

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

BEREAN CHURCH, MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN

Revised December 2015

Berean Church welcomes everyone who desires to worship God and fellowship with our church family, regardless of their personal religious beliefs. However, as every other church, we have certain beliefs to which we are committed. The following is the first half of the Doctrinal Statement of Berean Church.

PART 1 - ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

The beliefs discussed below are foundational truths and/or essential to salvation, therefore agreement and commitment to these truths is required of every member.

THE BIBLE - The Word Of God

By His Holy Spirit God worked through the human authors of Scripture to ensure that what they wrote was exactly as He desired. He did not dictate the Bible to them, but from their various languages and vocabularies guided them to choose the exact words by which they expressed His truth (II Peter 1:21). In this way God insured that even though they were fallible men, what they wrote was completely without error. Although none of their original manuscripts exist, there is so little variation among ancient copies, we can be confident that in a good English translation we possess the very Word of God. Because this is so, we need to receive the written Word of God as having the same authority as if we were to hear God audibly speak it (II Timothy 3:16a). We accept it as revealing the only way of salvation, and as being the basis of all faith and practice for both our individual lives and for Berean Church (II Timothy 3: 16b - 17).

THE NATURE OF GOD - One God In Three Persons

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons, a Tri-unity (Trinity) comprised of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We believe that each is a person distinct from the others, but inseparable, co-equal and co-eternal. We are not polytheists (those who believe in more than one god), and we are not Unitarians (who believe in one god, but deny the deity of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), neither are we modalists (those who believe in one god who has revealed himself in three different ways). We do not profess to be able to explain the Trinity, but find it taught clearly in Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 10:30-33; II Corinthians 13:14). That the nature of God is beyond the ability of our human intellects to fully grasp does not bother us. As someone has written, "A god small enough for our minds would not be big enough for our needs."

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - God Made Flesh

We believe that before His entrance into the world, Jesus Christ existed in heaven from eternity past, in full equality with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. It was in that distant past that the members of the Godhead determined among themselves, that God the Son would enter the world, becoming human, to provide a way for us to be saved from the guilt and penalty of our sins. To facilitate His birth, the Holy Spirit miraculously conceived His physical body in the womb of the Virgin Mary. By coming into the world, God the Son did not set aside His deity, but added humanity to it. He was and is the most unique person of all time, the God-man, true deity and true humanity combined in one person. Only someone who is both God and man could bridge the rift that sin has created between God and us. (Luke 1:35; John 1:1,14; Philippians 2:6-9; Romans 1:3-4)

THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - God With Us

We believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine person existing as co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son. His function is to convict unbelievers of their sin and condemnation before God, and to convince them that they need Christ to save them. It is only as He regenerates the spirits of unsaved people that they are able to understand the Gospel and trust in Christ. In those He does regenerate, the Spirit produces saving faith; He baptizes them into eternal union with Christ; seals them in that relationship for time and eternity; indwells them; equips them for service; and empowers them to live a godly life. (Acts 5:3-4; John 16:7-8; Titus 3:5; I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14; 3:16-19; Galatians 5:5; II Corinthians 3:18)

HUMANITY - Spiritually Dead In Sin

We believe that God created the first man and woman in His own spiritual image and likeness. They were created to know Him, to enjoy His friendship, experience His love and His wisdom, and to serve Him. But as a consequence of disobedience to God our parents lost their relationship with Him. They lost it not only for themselves but also for their descendants. We have all inherited from our parents a nature of rebellion against God. The Bible calls this nature and its works “spiritual death.” Spiritual death is complete estrangement from God. It is our total inability to approach God or to please Him in any way. Just as physical death makes it impossible to have a relationship with someone, spiritual death separates us totally and completely from the life of God. As spiritually dead men and women, we can do nothing to earn God’s favor. This is the spiritual “birth defect” with which each of us entered the world, estranged from God by our very nature, which fact we have long since confirmed by committing sins of our own. We are sinners both by nature and by choice, and unable to do anything to improve our standing before God. (Romans 3:9-18; Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1-3)

SALVATION - By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone.

Because our position relative to God is one of spiritual death, it follows both logically and Biblically that if we are to be saved from the penalty due our sins, it must be entirely a work of God. Therefore, the basis of salvation is entirely God’s Grace, love we don’t deserve (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-6). The means of salvation is faith, trust in God and not our own efforts (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-6). And the object of faith is Jesus Christ, His sacrifice and resurrection (Romans 3:23-25).

ETERNAL SECURITY - It’s Not “Eternal Life” If You Can Lose It

While it is possible to be saved and not understand the Biblical teaching of eternal security, to deny the doctrine is a corruption of the Gospel because it means that salvation is ultimately dependent upon some work of man. To deny the security of the believer is a denial of salvation by “grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.” The fact is that we did not deserve salvation the day we received it, and since then there has not been a single day that we have deserved to keep it. The continuance of salvation has nothing more to do with any work of ours than our receiving it did. If salvation is received as a gift by faith, but only maintained by either good works or avoiding certain sins, then we would only arrive in heaven through our own efforts, and would have something to boast about, “but not before God.” (Romans 8:1; 28-39; John 10:28-29; I John 5:11-13)

PART 2 - DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS

The second half of our Doctrinal Statement identifies several doctrines that distinguish us from other evangelical churches in the community. To safeguard the beliefs upon which Berean Church was founded, it is required that the members of the governing Board, the Senior Pastor and the Associate Pastor be in agreement with both halves of the Doctrinal Statement. But, other than for those holding these leadership positions, agreement with the second half of the Doctrinal Statement is not required for membership at Berean Church.

THE CHURCH - There's Only One True One

We believe that there is one true, universal church, identified in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul as "the Body of Christ." (Ephesians 1:23-24; Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27) That designation points to the ministry that Christ has given the church to represent Him in the world. This universal church is comprised of all people everywhere who have been saved and joined to Christ through faith in His finished work of redemption upon the cross. The Scriptures are clear in teaching that all who belong to the universal church should also be active members of a local congregation (Hebrews 10:25). Every local church, should function as the presence of Christ in its own community. For that reason, while we welcome all people to worship and fellowship with us, we believe that membership at Berean should reflect the composition of the universal church in that only those who give a testimony of their personal salvation should be received as members. Because membership in that universal church makes us brothers and sisters in Christ with every other believer, we believe that membership in the local church should have no doctrinal requirements beyond faith in those truths that are essential to salvation. Because Scripture commands us to recognize and to "keep" the unity that has been created among us by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-6), we will not be put in the position of saying to any who are family in the Lord, "We're glad God accepts you, but we will not."

WATER BAPTISM - No Controversy Here

Because of the conflicting beliefs and practices of various churches concerning water baptism (i.e. who, when, how and why) this subject is one of the most controversial and divisive theological issues facing Christians today. Yet the Word of God indicates that belief in baptism should be a pillar of Christian unity (Ephesians 4:5). Because the Scriptures speak of a number of different baptisms (Hebrews 9:10, Luke 3:16, Mark 10:38-39; I Corinthians 10:2) disunity over this subject comes when we focus attention upon the wrong one. The Bible teaches that there is a divine, spiritual baptism that occurs at the moment of salvation (I Corinthians 12:13). It's this baptism that joins us to the Body of Christ, the universal church (see above). We believe that this baptism is what Paul has in mind when he writes of the unifying "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5. Various Christian groups practice other ritual and/or symbolic baptisms but this baptism with the Holy Spirit is the only essential one. We believe that this baptism which God Himself performs is the only one that He requires today. For that reason we do not practice any form of water baptism, first to avoid adding to the confusion and then secondly, to place emphasis where God does. If you are a Christian, no matter what you believe about the water ritual, we recognize you as having been baptized by the hand of God and on that basis you are welcome as member here. Some people might think of us as that "strange" church that doesn't practice water baptism. We would rather be known as that "welcoming" church that recognizes and emphasizes the one baptism that joins every believer to Christ and to each other.

THE LORD'S SUPPER - In Remembrance Of Him

We practice Communion, with broken bread and grape juice, as a memorial of the broken body and shed blood of Christ upon the cross (I Corinthians 11:23-26). We believe that the bread and grape juice are symbolic and bring no special grace to those who ingest them. Instead, the Lord's Table serves us as time for remembering the price of our redemption; a time of worship and giving thanks to our Savior; for personal reflection and examination of our relationship with Christ; as a declaration of our faith; and as a reminder that He is coming again. While the Word of God contains virtually no instructions as to how Communion is to be celebrated, the Scriptures specifically command us to do so until Christ returns (I Corinthians 11:26).

STATE OF THE DEAD - Heaven Or Hell

We believe the Scriptures teach, that for those who are saved, death is a departure of the soul/spirit (our immaterial being) from our body and from this life to be instantly in the presence of Christ in heaven (II Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23). We believe that when those who are unsaved depart this life, they go to punishment in Hades (Hell) where they await final judgment and consignment to the Lake of Fire where they will spend eternity (Luke 16:22-24). We believe that all people remain in a state of consciousness after death and that their punishment or their bliss will last forever (Revelation 20:10-15).

THE JUDGMENTS - Punishments And Rewards

We believe that all who are saved will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. There we will be judged, not for our sins which have already been paid for and forgiven (Romans 8:1), but for the service we have given to Christ. Only what we have done according to His plan and purpose will have eternal value, and only those things will be rewarded (II Corinthians 5:10-11). While all who go to heaven will be happy to be there, the greatest joy will belong to those who have rendered the greatest service. Those who are unsaved will also be judged. They will be judged and ultimately punished for their sins. As there will be degrees of reward in heaven, God's justice demands that there will also be degrees of punishment in hell (Revelation 20:12).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS - Every Believer Has One

The Holy Spirit gives to every believer a Spiritual Gift, i.e. some divine enablement by which God desires us to work together with Him in building His Church, both spiritually and physically. However, we believe that some of the Spiritual Gifts that operated in the New Testament Church were temporary in nature, intended only for the Church's infancy (I Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 2:20). Gifts such as Apostleship, Prophecy, Supernatural Wisdom and Knowledge were withdrawn by the Holy Spirit as no longer necessary once a "foundation" of sound doctrine was established through the completion of the New Testament Scriptures. Other Gifts, such as Miraculous Powers and Gifts of Healing established the authority of the Apostles and ended with the cessation of that office. And certain other gifts, especially Speaking in Tongues and the Interpretation of Tongues related to God's dealings with the nation of Israel and ceased when Israel was set aside in unbelief (Romans 11). However, many other Gifts of the New Testament Church, Evangelism, Pastor, Teacher, Encouragement, Mercy, Giving, Hospitality, Administration and Leadership still function today. While we seek to avoid the confusion over Spiritual Gifts that exists in many branches of the Church today, we encourage every believer in Christ to discover the Gift(s) that God has given them and to actively use them in serving Christ and His Church (Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12:1, 7, 14-27).

FUTURE EVENTS - Watching For Christ's Return

We believe that the next event on God's prophetic calendar is Christ's return to take His Church to heaven, commonly called "the rapture of the Church." We believe that there are no Biblical prophecies that must be fulfilled prior to this event but that it can literally occur at any moment (Philippians 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Following the rapture there will come upon the earth seven years of great tribulation, marked by the power of Satan and the rule of the Anti-Christ (II Thessalonians 2:1-12). One of God's key purposes during this period will be to bring the nation of Israel to repentance and prepare her to receive Christ as her Messiah (Romans 11:25-29). At the end of the seven years Christ will return in power to deliver Israel from her enemies, to judge the nations, and to establish His Kingdom on the earth. The first phase of His Kingdom will last for a thousand years after which, in "the dispensation of the fullness of times" (Ephesians 1:9-10), God will gather together all things as one in Christ and there will be "a new heavens and a new earth" in which righteousness will be established forever. (Rev. 21 and 22)

CREATION - God's Handiwork

We accept Genesis 1 & 2 as an accurate reflection of God's creation of the heavens and the earth including man. We believe that the scope and complexity of creation reveals God's existence and power (Psalm 19:1-4) to such a degree that refusal to believe in Him is rebellion against Him for which there is no excuse (Romans 1:20).

LIFE and MARRIAGE - The Biblical Ideal

Berean Church recognizes that all human beings are made in the image of God, created as male and female (Genesis 1:26, 9:6; Psalm 139:13-14), and thus every human being has been granted by God the right to life from conception or the functional equivalent thereof, until his or her natural death. The intentional killing of a human being violates God's lasting commandment, "You shall not murder." (Exodus 20:13)

Berean Church recognizes that marriage is between one man and one woman and is intended for life (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:22-33); and that God has designed sexual relations to be enjoyed only within the God-ordained marriage relationship (Hebrews 13:4).