

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH

In the early 1990's, Michael Spencer, youth pastor at Aboite Missionary Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and his friend, Lon Diehl, began to talk about the idea of someday starting a new church body in the Fort Wayne area. Their musings eventually led to long hours in front of a computer screen spread over the course of a few years, planning and charting the direction for a church that existed only in their wildest dreams. Michael, the leader of a successful youth ministry, longed to step into a more senior role, preaching and discipling adults. Finally, in July 1993, Church of the Lamb began as a daughter church of the Aboite Missionary Church with a membership consisting of the Spencer family, the Diehl family, and Doug and Barbara Dayton.

From its inception, Church of the Lamb had as its trademarks an unwavering view of Scripture, a heart for ministry (especially to the mentally challenged) and social activism, particularly in the pro-life defense of the unborn.

As time passed, Church of the Lamb grew numerically, eventually outgrowing its first meeting place, the home of Doug and Barb Dayton. For nearly a year, the Southwest Conservation Club then became home to the growing congregation as each Sunday was shared with deer and elk heads on the wall and the bingo machine stored behind the bar.

In December 1994, the congregation moved to 247 Pearl Street. The building was originally a Cadillac dealership in the 1920's and prior to the extensive remodeling done by many volunteers, it housed a Christian-themed coffee house used as an outreach by Broadway Christian Church. With its central location and affordable rent, the two-story brick building served us quite well.

In early 2001, Michael Spencer announced his resignation, as he believed that God was leading him in a different direction and that his time at Church of The Lamb had served its purpose. Later that year he would be diagnosed with an aggressive form of throat cancer that would threaten his life. Fortunately, with God's grace, prayers by people all over the country, and the skill of many doctors in Fort Wayne and Chicago, the cancer was successfully treated and today Michael is cancer-free. He is currently serving as a pastor in Celina, Ohio.

Meanwhile, Church of the Lamb embraced a new leader, one of its own elders, Wendell Brane. Brane was a former pastor and had led a local pro-life organization. Under his leadership, the church has continued to grow due to its fine biblical studies in theology, hermeneutics, and apologetics. We have also been fortunate to host several fine guest speakers over the last several years, including William Lane Craig of Campus Crusade for Christ, Greg Koukl of Stand To Reason, Scott Klusendorf of Life Training Institute, New Testament scholars Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary and Ben Witherington III of Asbury Theological Seminary.

As the weekly attendance grew, the Pearl Street location began getting cramped with nursery and Sunday School space in short supply. As a result, a building was purchased in the spring of 2006 at 2715 American Way on the south side of the city. Previously home to a vending machine company, the facility was completely gutted and remodeled throughout the next year and a half, with the vast majority of the work performed by volunteer labor. Countless hours were logged by members and non-members alike, transforming a cold, stark warehouse into a warm and inviting church building that provides more space than the previous one. Our first Sunday in the new facility was September 23, 2007.

2007 also brought about several other changes to Church of The Lamb; the most obvious of which was a change in our name. Church of The Lamb became Trinity Evangelical Church: a name that we believe is a more accurate reflection of our core beliefs and values. Our youth ministry was the source of another change in 2007. Shawn Meyer, who had been our Youth Minister for a number of years, left to once again partner with Michael Spencer in Celina, Ohio. Although Shawn will be missed, we were blessed to be able to hire Seth Drayer as our new Youth Minister. Seth has become an immediate hit with the teens by blending sound teaching, a servant's heart and a keen interest in the lives of the kids under his care.

Trinity Evangelical Church continues to aspire to provide its congregation with solid biblical training in order that each member may personally mature in their faith and be prepared to defend and discuss their beliefs with those they meet in school, the workplace or the public square.

– Lon Diehl

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

It is virtually impossible to adequately define a philosophy of ministry in one or two statements. There are a number of underlying concepts and principles that contribute to a church's understanding of its purpose and mission. Our attempt here will be simply to highlight those positions that serve as a major influence upon the way we approach the local body, the church universal, and the world around us.

Many times, an effective way to explain something is by comparison, a tool that we will incorporate here to highlight some of our distinctives. Our attempt in this is not to be critical of others, but to simply show how we may be different than what you may have been accustomed to, and the reasons for these differences.

Many evangelical churches today have philosophies of ministry that are dependent upon the latest fads of church growth or the newest techniques in evangelism. The sole reason these churches exist is to get unbelievers to attend church or to evangelize the

unsaved. This is certainly to confuse one aspect of mission with the general ministry of the church. According to Scripture, the church is the gathering of believers. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, even seems to suggest that unbelievers present in the service would be an unusual or irregular event, certainly not a goal or the central focus of ministry.

The biblical pattern is that believers gather together to grow and mature, to worship God, to encourage one another, and to prepare to reach out to an unbelieving world. As C. S. Lewis so astutely observed:

"In enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going."

Without pressing the battle metaphor too literally, this seems to be a very good picture of what the church should be. One might say that we gather together privately to receive instructions from our Lord, to encourage each other, to bandage up our wounds, and to return to the mission field prepared to engage the enemy.

The ministry of the local church extends beyond its walls and has ripples that affect both the church universal and the world at large. Perhaps the best way to unpack a biblical philosophy of ministry is to view the church and its purpose as a three-tiered structure.

1. TIER ONE: THE LOCAL BODY

We unabashedly believe that the primary focus of ministry of the local church is the growth and maturing of the members and believers who regularly attend. This is clearly the conviction of the early believers (Acts 2:42-47). Scripture speaks of many ways in which this emphasis is worked out in practice:

A. The mutual encouragement of believers

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching. —Heb. 10:25

Here the writer of Hebrews speaks of the central need for believers to gather together, encourage, and uplift each other. To the author, it is a crucial element to keep the Christian from losing their moorings or being discouraged and drifting away to other things.

B. Equipping believers for ministry

To prepare God's people for works of service...the whole body grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. —Eph. 4:11-16

Paul here gives a clear statement of the church's purpose as that of equipping the church to be servants. This is seen as a preparation of the whole group through growth and mutual edification.

C. Teaching and instruction

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching... —Heb. 13:9

He [the elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. —Titus 1:9

Less emphasized in the evangelical community today is the need of the local church to teach sound doctrine. Even a casual perusal of the New Testament will yield a clear emphasis on teaching sound doctrine and being able to discern and refute false doctrine. Too often today, church is a gathering together with those who enjoy similar styles of worship or social interaction. Yet without a clear standard of Christian teaching, many are embracing heresies that are outside the pale of orthodoxy. While it is true that doctrine can be divisive, a shared body of beliefs is actually the glue which holds the church together. Without this we have nothing.

See also 1 John 4:1, Jude 3, Acts 20:28-31, 1 Tim. 4:13-16, 2 Tim. 2:15 and 4:2, and Matt. 28:20.

D. Worship in spirit and in truth

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. —Col. 3:15

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Eph. 5:19-20

These verses remind us of the important place worship is given in our common gatherings. This worship is based in gratitude for who God is and what He has done. Notice too, that in true corporate worship we not only speak to God, but we speak to each other. Good corporate worship will contain both vertical and horizontal elements.

E. Ministry by all

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. —1 Cor. 12:4-6

...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. —1 Cor. 12:25-26

This entire 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians is perhaps the clearest among many which tell us that the ministry of the local body is not just the realm of the clergy, but belongs to each member. Each individual member is gifted by God to contribute to the common good. Through these abilities we all encourage, edify, and serve the others in the assembly.

See also 1 Peter 4:10-11, Rom. 12:3-8, and Eph. 4:14-16.

F. Sanctification

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. —Eph. 4:15-16

...Teach them to obey my commandments... —Matt. 29:20

Our ongoing growth and discipleship was never intended to take place in isolation, apart from the local church body. This becomes quite apparent from the various directives we are given in the New Testament: Build each other up (1 Thes. 5:11); confess your sins to each other (James 5:16); spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24); Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom (Col. 3:16); and pray for each other (James 5:16). So important is this ministry of nurturing growth and sanctification that God has provided specific instructions on how to deal with members who refuse (Matt. 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5).

2. TIER TWO: THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

In addition to this primary focus, a secondary tier of concern is for the church universal. Unfortunately, this is an area of ministry seldom taught on in evangelical circles. Yet the scriptures are clear that we are obligated to those believers outside our own local body in a number of ways.

A. Unity in mission

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. — 3 John 5-8

There are numerous passages which speak of a local body's relationship to other believers elsewhere in the world. In this passage, the author writes to commend the local church for its support to brothers, who, though strangers to them, were in need. In a contemporary setting this might involve support for those doing work in missions or relief work, which go beyond the local assembly. It would also involve worthy projects that are supported by the wider Christian community.

B. Equal concern

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. — 1 Cor. 12: 25-26

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. — Heb. 13:3

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. — Acts 11:29-30

This identification with suffering or rejoicing brothers and sisters elsewhere reminds us that we are part of a bigger body of Christ and are expected to share with their joy and sorrow, as we remember their needs and celebrate their triumphs. This is especially important in the case of believers suffering persecution throughout the world. It is part of our ministry to hold them in prayer and provide what material assistance we can.

C. Preserving sound doctrine

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. — 2 Tim. 2:2

We don't usually see this as a ministry for the church universal, but it is a very important element nonetheless. As we train believers to understand and hold solid doctrine, we contribute to the well-being of the universal church by passing on to the next generation individuals who are solid in truth and able to understand and defend the orthodox faith.

3. THE THIRD TIER: THE WORLD

Finally, we believe that the church has a ministry to the world at large through *evangelism* (Matt. 28:19-20), *defending the defenseless* (Prov. 31:8-9), *holding leaders and individuals up in prayer* (1 Tim. 2:1-4), and *serving as salt and light to a culture apart from Christ* (Matt. 5:13).

PHILOSOPHY OF WORSHIP

Too often we take our ideas about church from the subculture around us. Instead of asking ourselves, “what is a church supposed to be, according to scripture,” we look around to see what other churches are doing and chart our course from there. This is also true of our attitudes about worship. By taking our focus off of our proper authority and substituting a host of false values, we tend to get bogged down in side issues and drift farther away from our true course. So we end up debating style, mode, instrumentation and other minor issues, looking to arbitrate even these problems by our limited cultural-historical experience or worse, mere personal preference.

This does not mean that we should be advocating a retreat to some primitive and basic pattern in our church, as if only those activities specifically mentioned in scripture are allowed and all other practices or activities are forbidden. Instead we look to the underlying attitudes and basic definitions established by the Word of God and test any additions, developments or changes by those standards. The starting point must always be the Biblical idea of worship.

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF WORSHIP

The English word “worship” comes down to us from an older form of the word “worthship.” It means to ascribe worth to someone or something. One immediately thinks of Rev 4:11, “You are worthy, Oh Lord, to receive glory and honor and power.” Scripture constantly reminds us that no false God, no man, or any created thing is worthy of worship, but God alone.

In the original biblical languages, words for worship give further insight into this concept in ways that we have often forgotten in our own contemporary concepts of worship. A handful of Hebrew words are translated into the English word “worship.” The most frequently used is “shachah,” which means to bow down or do homage. This includes not just bowing down, but to some degree, submission to a superior.

There are also a number of Greek words that can be translated into English as “worship.” Two are of special importance to our discussion. The most important and the most frequently used is the word “proskuneo,” which is literally “to kiss toward,” again reflecting the idea of showing reverence and allegiance.

A second word often used is “latreuo,” which carries the foundational idea of serving or ministering. The emphasis in this case is on our action in obedience and not on the narrow sense of a time of worship set apart from life. To worship God in this sense is to be His servant, to do His bidding. Clearly this involves a lifetime and not just a few moments on a Sunday. A Christian's whole life is lived as a prayer to God. This word also reminds us that worship can be used two ways: a narrowly defined time or action,

or the broader understanding of all of life. To forget this is to misunderstand the basic Biblical idea. As David Peterson has observed in his study of worship:

“Although some of Scripture's terms for worship may refer to specific gestures of homage, rituals, or priestly ministrations, worship is most fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration. Consequently, in both Testaments it is often shown to be a personal and moral fellowship with God relevant to every sphere of life.”

THE SUNDAY GATHERING

The Sunday assembly of the saints is not a worship service in the narrow sense of the word “worship.” It comes as a shock to most people today, but the New Testament nowhere refers to the regular gathering as a worship service. British New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall has written:

This vocabulary (worship service) is not applied in any specific way to Christian meetings...Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them...to sum up what goes on in a Christian meeting as being specifically for the purpose of “worship” is without New Testament precedent. “Worship is not an umbrella-term for what goes on when Christians gather together.”

This is of course counter to what we have experienced in the language of the church today. It is important to note that the New Testament church was not modeled after the temple worship. The temple was the place where God's elect met God, whose presence was represented by the Holy of Holies and they then responded in sacrifice and praise. In the New Testament the meeting place is in Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The particular location is unimportant, we can meet God wherever we are without seeking his presence in a special place. Nor is there any longer necessity for sacrifice, Jesus is our sacrifice. As a consequence our gatherings are not restricted to the narrowly defined worship. The New Testament writers speak of church gatherings primarily in terms of edification, instruction, prayer, ministering to one another, encouragement and celebration of the ordinances.

The model for New Testament gatherings became that of the synagogue, the place which was called “the house of instruction.” Comparing first century synagogue meetings with first century church gatherings shows remarkable similarity. Both were made up of the basic elements of prayer, scripture reading, instructional time and music. While neither gathering is typified by the expression “worship service,” worship in the broader sense, and also to a lesser degree in the narrower sense, does take place.

But we must be careful to avoid the trap of seeing the meeting alone as constituting worship in the narrowest sense or the equally errant thought of dividing the morning activities into worship activities and non-worship activities.

WORSHIP TIME IS NOT LIMITED TO PRAISE SINGING AND PRAYER

Too often we talk of a “worship team” leading worship, then after worship, the Pastor comes and teaches on the Bible. All of this has the aroma of platonic thought, the idea that particular spiritual activities are on a higher plane than more mundane tasks such as instruction and study of God's word.

In the early church, a central emphasis was the reading and exposition of the scriptures. Only later did it shift from the word to the sacraments, following a more mystical bent. The protestant reformation again emphasized the centrality of the word.

Two of the earliest glimpses we have of a regular church gathering are Ephesians 5: 15 - 21 and Colossians 3: 15 – 16. In both cases the singing of “hymns, psalms and spiritual songs,” involves an instructional or edifying element. We are to sing songs to God, but in so doing speak to each other.

If we compare the two passages, we see there a direct relationship to being filled with the Spirit (Eph.) and dwelling richly in the Word of Christ (Col.). There is no separation between activities of “worship” and activities of instruction; they are the same.

WORSHIP IS A SUBJECTIVE RESPONSE TO OBJECTIVE TRUTH

A reason why we make a strange separation between worship and instruction is that we tend to think of the sermon as a mental process and worship as an emotional or spiritual process. This is often reinforced by a horrible misreading of the Ephesians passage:

5:15-20 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is frequently used to suggest that worship is primarily emotional, that rather than be drunk on wine, we should get “drunk” on the Holy Spirit. But notice that the entire paragraph is a series of contrasts: unwise vs. wise, foolish vs. understanding and drunk vs. being filled with the Spirit.

The picture of worship given here is not that of unrestrained emotion over static truth; instead what is urged is a wise, informed life style, filled with the Spirit which brings self-control. It leads to a thankfulness for who God is and what He has done for His people.

The truth is that worship involves all of man, not just parts of man. It is based upon God's revelation of himself, and therefore involves content and propositional truth. We should think of worship as a subjective response to objective truth about God.

Theologians speak of this in terms of "revelation and response." In other words, we learn about God and His works from His revelation and then respond in an appropriate way. We bow before Him and follow His instruction. The starting point is truth: content about God.

EMPHASIS MUST BE ON GOD AND NOT PERFORMANCE

If this indeed is our starting point, then it follows that we must always keep the focus on God and His truth and not on style or performance. While we should strive always for excellence, what is excellent must not be judged by our culture's definitions of style, but by fidelity to the truth of scripture. From this flow some specific applications.

First, we must not confuse preaching with oration, as we are prone to do in evangelicalism. The expression "apt to teach" has more to do with the equipping of the person to encourage with sound doctrine and refute false doctrine than it does with mastering rhetorical style. In our day, the test too often is whether the person can entertain an audience and inspire them.

Secondly, the emphasis of our music, as we "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," is to be on the content of what is sung and not on the emotional response of the hearer. Music can be both an aid to remembering as well as a way to manipulate. It is sometimes a fine line between the two. St. Augustine relates his struggle between these two aspects in his classic Confessions:

Sometimes, I seem to myself to give them more respect than is fitting, when I see that our minds are more devoutly and earnestly inflamed in piety by the holy words when they are sung than when they are not. And I recognize that all the diverse affections of our spirits have their appropriate measures in the voice and song, to which they are stimulated by I know not what secret correlation. But the pleasures of my flesh – to which the mind ought never to be surrendered nor by them enervated – often beguile me while physical sense does not attend on reason, to follow her patiently, but having once gained entry to help reason, it strives to run on before her and be her leader. Thus in these things I sin unknowingly, but I come to know it afterward.

. . . I am inclined – though I pronounce no irrevocable opinion on the subject – to approve of the use of singing in the church, so that by the delights of the ear the weaker minds may be stimulated to a devotional mood. Yet when it happens that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned wickedly, and then I would rather not have heard the singing. See now what a condition I am in! Weep with me, and weep for me, those of you who can so control your inward feelings that good results always come forth.

Very few of us struggle with worship with anything approaching the depths of Augustine. Too often if the tune is catchy, we are happy to give it a whole hearted endorsement, no matter what the words say. This has lead to a great corpus of Christian music that is doctrinally and biblically unsound, panders to excessive sentimentality, or elevates ourselves and our feelings to center stage. It is indicative of our age when the major discussions of music in the church center around questions of style---chorus or hymn--- instead of the real issue which is of solid content extolling God. Just as we are careful of what we teach from the pulpit, we should be careful what we sing and what we pray.

CONCLUSION

As we strive to keep these goals, we recognize that our efforts will not be perfect and pray for God's protection and grace. May we develop a passion for God founded in who He is and respond in gratitude for what He has done.

STANDING FOR LIFE IN A CULTURE OF DEATH

Trinity Evangelical Church stands solidly and passionately in the long tradition of the Christian church in respecting the sanctity of human life. Scriptures are clear in their teaching that all humans have value because they bear the image of God. One of the most odious sins in the Old Testament was shedding innocent blood. To allow innocent blood to be shed in the land was to pollute the whole nation.

Our modern western culture is permeated with the shedding of innocent blood. Both science and scripture agree that when humans conceive, they conceive a human being. Yet, each day we witness the killing of these humans on the basis of convenience, arbitrary standards of achievement, or utility. To remain silent is not an option; we must work to eliminate these practices by whatever means are ethically proper.

In our understanding of the scripture's prohibition of murder by abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia we stand in the unwavering tradition of the Christian church. In the early centuries of the church, believers laid their lives on the line over this issue by rescuing babies that had been abandoned. In Roman law, if the father determined that a baby was unwanted, he had the absolute right to abandon the baby, leaving it to die of exposure. Christians interfered with this "right" and because of their understanding of human value they rescued these abandoned and unwanted infants, often facing severe penalties when caught.

From the earliest Christian writings on, tradition clearly and unequivocally stands opposed to infanticide and abortion. The Didache, one of the earliest instructional books of the late first or early second century, teaches:

Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not corrupt boys, do not
fornicate, do not steal; do not practice magic, do not go in for sorcery, do
not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.

To this can be added many other Christian voices such as Caesarius of Arles, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexander, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine.

Unfortunately, in our day we have seen the fall of this Christian principle as our country has reduced the value of human life to utility. Abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia are commonplace and being human is to be as disposable as fast food trash.

We hold that every Bible-believing Christian has a duty under God to stand opposed to this shedding of innocent blood. We encourage our members to become informed, to speak out against the slaughter, to write letters, to pray, to vote pro-life, to protest, to dissuade those entering abortion clinics, and perhaps even to consider non-violent civil disobedience. To remain silent or uninvolved would be to commit sin in the face of the great atrocity of our age.

HONORING THE TRUTH WHILE MAINTAINING A SPIRIT OF UNITY

Are there times when we should put our doctrinal differences to the side for the sake of fellowship? Are there times when we should place a higher regard on truth, forcing a break? How do we balance the two?

There are two extremes that we must be careful to avoid: Hyper-ecumenicalism and separatism. The one sees doctrine as an obstacle to unity and not as important. The other holds that there can be no unity unless there is absolute agreement on everything.

Keeping truth and unity in proper tension requires an understanding of the difference between those things that are **essential**, those things that are **secondary**, and those things that are **disputable**. Augustine said, "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, charity. In all things, love."

THE ESSENTIALS

The essentials of the faith primarily deal with *whom* it is we worship. To deny any of these core truths is to be guilty of heresy, for the one being worshiped is a false god. These truths serve as the foundational beliefs of our faith. They are "non-negotiables." They are limited in number and were worked out for the most part in the first five centuries of the church. We find them articulated in the ancient creeds (beliefs that have been held by all Christians at all times).

Examples include: The true and complete humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ; the Trinity; the personhood of the Holy Spirit; and salvation by grace through faith. Agreement on the attributes of God are also critical for genuine unity: His omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, immutability, eternal nature, mercy, love, justice, and so forth.

If someone continues to deny an essential truth after it has been explained, Christian fellowship must be broken. This does not mean that the person cannot remain a friend, or that all love is to stop. It means that the person cannot be regarded as a brother or sister in the Lord. Sharing in prayer and worship would be a contradiction. In Christianity, our fellowship with each other is based upon our fellowship with God. If there is no agreement on whom He is, there cannot be any genuine fellowship (the best we could do is to pretend). But by pretending, we act as if God is not that important.

The error of ecumenicalism is to consider very little, if anything, an essential of the faith. The error of separatism is just the opposite, making virtually everything an essential.

SECONDARY DOCTRINES

Church history is filled with spirited battles over secondary doctrines. Greater minds than ours have debated such controversial doctrines for centuries, leaving us many times with good arguments for both sides. However, there seldom is a middle ground, and because truth is antithetical, one side will be in error. The error is generally due to a misinterpretation of one or more passages of Scripture, and/or a flaw in logic.

There is a difference between heresy and error. Heresy is a denial of an essential doctrine for it is a direct attack upon who God is. Error, on the other hand, is a denial of a secondary doctrine. Nevertheless, error has serious and widespread ramifications and we should be willing to refute it with great vigor and persistence. On the other hand, error does not justify any break of Christian fellowship.

Examples of debated secondary doctrines include: Sequence of events surrounding the second coming of Jesus; the use of charismatic gifts in the modern church; Calvinism vs. Arminianism; infant baptism; views of the Lord's Supper; the role of women in the church; and issues relating to church government.

These and others all have a certain *theological weight* that shouldn't be passed over. They are very, very important and can often affect our understanding of other doctrines. Yet, division or separation on secondary beliefs cannot be justified because there is no heresy, no attack on the definition of God Himself.

DISPUTABLE MATTERS

There are many issues that Christians unnecessarily fight over, even resulting in church splits and permanently broken relationships. Disputable matters have no great theological depth, but deal primarily with style, preferences, tastes, and even matters of personal conscience.

Some examples include: Music style in worship; dress codes at church; women in the work force; home schooling vs. public schooling, and issues dealing with personal pietism (movies, television, playing cards, drinking alcoholic beverages, etc.).

In Romans 14, Paul scolds both those who eat meat offered to idols and those who don't for trying to impose their personal convictions on one another. It appears that both parties were able to argue their positions theologically. However, in the end it became a matter of conscience, not revelation. On such disputable matters where the Bible does not speak clearly, one is free to practice according to his own conscience, but must not make it a *test of faith* for others.

YOUTH GROUP

The purpose of Trinity Evangelical Church's ministry to teens may be expressed in three objectives. First is the goal of partnership with parents. Youth group is not a substitute for parents' discipleship efforts with their teenagers. Youth group is a supplement. Thus, we encourage parents to communicate with us any special goals, challenges, or concerns they have with respect to their children.

Second, Trinity Evangelical Church's ministry to teens is serious about biblical training and equipping. We study the Bible along with apologetics and theology. We are intentional about giving teens the tools to answer objections like "Doesn't the Bible contradict itself?" or "Hasn't science disproved God?" or "Isn't it narrow-minded for Jesus to claim to be the only way to heaven?" Too many teenagers grow up in the church, are entertained in youth group, and then go off to college and throw away their faith. Some studies indicate that as many as 8 out of 10 incoming freshmen who identify themselves as Christians abandon their faith by the time they graduate. This is because many churches simply are not training their young people. We recognize the problem and are working hard to train our teens. Learning God's truth trumps fun and games in our youth group.

We also place great priority on the overall body of our group. This is our third objective: to build a community of young believers seeking to honor God and serve together. The projects we pursue have not only the goal of service in mind—such as defending the unborn or reaching out to the neglected—but also allow for teens to fortify their relationships with each other as a unit. Priority is always given to the group. We have a wide range of ages—some of our members are thirteen years old while others are preparing for college—yet we strive to bring all together. We learn together and we serve together. Because of this priority to the group, we do not officially recognize dating or courtship relationships at youth group meetings or events. The question of whether or not teens may date is an issue for parents—not for the youth minister or sponsors. However, dating/courtship interaction, such as physical affection or exclusivity, is not permitted at youth group events. We seek to make this a community in which all teens are welcome, and thus we prohibit behavior which would harm or be distracting to the overall goals of the group.

If there be peer pressure here, we want it to be the positive pressure which influences teens to submit to the Holy Spirit and live in a manner consistent with the Bible. Therefore, teens should be prepared not only to be encouraged but also challenged by what they learn and experience as a part of our youth group. We live in a society which expects very little of our youth. We seek to dispose of that mentality and call our teens to rise to the challenge in a culture growing in hostility to the gospel.

MEMBERSHIP

The practice of churches maintaining a membership role is not as common as it once was. Though there are probably a number of reasons for this, I would suggest three as standing out: 1) A reaction to denominationalism, where churches are pressured to boost membership numbers; 2) a continuing decline in biblical ecclesiology in Evangelical churches; and 3) a rising influence of Platonism which views the church solely as a “spiritual” body, and therefore earthly organization is downplayed. Though each of these merit a thorough response, my intention here is to simply provide a general overview of our church’s reason for membership.

Membership, as practiced by TEC, has nothing to do with “numbers” or sending impressive reports to a denominational headquarters. It comes from an understanding of what the New Testament teaches regarding the relationship between “elders” and “saints” (church leaders and parishioners). Sadly, this understanding has been lost in recent decades.

Here is a short sampling of passages that address the nature of this relationship.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

1 Peter 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Notice that both the elders and the people have obligations to each other.

Church leaders are to “work hard” in their managing of a congregation. They are called upon not only to teach but also to admonish, which implies accountability. They are to direct the affairs of the church and protect her people from false doctrine. They are given the charge to shepherd and oversee the flock. Their diligence in all of this will be

something for which they will stand before God and answer. Therefore, they need to know who is under their care, for whom they are responsible. Simply put, the practice of membership provides this.

Likewise, the people are to “respect” the elders, “submit” to them, and “not be a burden.” They are called upon to “hold them in the highest regard in love” and even “obey them.” For a Christian to fulfill such mandates, he needs to be under the authority of an eldership. And, given the magnitude of choices today in any given community, he must decide *which eldership*.

Basically, the practice of membership establishes a clear identification and defines the actual congregation who is under the care of the elders. Membership is also a means by which a parishioner grants permission to the church leaders to exercise oversight over his/her life. This accountability is something that cannot be assumed; it needs to be clearly agreed upon.

Today, in our consumer mentality, where people just jump from one church to the next, the pastor and the elders need to know whom it is they are actually *pastoring* and *eldering*. Who is part of our church body, and who is not? For whom, exactly, are we responsible? The early church wasn't faced with those problems. Christians did not have 40 different churches of 40 different denominations at Ephesus or Corinth or Thessalonica from which to choose. Membership has now become necessary to properly identify to which eldership the believer is relating.

Though the analogy cannot be pushed too far, membership is similar to a marriage license. If a couple simply lives together with no formal commitment, then they are left to assume and speculate each other's *standing*. Yet, this is how many Christians approach their church involvement. The growing trend today is, *the less defined, the better*. This lack of commitment, and willingness to clearly identify with a local church, is a large reason why we are in the state we are in. Even as unmarried couples try to *play house*, so too, many Christians try to *play church*. There is no accountability. No true discipleship. No clear understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities. As a result, many of the New Testament mandates are either ignored or minimized.

TEC welcomes visitors and potential members to participate in all our services and events. We encourage such folks to take their time, 6 months to a year, to see if they would like to join the church, which we hope they will. During this time they are encouraged to learn about our congregation by interacting with the pastor, elders, and church members. If, after ample opportunity to consider our church, there is no interest in joining, then we will ask the person to consider another congregation. This is because of our conviction that every believer needs to be rightly related to a local church body, whether it be ours or another.

A membership handbook, which outlines our various policies and procedures, along with our constitution and by-laws, is available upon request.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

The Scriptures, as found in both the Old and New Testaments, serve as our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. We hold to the sacred doctrines of orthodox Christianity as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds (see below). We also recognize the Chalcedon Statement of Faith, the Athanasian Creed, and the Evangelical Affirmations (available on our website).

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God almighty and in Christ Jesus, his only Son, our Lord. Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried and the third day rose from the dead. Who ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father whence he comes to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, the life everlasting.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and comes again with glory to judge the living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshiped together and glorified together, who spoke through the prophets.

And in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins. We look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.