



Principles of Doctrine, Governance and Practice

Purpose of the Church

The church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of the Great Commission¹. The church is to baptize and teach those disciples to love the LORD in the depth of the Great Commandment² and is to exhort them to manifest the LORD's presence in all arenas and in all circumstances³.

¹Matthew 28:19-20; ²Matthew 22:37-38; ³Isaiah 43:1-7 and 1 Corinthians 10:31

Purpose of FiveStone Churches

FiveStone Churches serves and builds pastors and church leaders to plant, strengthen and renew local churches under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Basis of FiveStone Churches

- Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church¹; church leaders are His workers²; build on the foundation with precious stones³; build disciples of Christ⁴.
¹1 Corinthians 3:11; ²1 Corinthians 3:9; ³1 Corinthians 3:12; ⁴1 Peter 2:5.

Five Stones Identified

- Integrity, Authenticity, Trust, Leadership, Service. John 10:1-18

Core Values of FiveStone Churches

- Integrity proves Authenticity.
Authenticity leads to Trust.
Trust leads to Leadership.
Leaders Serve.
 - Character before gifting.
 - Edify, Protect, Encourage and Support.
 - Influence by relationship, not mandate.
 - A small church can be a great church.
 - The church rises or falls on the quality of biblical leadership.
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Doctrine

God in Trinity

We believe in the one true God. (John 17:3), the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). He created all things (Revelation 4:11) and upholds all things by the Word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He is a God of truth and without iniquity, He is just and right (Deuteronomy 32:4) and He shall judge the world (Psalm 9:8). He is holy, good, compassionate, gracious, loving and merciful (Exodus 33:19-20; Psalm 36:5-10; Isaiah 6:1-7; Isaiah 54:10; Revelation 1:12-18).

We believe that God's characteristics and His attributes can be seen and understood. His attributes fall into two categories: communicable and incommunicable. God's communicable attributes are those characteristics that humans can share. This is possible either by a person being made in the image of God or through the process of sanctification in a person's life. These attributes include: spirituality, love, holiness, faithfulness, truthfulness, goodness, grace, mercy and righteousness.

Those attributes that are incommunicable—those not shared with humanity—include God's self-sufficiency, immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, eternity, infinity and sovereignty.

God's characteristics and the outflow of His nature can be clearly seen in God's creation (Psalm 104:14-35; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20-22) so that a person has no excuse for denying the existence of God.

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and are worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience (Mark 12:29; John 1:1-4). Everything of eternal importance depends upon what a person believes about God, and what a person believes about the Trinity deeply affects that person's spiritual life and eternal destiny.

We believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is core to the Christian faith because:

- It makes explicit the essence of God as implicitly taught in the Old and New Testaments;
- it differentiates Christianity from all other forms of theism by preserving the unity of God while recognizing the diversity of God;
- the Christian faith disintegrates at the denial of the deity of Jesus Christ and at the denial of the Father and Holy Spirit within Trinity;
- it has significant implications for life of the individual Christian and life in the local church, i.e. the submission of the Son to the will of the Father, the Spirit's work in calling attention to the Son rather than to Himself.

Jesus Christ

We believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe He is the manifestation of God in the flesh and is, therefore, sovereign creator and king (John 1:1-3, Revelation 19:11-16). He is completely righteous, holy, good and true (Colossians 1:15-16). We believe He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He is true God and true man (John 1:1; John 1:14; John 1:18; John 14:8-9; 1 Timothy 3:16).



Resurrection of Jesus Christ

We believe in the resurrection of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension into heaven and His present life for us as High Priest and Advocate (Acts 1:3; Acts 1:9; Hebrews 7:25-26).

Holy Spirit

We believe in the deity of the Holy Spirit and that His primary ministry is to glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, baptizing the believer into one body of which Christ is the head. The Holy Spirit ministers to the believer in Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells, guides, instructs, fills, comforts and empowers the believer for godly living (Mark 13:11; John 14:26; John 16:8; John 16:14-15; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, of God's righteousness and of coming judgment (John 16:8-11).

We believe that God gives spiritual gifts to individual people not for the display of self, but for the benefit and the building up of the church. (Ephesians 4:11-12). We seek to emphasize the excellent way of love, zeal for the more edifying gifts and use of all of the gifts to build up the local church (John 13:15; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 8:9-17; Romans 12:4-8; Romans 12:4-5, Romans 12:11-13, 12:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 5:25; Hebrews 4:1-4).

Scriptures

We believe the Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are verbally inspired by God and inerrant in their original writings. We believe the 66 books of the Old Testament and the New Testament are God's complete and sufficient revelation and therefore carry God's authority for the well-being of mankind. There is no additional written revelation from God. (Psalm 119:97-104; Psalm 119:160; Matthew 5:18; John 5:46-47; John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Revelation 22:18-19).

Man

We believe man was created in innocence under the law of God but, by voluntarily transgressing, fell from his sinless state. Consequently, all mankind is sinful (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23-24; Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1-3). All people are spiritually dead sinners not only by inheritance, but by their own choice and therefore are under just condemnation without defense or excuse. We believe that without exception every man and every woman is totally depraved and needs a Savior (Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 3:10-19; Romans 1:18, Romans 1:32; Romans 5:1-2).

Salvation

We believe that a person is spared punishment for his sin by grace alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus Christ died for sins as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice. We believe that a person receives salvation through God's unmerited gift of grace and by faith receives Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. That person is justified on the basis of Jesus Christ's shed blood on Calvary and Christ's righteousness immediately is credited to that person.

Each person who receives Christ as personal Savior is born again of the Holy Spirit and thereby becomes a child of God and is eternally secure in that relationship. We believe the Holy Spirit baptizes each believing person into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation and that there is no second baptism of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:6-11; Romans 8:37-39; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21).



Heaven, Hell and the Return of Christ

We believe in the blessed hope: the personal, bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of the age. He will eradicate evil and establish righteousness. His people will worship and serve Him forever.

The return of Christ has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost. The saved are raised to eternal, conscious delight in heaven (Matthew 25:34; John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Revelation 2:7) the lost are raised to eternal torment in hell in conscious separation from God. (Matthew 8:11; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 13:49-50; Mark 9:47-48; Luke 12:5; Revelation 21:8).

These convictions regarding the blessed hope and its consequences are settled orthodoxy in the universal Christian church.

Church

Upon receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, a believer becomes part of His body, which is the church. There is one church universal, composed of all those throughout the world who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Scriptures command believers to gather regularly and frequently in order to devote themselves to worship, prayer, teaching of the Scriptures, observance of the ordinances of baptism and communion, fellowship, service to the body through the development and use of talents and gifts, and outreach to the world in fulfillment of the command of Christ to make disciples of all believers (Ephesians 5:23; Romans 12:1; Acts 2:42-46; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Matthew 28:18-20).

Wherever God's people meet regularly in obedience to this command, there is the local expression of the church – under the oversight of elders and other supportive leadership. The church's members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Missions

Realizing that the cause of Christ extends beyond any one local fellowship, we commit ourselves to an ongoing ministry of extending the call of Christ to make disciples around the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

Church Government

Pastor, Elder, Overseer, Shepherd and Deacon

The Bible's teaching on the subject of church offices is found primarily in 1 Timothy 3:1-16 and Titus 1:5-9. Although there are several terms used for the offices of the church, i.e. Pastor, Elder, Overseer, Shepherd and Deacon, analysis of these terms indicates that Pastor, Elder, Overseer and Shepherd are used interchangeably. Deacon has a meaning distinct from the others.



Elder Qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9)

- Above reproach
- Husband of one wife
- Sober-minded
- Self-controlled
- Respectable
- Hospitable
- Able to Teach
- Believing children who are not morally corrupt or insubordinate
- Not a drunkard
- Not violent, but gentle
- Not quarrelsome
- Not a lover of money
- Not a new convert
- Not arrogant
- Not quick-tempered
- Not violent
- Not greedy for gain
- Hospitable
- Lover of good
- Self-controlled
- Upright
- Holy
- Disciplined
- Holding firm to the Word so he may instruct
- Correct those who contradict sound doctrine

Deacons

The Bible teaches that Deacons are *proven as servants* (Acts 6). The qualifications for Elders and Deacons are the same regarding the individual's character, but different in aptitude. The elders are to be *able to teach* while the deacons are to be *able and proved as servants*.

Deacon Qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-12)

- Dignified
- Not double-tongued
- Not addicted to wine
- Not greedy for dishonest gain
- Possessing a clear conscience
- Tested as servants and found blameless
- Spouse must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded and faithful
- Holding to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience
- Husband of one wife
- Manages household well



Issues for Clarification

Giftedness and Success

The LORD gives spiritual gifts to equip His people and build His church. Spiritual gifts are not given for the glory of the one demonstrating the gift. The LORD is to receive complete thanks and total honor for giving the gifts and He is to receive all praise for the fruit that results from the exercise of the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-16).

A gifted individual is a vessel used by the LORD as a simple conduit to carry His gift for the blessing of others. The gifted individual is a servant who is obligated to reject glory from men and live in a way that points to the LORD alone as the source of all gifts. (Micah 6:8; Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 3:3-9; 1 Corinthians 4:7-13; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Galatians 5:22-26; Colossians 3:23; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

The Scriptures picture the church as a human body, with each part fulfilling a specific and important role (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). The body cares for itself in love to build itself in strength and usefulness to the LORD. The LORD's church is to be led in strength, but it is not to be led as a competitive corporation or as a military force (Micah 6:8; Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 9:46-48; John 13:5-17; Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

The church is the bride of Christ and as such is to be led by godly individuals who are worthy to be followed as they themselves follow Christ and demonstrate His character (Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:25-32; 1 Peter 5:2-4). Churches are to be shepherded by those who are marked by Integrity, Authenticity, Trust, Leadership and Service (John 10:1-18). Although leaders in the FiveStone network are to be known by these five markers, it is obvious no one has fully attained the likeness of Christ and all must be committed to a continual, never-ending process of growing into His likeness (Philippians 3:10-16; Colossians 3:10).

We are committed to the servant leader example Jesus described as the Good Shepherd. The example of Jesus can be summarized as: "Integrity proves Authenticity. Authenticity leads to Trust. Trust leads to Leadership. Leaders Serve." (John 10:1-18)

We rejoice in the numeric growth of each church in the FiveStone network, but do not emphasize numeric growth of the local church as the key measure of success nor as proof of the LORD's favor upon a local church. Rather, we emphasize courage, devotion, faithfulness and steadfastness in shepherding the local church (1 Peter 2:4-12; Revelation 2-3). We adhere to the admonition, "If your church is small in number, don't let it be small because you're spiritually lazy, mentally lazy or physically lazy."

Independence and Autonomy of FiveStone Churches

FiveStone Churches is an independent organization and is not a ministry arm of an individual church. The organization is governed and protected by a board—the **Elders Council**—which is largely composed of pastors and other leaders from select member churches. The Elders Council serves as a governing board; it is not to function as a titular or nominal advisory board.



Elders Council

The Elders Council provides protection and guidance as FiveStone Churches seeks to plant, strengthen and renew local churches.

The Elders Council is comprised of:

- no fewer than three and no more than 16 individuals;
- Senior Pastors and other leaders from Partner Churches;
- the Executive Director of FiveStone Churches;
- leaders of Partner churches or FiveStone Churches staff or others from outside the network as deemed appropriate by existing members of the Elders Council.

The Elders Council desires to bless member churches through the mutual exchange of ministry, teaching and coaching services, research, conferences, printed materials and seed money devoted to church planting and pastoral education programs.

Independence and Autonomy of the Local Church

We are committed to the independence and autonomy of the local church led by a plurality of elders chosen from within the local congregation. FiveStone Churches is not to control the local church and its leaders but, rather, is to influence by relationship, not mandate. FiveStone Churches will Edify, Protect, Encourage and Support church leaders and rely on healthy relationships to influence churches toward courageous and steadfast faithfulness to the LORD in the work of ministry.

Elder Government

The Book of Acts reveals that the authority for the direction of the affairs of the church was vested in elders. The elders are responsible to be sensitive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit and to discern on behalf of the congregation the Holy Spirit's direction. The local church is to be led by a spiritually mature, qualified group of men who serve as shepherds of the entire church. They are to meet the biblical qualifications described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 and are to bear responsibilities as described in Isaiah 3:14-15; Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 4; 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

Churches of the FiveStone network may include various levels of congregational input in governance. However, congregational input is not to be confused with congregational governance. The elders hold overall responsibility to govern and protect the church.

Although each member church in the FiveStone network is to be governed and protected by local elders, an individual church's by-laws may mandate issues that must be decided by a congregational vote. In addition—and at the elders' discretion—input regarding issues not specified in the by-laws may be placed before the congregation for consideration and decision. None of these opportunities for congregational input is to supersede commitment to the biblical principle that responsibility for each local church's shepherding and protection is in the hands of a plurality of qualified local elders.



Elder Responsibilities

The Scriptures show that Elders provide spiritual oversight for the local church. The elders are to ensure their leadership is marked by Christ-likeness.

The Elders' focused responsibilities:

- **Doctrine.** Ensuring that the doctrine of the church is biblically sound, honoring to the LORD (Colossians 1:28-29). All doctrinal issues in the church will be settled by the Board of Elders;
- **Discipline.** Administering in love and humility the process of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-4; Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:17-25; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 and Romans 16:17;
- **Direction.** Ensuring that the direction of the church is consistent with the FiveStone Churches statement of purpose;
- **Discipleship.** Ensuring that the Church prioritizes the practice of individual and group discipleship to strengthen the church by biblically and intentionally building followers of Christ.

Elders and Consensus

Elders employ the method of **Consensus** as the most appropriate decision-making model. Whereas voting forces a polarization of perspectives as either 100 percent in favor or 100 percent opposed, consensus decision-making acknowledges mixtures and nuances of favor and opposition and the need for a process of prayer, discussion and discernment so that all board members reach a unified conclusion.

Consensus means either unanimity among the board members or a general--although not necessarily uniform--agreement after all present board members have had a fair and reasonable opportunity to be heard. Consensus will have been achieved if most board members are in agreement on an issue and the board members in the minority are willing to join the majority in public support of a decision. Consensus requires that each and all elders publicly support the decision of the entire Elder Board.

When the Elders believe an issue is sufficiently significant to require congregational input, the elders will present the pertinent information to the congregation. The congregation will have opportunity to give input to the elders. It is the responsibility of the elders to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit through the truth of the Scriptures, prayer, an understanding of the pertinent issues at hand and input from the congregation.

Plurality of Elders

The Scriptures teach that a plurality of elders governed individual New Testament churches (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1). The Scripture does not mention any congregations featuring a stand-alone pastor and leader. A plurality of godly elders, exercising their individual giftedness, squares with the Scripture's teaching that wisdom is found in a multitude of godly counselors (Proverbs 11:4; Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 15:22; Proverbs 19:20; Proverbs 24:6.). This does not eliminate the possibility or likelihood that one or more elders will stand out from the others as more public in their ministries or more influential in their workings on the Elder Board.



Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor of a church in the FiveStone Churches network has a highly public presence and responsibility before the congregation and automatically serves as an Elder. The Senior Pastor must walk closely with the LORD and, as a result of that relationship, he must demonstrate the qualities of a godly, mature Christian life as described in the Scriptures. He may have a variety of gifts and talents, but he must be able to preach, teach and lead.

The Scriptures use the term *Pastor*, *Elder*, *Overseer* and *Shepherd* interchangeably. The term *Pastor* is a reference commonly reserved in many church cultures to refer to those who serve in full-time, vocational, shepherding ministry in a local church. The Senior Pastor's first responsibility is his relationship with the LORD; his secondary responsibility is his relationship with his wife and his children. His work in the local church focuses on shepherding the church and preaching the Scriptures. He will—with patience and persistence—rightly handle the Scriptures as he reproves, rebukes, exhorts, encourages, admonishes, consoles, implores and reminds in order to build spiritual unity and maturity in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Timothy 4:12-15; 2 Timothy 2:15; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:11).

The Senior Pastor will preach and teach the Word of God in order to *equip the saints for the work of ministry* (Ephesians 4:12). He will publicly proclaim the gospel which is the *power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16). He will oversee all worship services. The pastor will work with the elders of the church to shepherd the congregation. The Senior Pastor will lead the congregation to fulfill its responsibilities.

Marriage and Human Sexuality

The Scriptures teach and require that marriage be reserved for and restricted to a union between one man and one woman (Genesis 1:27, Matthew 19:4-6, Romans 1:26-27). God designed marriage between one man and one woman for four primary purposes: complementary partnership, relational intimacy, sexual fulfillment and multiplication (Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 2:18; Genesis 2:23-25, 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Corinthians 7:9, Ephesians 5:31). The Scriptures encourage and honor sexual intimacy only within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6, Hebrews 13:4).

Church Leadership and Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

The Bible teaches that the Lord God designed marriage to form a lifelong, singular relationship between one man and one woman. Divorce is a human innovation that was instituted because of the hardness of heart of both men and women. Divorce destroys the Lord's vision for marriage and its benefits; divorce damages families; divorce destroys marriage's illustration of the gospel (Ephesians 5:23); divorce weakens the fabric of society. Despite these consequences, the Lord also offers abundant grace and mercy to overwhelm the sin of men and women.

Although marriage is designed by the Lord to be a permanent earthly bond between one man and one woman, the Scriptures also teach that marriage is dissolvable. Death of one of the marital partners, for example, dissolves the marriage and frees the living spouse to remarry (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).



The Scriptures also describe two exceptions that allow for divorce:

1. God allows a husband or wife to divorce and remarry if his or her mate has committed adultery. Divorce in that case is not required, but would be allowed. The marriage could be reconciled despite sexual unfaithfulness. However, reconciliation is not always possible (Matthew 19:3-12).
2. If a believer is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever divorces (abandons the marriage) rather than continues in the marriage, the marriage would be dissolved. The believer would be free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

In both exceptions, the innocent spouse has not committed adultery. Also, the innocent spouse either has not sinned in any way or has not sinned in a way that should destroy the marriage. Despite the simple specifics of these two exceptions, it is clear that sinful men and women sometimes manipulate and posture in order to feign innocence and seemingly fulfill one or both of these exceptions in order to impersonate the innocent party. A spouse, for example, may use sinful means to drive the other toward an adulterous affair. Or a spouse may make it impossible to live peaceably at home, and thereby eventually drive the marital partner to abandon the marriage. Nonetheless, the Scriptures affirm the exceptions cited. Responsible pastors and elders must prayerfully, thoughtfully discern the specifics in each circumstance and reach justifiable and right conclusions.

The Bible requires a pastor-elder to be a *one-woman man*. A man divorced and remarried under one of the two exceptions has not committed adultery. It is permissible for a man divorced and remarried under either of these two exceptions to serve the Lord in the local church as a pastor or elder or deacon.

A man who was divorced prior to his salvation in Christ—regardless of circumstances—is not disqualified from serving as a pastor, elder or deacon. If, for example, the man in question has received Christ in salvation, has remarried and has remained faithful to his wife, he could qualify as a pastor, elder or deacon despite a history that included an unbiblical divorce prior to his salvation in Christ. If the man is repentant for his role in the original marriage's dissolution, has demonstrated repentance over time and is faithful to his wife, he could fulfill the Titus 1:6 qualification as a *one-woman man*.

A man who—after claiming salvation in Christ—initiated an unbiblical divorce against his wife would only in rare circumstances be privileged to serve as an elder in a local church. In order to consider that man for eldership, the church's existing elders must deeply ponder whether the man was a genuine follower of Christ before and during the season of the divorce process. Core to the matter would be the man's personal history and the elders' research and discernment of specifics of the case.

On the other hand, if all divorce in all circumstances or any heinous sin—committed before salvation in Christ—automatically disqualified a man from eldership, then the Apostle Paul should have been disqualified. Paul said of himself in 1 Timothy 1:12-14: *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* Prior to his conversion to Christ, Paul practiced horrid sin, participated in the wicked killing of Stephen in Acts 7 and persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ, ravaging the church as described in Acts 8:1-3.



What of an existing elder whose marriage is falling apart to the point of divorce? The elders obviously must hear from both the elder and the elder's wife and perhaps others regarding the details and specifics of the circumstances that have done such severe damage to the marriage. It is likely that the elder in question would be required to step down at least for a season in order to free him and his wife to save the marriage. The elders hold the responsibility and the authority to discern what is best for the church and, secondarily, what is best for the marriage and for the man serving in the elder role. The church elders' first responsibility to the husband and wife is to help preserve the marriage.

Each man who desires the elder role must be willing to have his life examined for qualification. The qualification of being a *one-woman man* may seem the sole focus in the issue of marriage, divorce and re-marriage. However, also deeply important is a discussion connected to the requirement that a man be a *good manager of his own household* (1 Timothy 3:4). As Paul notes in 1 Timothy 3:5, . . . *if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?* A man who has been divorced may need to consider whether his leadership of his family in the home contributed to the divorce. Did his sin drive his wife or his children away from relationship? Rather than presume the answer to be Yes, the answer must be discerned through thoughtful and compassionate examination of the man's life and conduct.

Assimilation and Church Membership

We believe in the importance of serving the body of Christ by offering clear paths for people to start and develop healthy and growing relationships with others in the church body. We value an intentional plan to help every interested person enjoy godly relationships in the church. Church membership is a by-product of people who are growing in Christ and who grasp the importance of serving the Lord by using their gifts to serve others in the local church.

Baptism and Communion

Baptism and communion are the two ordinances required in the church. We believe that Christian baptism by immersion in water is a public identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Although baptism is not required for salvation, it is commanded of all believers and is for believers only (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38, 41). We practice *believer's baptism*, i.e. a person is baptized after personally receiving forgiveness of sin by accepting Jesus Christ. Belief in Christ comes before baptism. Participation in the waters of baptism is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection to newness of life that occurs when a person becomes a Christian (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Communion is the commemoration by believers of Christ's death and a reminder—through the bread and the juice—of the Savior's broken body and shed blood. Communion is to be a time of confession of sin and should be preceded by careful self-examination (Acts 4:13; Romans 6:3-6; 1 Corinthians 11:20-29).

Sufficiency of Scripture

We believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and that they contain all the words of God that we need in order to completely trust and obey Him. The Scriptures are inerrant in their original writings and are infallible in their instruction (Proverbs 6:32; 2 Peter 1:19), eternal in duration (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:23-25); the final authority and the standard for faith and practice (Matthew 4:4; Psalm 119); and sufficient for counsel in every issue of life (Psalm 19:14-17; 2 Timothy 3:16).



We believe the 66 books of the Old Testament and the New Testament are God's complete and sufficient revelation and that there is no additional written revelation from God. (Psalm 119:97-104; Psalm 119:160; Matthew 5:18; John 5:46-47; John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Revelation 22:18-19).

We believe that the very words of Scripture in the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic are inspired by God. Therefore, we believe that the Bible versions which translate the Scriptures most literally into modern English should be preferred.

Creation and God's Sovereignty

We believe God created the universe *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—and that, before He created the universe, nothing except God existed (Genesis 1; Exodus 31:17; Psalm 33:6-9; Acts 17:24; Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16). God chose to create the universe and all that is in it to reveal His glory, divine nature, eternal power, infinite wisdom and supreme authority (Isaiah 43:7; Psalm 19:1-2; Jeremiah 10:12; Romans 1:20; Rev. 4:11).

We believe that God created Adam and Eve personally and individually and as complete human beings and that all people are descendants of Adam and Eve. We deny that the universe or mankind is the byproduct of any evolutionary process (Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

The fall of Adam and Eve infected all people with sin and death, but the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives the opportunity to receive God's gift of eternal life. (Romans 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

God rules His creation and cares about and is involved in the lives of individual people (Job 12:10; Acts 17:25; Acts 25:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:13; Ephesians 4:6).

Salvation and Security

One of the primary responsibilities of the local church is the clear and passionate proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures teach that no person can do anything to satisfy God's requirements for salvation to eternal life. Each person is physically born spiritually dead and, on his own, is without hope for spiritual life.

Spiritual life comes only if and when God decides to move into that person's heart to draw the person to Himself. Salvation is purely a sovereign work of God and is totally without human initiation. It is God's decision to save a person (John 3:8; John 6:37; John 6:44; John 6:65; Romans 8:29-30; Romans 9:11-18; Acts 13:48; Acts 16:14; Ephesians 1:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:3). It is God's kindness, forbearance and patience that lead a person to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Although God is the initiator of the salvation transaction, the Bible also teaches that God holds each person responsible for receiving or rejecting Jesus as Savior and Lord and that God welcomes all who come to Him by faith apart from works (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 15:7; Luke 20:9-18; John 7:37; Romans 10:9-13; Acts 16:30-34; Acts 17:30).

Both of these truths—God's sovereignty in salvation and man's responsibility in response to the salvation offer—are taught in the Scriptures. The Scriptures, though, are clear that even a person's reception of the offer of salvation is rooted in God's sovereign decision to draw a person to Himself. Man, because of his depraved nature, has no interest in the things of God and is unable and unwilling to respond to the gospel call apart from God's initiating work in the human heart (John 1:12-13; John 6:44; John 10:26; Ephesians 2:1-10; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 2:13).



All glory for the salvation of every believer belongs to God alone (Romans 3:21-31; Ephesians 1:7-9; Ephesians 2:8-9, Jude 1:24-25). Those who are born of God's Spirit through Jesus Christ persevere in the faith (Matthew 13:13; John 15:4-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:10-13; 1 John 4:13; 2 John 9). God is faithful to His people, and empowers them to persevere in the faith (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:19-20).

We believe that everyone who is born of God's Spirit through Jesus Christ is assured of salvation from the moment of conversion (Ephesians 1:13-14). This assurance relies on God's decisive and faithful grace rather than on the works of the Christian. Obedience, good works and fruit-bearing do not earn or retain the believer's salvation, but indicate the reality of the person's relationship with and love of Christ and profession of faith (Luke 6:46; John 14:21; James 2:17-18).

Eternal security in salvation relies on the Lord's guarantee of each believer's adoption as His son or daughter (Galatians 4:4-7), and His seal of the believer by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14) and the conviction that God gives the Holy Spirit to each believer as a down payment toward future bliss in heaven (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). A person who professes genuine faith in Christ immediately becomes His possession (Luke 23:42-43; Acts 2:40-41; Acts 16:30-34), and nothing can snatch that person out of His hands (John 10:27-29). Having been bought with the price of Jesus Christ's crucifixion as complete payment for sin, Christians are not their own. They are Christ's possession (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This reality is absolutely certain, reserved in heaven, protected by God's unlimited power (1 Peter 1:4-5).

Process of Sanctification and Maturity

We are committed to multiplying the godly characteristics of leaders' lives into others (2 Timothy 2:2). This *multiplication of leadership* is key to the health of the local church.

We believe disciples of Jesus Christ should minister to one another in the local church, rather than insisting that one or a small number of professional pastors bear the total responsibility to care for the congregation. God has given spiritual gifts to all of His people to provide mutual ministry in the context of the healthy local church (Ephesians 4:11-12). This *multiplication of ministry* is key to the healthy growth of the local church.

Worship

The chief purpose of mankind is to glorify God by loving Him with the entire heart, soul, mind and might (Deuteronomy 6:5; Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 22:37). All believing men, women and children are to glorify God and thus fulfill the purpose of their existence. Worship glorifies God through adoration (Psalm 95:6), praise (Psalm 99:5), prayer (Daniel 6:10-11), thanksgiving (Nehemiah 12:46) and a complete yielding to Him (Romans 12:1). Worship declares His worth, pays Him homage and celebrates Him in a life of devotion. We seek to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (Exodus 15:1-21; 2 Samuel 6:14-16; Psalm 5:7; John 4:23-24; Revelation 4:11; 5:12).



Several tenets guide our worship. We seek to:

- lift high the name of Jesus Christ (John 4:22-26; John 12:32; John 14:6);
- lead God's people to lift their hearts and voices to Him, giving Him praise and thanks in music and lyric (Nehemiah 12:45-46; Psalm 66:1-4; Psalm 95:1-2);
- prepare hearts to hear the Lord speak through the proclamation of Scripture (Psalm 95:6-9; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42);
- emphasize fresh and contemporary expressions while retaining traditional elements that recognize the richness of our heritage in the faith (Deuteronomy 32:7; Psalm 33:3; Isaiah 46:8-9; Matthew 13:32; Ephesians 5:19; Revelation 5:9);
- pursue excellence in worship, knowing that God is worthy of our best (Exodus 12; Deuteronomy 17:1; Psalm 33:3, 1 Timothy 4:14-15; Hebrews 11:4).

Women in Ministry

FiveStone Churches affirms the God-ordained and significant role that women should play in establishing and leading the local church. Every leadership opportunity is open to women except those that are excluded by Scripture. The Scriptures clearly state that men are to serve in the office of Elder and that women are not to serve in church positions in which they exercise authority over men or in which they teach doctrine to men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:6-9). We do not see this as an issue of equality, for men and women are equal under God. The Bible is clear that men and women do not have the same roles. Qualified women should serve in any leadership position that is not forbidden in the Scriptures.

Spiritual Warfare

Satan and his demonic servants viciously oppose the work God performs in and through His people (1 Peter 5:8; Genesis 3:1-7; Ephesians 6:12). God, who by His nature is infinitely more powerful than Satan, in due time will have complete and total victory over Satan (1 John 4:4; Revelation 20:1-10).

Although it is appropriate to pray in Jesus' name for protection against demonic activity, the Scriptures do not instruct the Christian to "bind Satan in Jesus' name." Rather, the Scriptures instruct the Christian to combat Satan by:

- humbly drawing near to God, knowing that He will give grace, mercy and strength (2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Hebrews 4:15-16; James 4:8; 1 Peter 5:6-10);
- resisting his temptations (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9);
- rightly applying the truth of the Scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11; John 8:44; Ephesians 4:24-27);
- forgiving offenses (2 Corinthians 2:10-11);
- putting on the armor of God's truth, righteousness, readiness to share the gospel, faith, salvation and prayer (Ephesians 6:11-20);
- demonstrating faithfulness to the Lord by enduring trials (Revelation 2:10; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 3:9-10)

Counseling Philosophy

The Lord changes lives and accomplishes His purposes directly through reading and applying the Scriptures, meditating on the truths of the Scriptures and prayer. The Lord also uses those who minister His Word as they encourage, exhort, admonish, edify, implore, reprove, rebuke, console and support others toward godliness.



God needs no new or unique insight into the human condition in order to change lives, regardless of whether that insight is gained through psychology or some other tool of human origin. Psychological theories that may help people live healthier and more effectively are embellishments of principles already revealed in the Scriptures. Although some forms of human wisdom are true, they are not the Word of God. They are infinitely subordinate to, and not to be compared with, the matchless value of the Scriptures (Psalm 119:160; Isaiah 40:8; John 17:17).

Problems that are approached by integrating the Scriptures with psychological theories tend to deceive individuals into diminishing the God of the Scriptures and into believing that He has not provided and cannot provide sufficient truth, insight and wisdom to change their lives (Colossians 2:8-10). There are occasions when a medical doctor may diagnose a physical problem that manifests itself in attitudinal, behavioral or emotional struggles. In those occasions, the use of medications may be appropriate.

The Lord's church is a community of faith—a living body with Jesus Christ at the head (Colossians 1:17-18)—that influences, supports and helps bring men, women and children into healthy relationships with the Lord and with others of the church. A healthy church body applies biblical principles to relationships at all levels, i.e. the overall church context, ministries within the church, families within the church and individuals within the church. God-honoring application of biblical principles throughout the church leads to healthier relationships at all levels (Ephesians 4:14-16; Hebrews 12:12-13). This application also helps ensure the integrity of the church's corporate and individual witness to a watching world (1 Peter 2:12).

C

FiveStone Churches seeks to build the local church by emphasizing the excellent way of love, zeal for the more edifying gifts and use of all of the gifts (John 13:15; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 8:9-17; Romans 12:4-8; Romans 12:4-5, Romans 12:11-13, 12:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 5:25; Hebrews 4:1-4).

Members of the FiveStone network are conservative, evangelical local churches that welcome all who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, as well as all who are seeking Him. FiveStone Churches is not a network of charismatic churches.

Current displays of the gift of tongues:

- give unwarranted prominence to the gift, which is described in the New Testament as being only one of many spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12);
- emphasize speaking in tongues as the primary manifestation of the Spirit's working in a person's life, while minimizing the Spirit's work in producing a holy life (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 2 Timothy 1:9) and a life that displays the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22);
- often suggest that speaking in tongues is a required proof of being Spirit-filled or of possessing salvation in Christ, even though the Scriptures do not teach this;
- do not appear to be authentic human languages, as described in the New Testament gift (Acts 2:6-11).

Philosophy of Church Planting, Renewal and Strengthening

The church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of the Great Commission¹. (Matthew 28:18-20). In acting upon the church's purpose, FiveStone Churches recognizes the value of multiplying ministry by planting local churches and by associating with existing local churches for the purposes of renewal and strengthening. God is glorified when like-minded churches associate with one another to foster relationships that Edify, Protect, Encourage and Support.



Benefits and Commitments of Association

FiveStone Churches intends to bless all member churches through the mutual exchange of ministry, consulting services, research, conferences and seed money devoted to church planting and leader development. FiveStone Churches is committed to a biblical standard of autonomous, elder-governed and elder-protected local churches.

