon refusal to the caring admonition of the church the individual is to be publicly dismissed from the church with hope of future repentance and reconciliation. Public dismissal means the individual is to be:

1. Denied Christian fellowship
 - a) "Avoid them" (*Romans 16:17*)
 - b) "Withdraw yourselves from them" (*2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:3,5*)
 - c) "Reject them" (*Titus 3:10*)

- d) "Have no company with them" (2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13)
- 2. Delivered over to Satan
 - a) "That they may be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20)
 - b) "For the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved" (1 Corinthians 5:5)
- 3. Treated as an unbeliever
 - a) "As a Gentile and tax-gatherer" (Matthew 18:17)

PRACTICES AND CONDUCT

We teach that the Scriptures clearly command that believers are not to be conformed to the world view and lifestyle of which they are a part, but, on the contrary, are to function as salt to prevent the spread of moral corruption, and as light to dispel spiritual darkness. It is therefore imperative that they set high standards in all areas of their life.

1. Their disposition and attitudes shall be characterized by godliness and the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
2. Their social relationships shall bear witness to Christ with all conduct reflecting the spiritual ideals of Christianity rather than of the world; they shall not marry unbelievers; shall not hold membership in oath-bound, secret societies and shall not compromise Christian principles in partnerships.
3. Their bodies shall be treated as temples of the Holy Spirit such that one's lifestyle promotes spiritual development and presents a testimony that is faithful to the principles set forth in the Word of God: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2)

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:8-9)

Numbers 14:13-23; Galatians 5:18-26; Romans 13:13-14; Ephesians 4:17-24; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1

MORAL STANDARDS

We affirm that individuals should develop convictions from a conscience that is influenced by the Scriptures as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Convictions are to be lived out in the context of our time and culture with the realization that other believers may be new in the faith or ignorant in the Scriptures. The object is not to determine a list of acceptable and unacceptable conduct (in areas that are not clearly delineated in Scripture) but to represent the Lord in personal godliness and compassion. It is therefore, love for others that limits the exercise of liberties of conduct.

THE LAW OF GOD AND THE BELIEVER

The Bible clearly teaches that the law has never been able to save or make one holy. Therefore, observance of the law has never been a means to grace or sanctification. (Romans 4:1-12) The purpose of the law has always been to guard God's people and to point them to Christ by bringing about the knowledge of sin; that purpose being fulfilled, believers are no longer under the law. (Galatians 3:19-25) However, this does not render the law meaningless since the law is based in the perfect character of God, who is unchanging. (Romans 7:7-16; 1 Timothy 1:8) Therefore, each law should be seen merely as a vehicle to communicate a principle of truth rooted in the character of God.

This theological principle relates to the original intent of the biblical author. The value and authority of the aspects of the Law that reveal His character is not that the Law commands it, but in the spiritual principles common to all expressions of God's will for his people¹. Furthermore, since all Scripture is inspired and useful (2 Timothy 3:16), we will not assume that a law has to be repeated in the New Testament to be relevant and meaningful. For each law, we will strive by sound exegesis to discover the theological principle imbedded in that law. Then, according to the intent of the author, seek to apply that principle by faith into our lives as New Testament believers. We are to trust God to produce holiness in us by the power of the Spirit as we obey His Word. This is what is meant by the believer being called to walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5) Therefore, we reject legalistic as well as theonomic interpretations of the law of God. We also reject extreme dispensational interpretations which would see certain laws as inapplicable simply because they are not repeated in the New Testament.

For example, the Fourth Commandment states: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." (Exodus 20:8). The original purpose of this commandment, as well as all commandments, was to guard God's people and point them to Christ. This purpose was fulfilled at the cross. However, the timeless theological principle imbedded in this law is that the believer should trust God by being faithful to set time aside to worship and rest. This truth is carried forward to today and remains as meaningful as it was when this law was given. As the believer strives to apply this principle by faith to his life, the Holy Spirit may reveal the need to rearrange lifestyle decisions and priorities related to worship and rest. The believer, therefore, becomes increasingly conformed to the image of Christ.

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

We teach that God's ownership of all things creatively and redemptively is unquestioned in the Scriptures. Since we are saved by grace and the death of Christ provided our ransom, our whole being, body, soul, and spirit should be freely given to God, which is our reasonable service.

We teach that not only does God demand and deserve our love and devotion, but He has made us stewards of what we have in time, talent, and temporal goods. Our stewardship in all things should be motivated by the Spirit and follows the example of our Lord who freely gave Himself for us.

We teach that giving is a grace; it can be practiced even during believer's deep poverty; it is a form of fellowship; it should be preceded by the dedication of the believer, himself; it proves the reality of one's love, and it should be given to help meet the needs of others.

We teach that each believer should give just as "he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Proverbs 11:24; Luke 6:38; Romans 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:9

MARRIAGE AND THE HOME

We teach that marriage is a sacred institution ordained of God and is an indissoluble union of the husband and one wife until parted by death. In the order of marriage, the husband is called to be the head of the wife and the wife is called to be in submission to the husband as unto the Lord. The husband is called to love his wife and give himself sacrificially to his wife as Christ loved His bride, the Church, and gave Himself for her.

¹ Breshears, Gerry, 1989, "The Place Of The Law In The Life of the Believer in Christ"

Marriage, which is the foundation of the family and the Christian home, should only be entered into in the fear and will of God. Accordingly, a believer should not be united in holy matrimony with an unbeliever. We teach that ministers and parents have an obligation to teach the sanctity of marriage and to warn against believers being yoked with unbelievers.

Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 7:3; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2-7, 39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19

We teach that the home is a divinely ordained institution. The Father is the head serving his family by the law of love by providing provision and protection. He is charged with the responsibility of biblical training and discipline. The mother is to be his helpmate. She is charged with providing loving care and training of the children and assists in managing the affairs of the household.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-25; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

We teach that God's design for marriage is one man united with one woman in a monogamous life-long oneness. The Bible clearly states that God hates divorce. He does acknowledge that divorce takes place as a result of the hardness of man's heart. When divorce takes place, the picture of the marriage relationship as a reflection of Christ's love for the church is destroyed. In addition to this, divorce for a cause less than adultery always causes adultery in remarriage. Divorce and the opportunity for remarriage, therefore, were a concession for the faithful partner due to the insensitivity of the other partner to God.

Although divorce is painful and real, the Biblical ideal is reconciliation and should always be pursued as the first viable option. When reconciliation is not possible, remarriage could be considered by the faithful partner in the following situations:

- The marriage union has been destroyed because of fornication. (*Matthew 5; 19; Mark 10:11-14; Luke 16:18*)
- A non-believing spouse leaves the marriage, especially because of the faithful partner's Christian testimony. (*1 Corinthians 7:10-13*)
- The divorce was prior to salvation. (*2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11*)

If remarriage is possible on the basis of one of the above, it must be "in the Lord". (*1 Corinthians 7:39*)

It is preferable that the faithful partner not pursue remarriage until their spouse has remarried in order to not preclude any possibility of reconciliation. However, the situation will depend upon a number of factors, that is, purity of life, time, etc.

In the case of two believers who have divorced where there has been no adultery, the Scripture calls them to either reconcile or remain single. If a second marriage takes place that union would be recognized as adulterous. Believers who pursue divorce on non-biblical grounds are operating outside the clear guidelines of Scripture and are in rebellion against God's design.

When a divorce has taken place under the previously stated conditions, that faithful party is not necessarily permanently disqualified from all leadership positions. The Church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. Precaution should be taken to avoid penalizing the faithful partner. In cases where there has been a divorce in a person's past, the church has an obligation to restrict, for a

period of time, the person's involvement in leadership until it can be proven that the person is characterized as living "above reproach" and the present marriage exemplifies Christ's relationship to His Church. If the divorce took place prior to one's salvation the sin of divorce is to be viewed as all other sins prior to salvation--nailed to the cross of Christ. As in all cases, a lifestyle of blamelessness and faithfulness to present relationships is the issue.

Although the Bible is clear in its treatment of divorce there are situations that arise that do not fit neatly within the specific scenarios with which the texts deal. We have been given, however, the biblical framework necessary to think through each situation and apply the Biblical principles. Therefore, each situation must be dealt with on an individual basis to determine how to best apply the principles we do have.

REGARDING WOMEN IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

The design in Scripture is that the local church is to be led by a plurality of godly men called elders, or overseers (*Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17*). The Bible gives us several characteristics of elders: They are male, they are appointed, they meet certain character qualifications, and they perform specific duties (*1 Timothy 3:1-11; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14*). The term in Ephesians 4:11, pastor-teacher, is understood to be synonymous with the office of elder. The term pastor, also translated shepherd, simply reflects a duty or function of an elder. Therefore, the biblical office of elder must not be separated from its pastoral responsibilities (*1 Peter 5:1-4*). At Northwest, we choose to employ the term pastor referring to a man in our body who is an elder freed up by financial remuneration to perform this office full-time (*1 Timothy 5:17*).

Although men and women are equal with respect to status in Christ, Scripture defines clear gender roles in church leadership. Women are not to function in the roles explicitly reserved for the office of elder. This is not to say that women are not to serve in the body, or that women cannot have official or even significant leadership positions in the church. However, it is clear that the office, functions and responsibilities of elders, and therefore pastors, are not open to women.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING

We believe that personal needs are met through a vital relationship with Jesus Christ (*2 Peter 1:3; 2 Corinthians 9:8*). Biblical counseling starts from the premise that submission to Christ and His Word is the solution to man's problems, which are caused by his sin. The goal of biblical counseling is not relief from pain or difficulty, but to give direction in how to respond biblically to one's circumstances. The reason to solve personal problems should be to deepen one's relationship with God in order to more effectively please Him. God is more concerned about our "holiness" than He is our "happiness". Therefore, biblical counseling is based on the directions, promises and concepts of God imparted through His Word.

Although the psychological approach may offer insight into human behavior the conclusions are often based on an incorrect view of: (1) man, (2) the source of man's problems, and (3) the solution to those problems. Even when the principles and methodology employed in the observation of human behavior by the psychologist are compatible with the Bible, if his assumptions about man's responsibility are incorrect, then his conclusions will usually be wrong as well. God holds man completely responsible for his own attitudes and actions. In His Word, God gives the means by which one's attitudes and actions can be brought into conformity to His will. Thus, apart from any physical problems that may be a contributing factor, we turn to the authoritative Word as the basis and means for realizing responsibility and modifying both character and behavior.

We see the Bible as the primary resource for providing the direction in dealing with the problems of life (*2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12*). God uses both His Word and His Spirit as the agents of change to reveal the depth of our sin

so we can understand the riches of His grace (*Ephesians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10*). The believer is to respond by confession and repentance as the path to experience that grace and the freedom from guilt. As the believer “renews his mind” with God’s truth, his attitude and actions can be brought into conformity to God’s will (*Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5*). This is all part of God’s ongoing process of transforming the believer into the image of Christ (*Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 4:1-2*).

We see the local church as the primary context for such change. We maintain that the primary responsibility for the care of souls belongs to the elders as they shepherd the flock of God among them (*1 Peter 5:1*). As the body of Christ practices the “one another” commands of scripture, the body is built up (*Hebrews 3:13*). We are committed to dealing with sin biblically, which places a priority on personal accountability to the body of Christ in maintaining biblical relationship, both with God and with one another. Therefore, we are to love others with the love of Christ, encourage, admonish and implore one another to obedience (*1 Thessalonians 2:11-12*), forgive those who offend us as “God in Christ has forgiven us” (*Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14*) and to seek forgiveness from those whom we have offended (*Matthew 5:22-23*).

We are committed to helping people understand that a loving sovereign God has ordained their difficult circumstances (*Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 1:11-12*). The believer can therefore: (1) seek to live life from God’s perspective, (2) have hope in difficult circumstances based on the character of God and His promises and (3) understand that God will accomplish His goals for the believer through difficult circumstances and suffering (*James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7*).

DIVINE HEALING

We teach that God heals in His own time, by His own means, for His own glory, and according to His sovereign will and pleasure. God may heal directly, through medicine, or in answer to prayer. Scripture teaches that when we get sick we should pray and rest in the perfect will of God. Prayers of faith are answered not simply because they are prayed in faith, but only if they are consistent with the will of God. God does not always choose to heal.

John 9:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:9; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

REGARDING THE NATURE OF TONGUES

We teach that the New Testament practice of speaking in tongues was manifestations of known, real languages that were spoken by some people groups on the earth. Therefore, we see the contemporary teaching and practice of speaking in tongues as unknown “heavenly” languages not spoken in this world as inconsistent with the biblical pattern (*Acts 2:8; 1 Corinthians 13:10*).

REGARDING THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES

We teach that the biblical purpose of tongues is the edification of the body of Christ through the preaching of the gospel to peoples where the gospel has not yet penetrated in their own language. The New Testament does not teach that the purpose of tongues is personal growth or worship nor is it the necessary evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:41; 1 Corinthians 12:7-14*).

REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF TONGUES

We teach that speaking in tongues, alongside the working of sign miracles and the gift of healing in the first century church, were temporary sign gifts and are not for the church today (*1 Corinthians 13:8-13*). They were for the

purpose of pointing to and authenticating Jesus Christ and the apostles as revealers of divine truth and never intended to be characteristic of the lives of all other believers (*1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:1-4*).

ATTITUDE TOWARD CIVIL GOVERNMENT

We teach that civil government is ordained of God for the welfare of society to promote and protect the good and to restrain and punish evil. Therefore, we consider it the duty of Christians to pray for rulers and for those that are in authority over them and to give due loyalty, respect, and obedience to them. Christians are also encouraged to take an active interest in government at all levels. Where the demand of civil law would militate against the supreme law and will of God, Christians should obey God rather than man.

Daniel 4:17; Matthew 22:17-21; Acts 4:19, 5:29; Romans 13:1-4; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:12-14

ATTITUDE TOWARD STRIFE AND MILITARY SERVICE

We teach that Scripture enjoins believers to love their enemies, to do good to them that hate them, to overcome evil with good, and inasmuch as possible, live peaceably with all men. Therefore, we conclude that it is not fitting for the Christian to promote strife between nations, classes, groups, or individuals.

We teach that sincere Christians may have conscientious differences to their understanding of the teaching of the Word of God with reference to their responsibility as Christian citizens to human government both in times of war and in times of peace. We therefore exercise tolerance and understanding, and respect the individual conscience with regard to participation in war.

We teach that all have the responsibility of searching the Scriptures with open heart and mind and their position may truly be one of Christian conviction and not expediency.