

Life's Ultimate Questions

What We Believe

Everyone has a “worldview.” It is the framework we use to make sense out of life. Every worldview answers seven basic questions: How do we know? Who is God? Who are we? What is our problem? What is our purpose? What happens when we die?

This document is a representative, not an exhaustive, summary of key biblical beliefs that we hold.

How do we know?

The Bible:

- Is inspired by God.
- Is truth without any mixture of error.
- Is the ultimate guide for faith and practice.

2 Timothy 3:15 And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalms 119:160 All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Who is God?

Father:

- He is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, creator and ruler.
- He is holy, just, and loving.
- He exists equally in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1 Corinthians 8:6 Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Isaiah 40:10, 22 ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

Jesus:

- Is the eternal, sinless and only son of God.
- Was made the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross.
- Rose from the dead and ascended to heaven where he reigns with God the Father.
- Will return to earth to end history and begin the eternal plan of God.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Colossians 1:15-16 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Hebrews 1:1-3 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Acts 1:9-11 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Holy Spirit:

- Is eternally co-equal with the God the Father and the Son.
- He makes people aware of their need for God.
- He lives in every Christian from the moment they are saved.
- He disperses spiritual gifts to members of Christ's church.
- He guides, comforts, and empowers believers to live a life that pleases God.

John 16:5-15 "Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" ⁶ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. ⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. ¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Ephesians 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Who are we and what is our problem?

Created in God's image/Sinful:

- We have been created in the image of God.
- We are unique in all of creation-therefore deserve love, dignity, and respect.
- We have tremendous potential for good.
- We have all chosen to rebel against God's desire for our lives-the Bible calls this "sin."
- We have been separated from God because of our willful rebellion.
- We will each answer to God at the Final Judgment as to how he or she responded to God's provision for salvation.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Acts 17:26-27 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in 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. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

What is our solution?

Salvation:

- Moves us from slavery to sin and spiritual death to a new and real life in Christ.
- Is a free gift; it cannot be earned nor taken away.
- Was made possible by Jesus' dying on the cross on our behalf.
- Is received by a personal faith in Jesus Christ accompanied by true repentance-choosing Christ as the Lord of your life.
- Begins the moment we commit our life to Christ, continues as God grows us to be like him, and will be completed at Christ's return to earth.

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

1 Peter 1:3-9 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is our purpose?

God's Glory revealed in our lives individually and collectively in the local church.

- All things, including all of us, exist for the glory of God.
- He is glorified in us when we delight in him, love him, and obey him.
- His glory is made known through us when we make his love known to others.
- His glory is revealed when we live lives that honor and reflect him.
 - We continually turn away from sin back to God
 - We pursue lives that are holy and pleasing to God
 - We seek to obey God in what he has revealed in his word

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Colossians 3: 5-14 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Ephesians 3:10-11 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What happens after we die?

Heaven or Hell:

- Those who have believed the gospel and have been born again will live forever with God.
- Those who have not believed the gospel will be eternally separated from God.

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Hebrews 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Matthew 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Other Theological Beliefs & Practices at River

We consider the following topics to fall in the category of “practically important,” but not “doctrinally essential.” We believe the doctrinal topics listed in the previous section are essential for biblical Christians. The topics in this appendix are of great importance for the Church, but authentic Christians can disagree on them. They are important because they directly impact how church life is carried out at the local level. The following describes our beliefs and practices at River on these topics. There are other doctrinal matters that we would consider neither essential nor of great practical importance. One example of this would be the different views of eschatology (the return of Christ).

Church Ordinances and Organization

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Communion):

We believe there are only two ordinances given to the church. An ordinance is a Christian rite, associated with tangible elements (water; bread and juice), that is celebrated by the church. They are to be observed by the church when the church gathers for corporate worship.¹ Neither Baptism nor the Lord’s Supper add anything as to merit salvation. However, both should be viewed as obedient expressions of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of those who have been born again. Both acts are visible proclamations of the gospel.

Baptism: Baptism is an ordinance instituted by Christ for people who offer a credible profession of faith in him and who, in obedience to his command, are baptized. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which signifies a believer’s union with Christ. It signifies the believer’s death to sin, union with Christ, the burial of the old life, and resurrection to walk in the newness of life in Christ Jesus. Baptism is the church’s act. The repentant believer publicly bears witness to Christ, while the church bears witness to the visible faith of the baptized. Baptism is the initiatory rite of the new covenant. As such, baptism is a prerequisite for church membership.²

The Lord’s Supper: The Lord’s Supper (communion) is a symbolic act observed in the gathered worship of the church whereby the church partakes of bread and the fruit of the vine testifying of Christ’s saving work on the cross and in anticipation of his second coming. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim Christ’s atoning death, we are comforted by the remembrance of our forgiveness in Christ through faith, and we are reminded of our union with Christ and with each other. While baptism is the initiatory rite of the new covenant, the Lord’s Supper is the ongoing rite for those who belong to the new covenant. The new covenant is the promise that God will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those whose hearts are turned toward Him. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, and His death on the cross is the basis of the promise.³ As our local church has visiting believers from other churches, we invite other baptized believers from gospel-believing churches to share in the celebration of the table.⁴ The Bible does not provide explicit instruction on how often the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated. As a matter of prudence, churches should celebrate it frequently.⁵ However, “frequently” does not necessitate weekly observance.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:33–34

² Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 8:38; 10:47–48; 16:32–33; 18:7–8; Romans 6:1–4; Colossians 2:12

³ Luke 22:20

⁴ Matthew 26:26–30; Luke 22:14–23; Mark 14:22–26; Acts 2:41–42; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 21; 11:17–32; 1 John 1:7

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:26

It seems the Bible gives latitude for the local church to determine how often they partake--whether, for example, quarterly, monthly, or weekly. Frequency is not the heart of the matter, but rather the heart of the matter is the manner in which we partake, in reverence, love, and gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

Women in the church

One of the tasks of the church is to faithfully reflect upon and apply Scripture to all areas of life, including what the Bible says about men and women and how they operate within the church. This brief description is limited to describing how women and men function within the church, not in marriage. We must be careful to not wrongly apply scripture that is intended to describe how men and women relate in marriage to the larger topic of women in the church; while there may be some overlap, there are also clear differences.

At River, we describe our position on women in the church as “balanced” or “generous” complementarians. Women and men are both created in the image of God;⁶ we are absolutely created equal, male and female,⁷ in essence, dignity, and value. Both men and women are important and necessary in order for us to collectively live out both the Cultural Mandate⁸ and the Great Commission.⁹ Equality does not indicate sameness; men and women are not interchangeable, but are image bearers who are created to be partners in ministry.

In our church, both men and women serve as small group leaders, worship team members, teachers, and more. Both men and women also pray, make announcements, and, at times, are asked to share during church services. Some qualified men are called to preach and/or serve as an elder; these roles are not open to all men.¹⁰ Our study of scripture leads us to the conclusion that the office of pastor is reserved for qualified men.¹¹ Women do not preach nor hold positions at River that would have spiritual authority over male heads of household.¹² All men do not have authority (spiritual or otherwise) over all women in any situation. Spiritual authority is a position of responsibility and should never be used for personal gain or privilege, but rather should be used to empower those under that authority. In summary, we reiterate that women and men are equally created and valued by God and by the leadership at River and their worth is not based upon nor limited by gender, gifts, or roles. Each role and function within the church is important and valued by God¹³ and should never be used to oppress, degrade, nor abuse either women, men, or children. Whatever transitory roles the Lord may call us to in this lifetime, our goal is to be found faithful – for the glory of God, for the good of others, and for our own good.¹⁴

Church Polity

Polity is a word that means governance. It is important to remember the purpose of the church when considering the church’s governance. The purpose of the church is to make disciples.¹⁵ We believe that the governing structure of the church should serve to enable the church to fulfill its God-given purpose. Ministry is the business of the church, so we seek to maintain a simple “business” structure so that the members of the church might be engaged in ministry.

⁶ Genesis 1:27, 5:1-2

⁷ Galatians 3:28

⁸ Genesis 1:28

⁹ Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁰ Titus 1:5-9

¹¹ 1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹² 1 Timothy 2:12

¹³ Romans 12:3-8

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:27

¹⁵ Matthew. 28:18-20, John 20:21-23;, Ephesians 3:8-11

Jesus is the Head

River is a fully autonomous church. We voluntarily cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention for the purpose of working to fulfill the Great Commission globally, nationally and locally. Our church operates under the Lordship of Christ. Jesus is the head of the church. Jesus functions as the head as each covenant member submits their lives to his Lordship and as members call one another to submit to the Lordship of Christ.¹⁶

Elders

The elders are called out from among the membership of the church and are given spiritual authority by the church to lead the church.¹⁷ The primary preaching and teaching duties, along with significant decision-making, are given to the elders who meet the qualifications in scripture.¹⁸ The River elder team is made up of staff and lay elders. Our Senior Pastor is the head elder. The role of the senior pastor as the head elder is to set the spiritual direction for the church, to lead the elder meetings, and to oversee the overall organizational health of the church.

Deacons

River does not have a deacon structure. The purpose of the deacon in the early church was to fulfill a specific role to care for the needs of the church.¹⁹ The title of deacon is descriptive and not prescriptive, but the function of a deacon is crucial. The function of the deacon at River is filled by the small group leaders. Our small group leaders lead the primary care ministry at River through their personal ministry in small groups.

Members

Each member of the church has responsibility and authority. Their responsibility is obedience to Christ; their authority as covenant brothers and sisters is to call one another to obedience to Christ and submission to the scripture.²⁰ Every member of the church has covenanted together under Christ to be responsible to love one another and, as such, members grant authority to one another to speak the truth in love to one another.²¹

Biblical morality

There are clear moral guidelines outlined in the New Testament that give evidence of a growing relationship with Christ and a healthy relationship with others. While all Christians and all churches are a “work in progress” consistent, unrepentant sin cannot be allowed to continue for those desiring continued membership in the church. Examples of these biblical moral essentials include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sexual sin (heterosexual activity outside of marriage and homosexual activity)
- Clearly illegal behaviors
- Slander, intentionally divisive words and actions

*This list is representative, not exhaustive.

¹⁶ Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, Galatians 6:1-5

¹⁷ Acts 14:23, 1 Peter 5:1-2, 1 Timothy 5:17

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:6-9

¹⁹ Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-12

²⁰ Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2, Galatians 1:8-9

²¹ Romans 13:8, Ephesians 4:15