



What's Going on **Here?**

AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR CHURCH

What is going on **Here?**

Welcome to our church. We are glad that you are here and glad that you are interested in what we are about. This booklet is an introduction; a conversation starter. It may not answer your every question, but it should help you to better understand the foundation that our church is built upon.

The easiest way to describe who we are and what we are about is to say that we are a collection of people who are gathered to worship God. This is more than attending a Sunday morning service or small group Bible-study. Our worship is to give ourselves (mind, body and soul) to God.

We do this so that he would do his good work **in us** so that we become more like him in our thoughts. We want to see ourselves, the world around us, and God himself the way God sees them.

We do this so that he would do his good work **through us** so that the world around us can know the truth, the hope, and the love that only he can give.

Who is **God**?

Nature and reason tell us that everything in our universe comes from something. From the smallest of creatures to the vast displays of galaxies, we can explain (at least in theory) how they are formed. But, how did it all begin?

We believe that God brought all of this into being. The Bible says that God, in the beginning, created the heavens and the Earth (Gen. 1:1). It tells us that Jesus participated in this creation by creating all things that were created and specifically stating that there is nothing made that was not made by him (John 1:1).

Because God created everything, he holds a rightful claim over those things he has created. So, all things were created by him and for him (Col. 1:16).

Who is God? He is the creator of and authority over everything that exists.

Who are **We**?

When God looked at his creation, he called it “good.” It was good because it was designed to show his glory. It was a place of beauty and power and wonder that spoke to the beauty and power and wonder of the one who created it. As the crowning jewel of creation, God made mankind. People were more than just another great addition to God’s good work. People were designed to represent the very image of God (Gen. 1:26).

As part of our special design, God gave people the privilege to choose to follow him or to live life their own way. He placed them in the middle of his creation and gave them dominion over everything they saw. But, in the end, this wasn’t enough. People were not content to live under God; they wanted to be like God. And so, they chose to live life their own way. When this happened, sin entered into the world and corrupted God’s good creation. Everything, from the weather to vegetation to the nature of animals and even the hearts of mankind, everything was changed by sin. God’s lofty creation was now a fallen world.

What is **Sin**?

When we hear the word “sin” we tend to think of people worse than us doing horrible things we would never do. We are often happy to admit that we are not perfect, but we pause at the idea of seeing ourselves as sinners.

Rebellion is one way the Bible describes sin. This is the simplest form for us to understand. After all, a bold-faced rebellion against God seems to be something that he would rightly oppose.

Sometimes, sin is described as transgression. To transgress is to cross a boundary. When we claim authority over our lives that rightly belong to God, we have crossed the line; we have committed a transgression or sin.

The Bible also, and most commonly, describes sin as falling short or missing the mark. Think in the terms of an archery contest. Consider a target with only a center mark. Anything other than a perfect shot is a failed attempt.

The Bible tells that this center mark is the perfect glory of God himself. When the Bible says, “all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), it is telling us that it doesn’t matter how good we might like to think ourselves to be. We are less than perfect and, at different times and by varying degrees, we have all missed the mark.

So, we have fallen short and crossed the line. Does God really care about sin?

What is **God** doing about **sin**?

When a wrongful rebellion begins, when boundaries are wrongfully crossed, and when perfection is tainted by something short of glorious, God is left with two options.

On one hand, he holds the right to exercise justice. As the creator of and authority over all things, it is perfectly within his right to make his creation good again by ridding it of rebels, transgressors, and anyone who misses the mark. This is justice and God does exercise his right to practice justice by punishing sin.

On the other hand, God has chosen to be merciful and gracious. Since all wrong is essentially sin against God himself, he alone holds the right to pardon sinners. For his glory he is setting apart a people for himself. Although they are rebels and transgressors and less than perfect, he has chosen to forgive them and cover their sin. We call this justification. Those whom he justifies will see their rebellion cease, their transgressions come to an end, and their shortcomings compensated for by God himself.

While some will face the just wrath of God others will be justified by God. The first will experience the consequences of their sin (death and eternal separation from God) and the latter will experience freedom from sin that ends in eternal life in the presence of God.

How do we know this is **True?**

As the song says, “Jesus loves, me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

On page three of this book, we recognized the power of human reason to help us understand that there must be a God of some sort that brought all of creation into being. However, reason has limitations. Although it might be sufficient in telling us *that* God exists it doesn't tell us *who* God is or *what* he is up to. The knowledge we gain from nature is called general revelation. The knowledge we have about the person and plan of God comes from special revelation; the Bible.

From the beginning, God wanted for a relationship with mankind. Before sin, people could be with God in a very tangible way. After mankind chose sin, God made himself known to his creation over the course of 15 centuries at the hand of some 40 authors and their 66 books that we now call the Bible.

In this book, God has chosen to tell his story. He tells us about his glory and the fall of his creation. Most importantly, he tells us of his plan to restore both creature and creation. We call this the redemption story.

How should we **Respond?**

If God's story of redemption is true, it is crucial for every person to consider how they will face God's judgement of sin.

Some acknowledge their rebellions, transgressions, and shortcomings yet continue to live as they see fit? When they do, they experience the justice of God. For the sake of bringing creation back to a state of good, these will be forever removed from the glory of God and his creation.

Others will heed the call of God to turn away from their sin and, in faith, receive his grace and mercy. These will be justified by God. He will forgive their sin and, when his creation is restored, they will live in his glorious presence. They will know life without the pain and hardship and death brought on by sin. Their world will be a world that rightly displays the beauty, power, and wonder of a holy God.

These are the only two possibilities, and we cannot afford to get this wrong. On a matter so crucial, can we really trust that faith is the only thing required of us?

Is faith really **sufficient**?

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. -Eph. 2:1-10

In our sin, we were rightly condemned to death, but God chose to bring us life because he is “rich in mercy.” Faith is not sufficient because it is a good work that we do. Neither our deepest devotions nor our best efforts can undo the sins of our past. In the same way, we are helpless to perfect our own will for the future. Not only is faith in the merciful plan of God sufficient; it’s our only hope. So, faith is sufficient because God is sufficient, and his plans are sufficient, and his promises are sufficient.

What is **God's Plan**?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. -Romans 5:8

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. -John 3:16-18

God knew that we would never be able to save ourselves, so, rather than punishing us with the eternal death our sins deserve, he mercifully sent his son into the world to die in our place. God's son, Jesus, was not sent against his will. He set aside his divine place of worship, humbled himself, and fulfilled the plan of God out of love for us and the God the Father. So, the holy and divine Son of God joined mankind so that he could bridge the gap between a holy God and a sinful people. This is good news! We call this good news the Gospel.

Having faith in the sufficiency of God's plan means that we have faith in the sufficiency of his son, Jesus Christ, to pay for the debt of our sin.

How is **Jesus Christ** able to pay **my debt**?

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. -1 Peter 1:17-21

Jesus was the perfect sacrifice chosen by God for the purpose of justifying us. This was God's plan from the start. The salvation of Christ was the expectation long before Jesus was born.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. -Isaiah 53:10-12

Is there **more?**

There is most certainly more! The death of Jesus for our sins was, for all of mankind, an enormous victory. God's love had inspired him to act on our behalf. In love, Jesus took the punishment for our sins. We can say with the Apostle Paul,

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – I Cor. 15:55-57*

We have no need to fear sin and the death it brings because Jesus not only paid the price of our sin by his death on the cross, but he also defeated death when he was raised to life three days later. This gives us confidence that God's plan is sufficient both to save us and to keep us. Paul expresses his confidence like this,

It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 8:31-39

Is faith simply **believing**?

Yes, we are saved simply by faith, but not by a simple faith. Placing our faith in the work of Jesus is not a one-time event. It's a life-journey. To have faith in the plan of God means to join Him in that plan.

We do this by trusting that he knows best.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. -Romans 12:2

We do this by understanding his glory is greater than our own.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:29-30

Ultimately, we do this by turning away from our own plans to join him in the work of his plan.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. -Mark 8:35

When we place our faith in him by turning our lives over to him, he adopts us into his family.

What is this **family**?

In short, this family is every person who puts their faith in God's good plan to justify his creation. This family spans the globe. We call this family the church.

God's church represents his good plan to the world. In the Bible, we are given instructions on how we can best represent him.

What is **baptism**?

Baptism is the Bible's instructed method of showing the world that we have placed our faith in God, that he has forgiven our sins, and that we have begun our life-long journey of following him.

In some forms of Christianity, it is believed that parents should express their faith in God and their hope for their own children by having their babies baptized. While this is a nice sentiment, it is not the way God describes baptism in the Bible. For this reason, our church believes that the most appropriate way to begin our life-long journey of faith in the plan of God is to practice baptism as God planned.

Baptism is a one-time event that declares the beginning of our journey. However, infant baptism is a sign of hope that parents have placed over their children. It is not the same as a personal declaration of faith. This is why many in our church who were baptized as infants have chosen to be baptized again as a personal act of obedience and declaration of faith.

What is **communion**?

Like baptism, communion is the church's way of declaring our faith to the world. Whereas baptism signifies the start of the journey, communion signifies our continuation on that journey. Whereas baptism is an individual expression of faith, communion is the baptized family of God coming together to show that our faith remains.

What is **church membership**?

It is true that many choose not to join a local church because they feel that it is enough to be part of the greater family. Again, we believe that this is not the plan that God has in mind. The Bible shows the local church as a group of people committed to fellowshiping and worshipping together.

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
Acts 2: 42*

They loved and served each other.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing of honor. Romans 12:10

And they were organized for ministry.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

As the family of God, our relationships with each other should represent the same sort of mutual commitment that a healthy and vibrant sibling relationship would express. We do this, in part, by joining together in membership.

Should I join **this church**?

I would love to think that every believer in this city would choose to be a part of our church, but that is not always best. Here are some questions you should ask of any church you would consider joining.

1. Do they place a high priority on the Bible as God's Word?
2. Do they teach that mankind is separated by God because of sin?
3. Do they teach that mankind is saved from sin by grace through faith?
4. Do they ask people to lay aside their own aspirations for the plans of God?
5. Is this a place that is eager to teach me the truth of God from the Bible?
6. Is this place eager to help me find ways to join in the fellowship and the work that comes with being family?
7. Are the Pastors and Elders trustworthy and faithful? *
8. Are my honest questions welcomed by leadership?
9. Do I agree with the teachings of this church on matters of faith that I consider to be significant?
10. Is this church eager to have me?
11. Is the leadership of the church expressing discernment and care for both me and the church as they interview me for membership?

*See 1Tim 3; 2 Tim 3-4; 1Peter 5