



WESTRIDGE
CHURCH

POSITION PAPERS

SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

We believe Scripture declares that every person needs to surrender their life to God through Jesus Christ. Nicodemus was a man who faithfully attended church, prayed, memorized scriptures, tithed, fasted, believed in God and acknowledged Jesus as someone sent from God, yet Jesus told him, "You must be born again"! In other words, being a good and religious person doesn't meet the requirements for having a relationship with a holy and righteous God, which is what salvation is all about. Not every encounter with God is a salvation encounter. Some have had a seed conceived in them, and they have called that salvation. When they responded to God's prompting, a seed was planted; but later in their life, an encounter with God resulted in a response where some might say they "totally sold out," "gave up" or "rededicated" their life. That is when a change in their thinking and behavior occurred. Jesus spoke of repentance as involving a change in behavior, and He associated that change with salvation.

We believe that new birth in Christ produces a change. Scripture is clear that we are not saved by what we do because salvation has been provided by Jesus Christ as a free gift which we receive by faith. However, when we receive Christ, it is evidenced by the fruit of change in our thinking and behavior in response to confessing our sin, acknowledging our need for a Savior and accepting Jesus Christ as God's provision for our lost condition.

The answer for those who want to know if they've been born again is found in their response to a simple question, "When you received Christ, was there a change evidenced in your life?" In other words, "When did you stop going your way and start going God's way?" The answer may point to a specific date or to a specific event or to a general point in life where a change was noticed in response to a decision to surrender to God and to accept His provision of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is God's stated desire that no one should spend eternity apart from Him but rather that all should obtain salvation. Scripture is also clear that nothing can separate us from His love.

It is our conviction that when a person has been truly born again to new life in Christ, that person's relationship with God is eternally secure and His love for us is without question. As a loving Father, He disciplines disobedience and brings correction through a variety of means, but He never leaves us, rejects us or withdraws His promise of eternity with Him.

ISSUES OF CONCERN AND PRACTICE

1. Once a person has received Christ, evidenced by fruit of changed behavior in their life, they maintain intimacy of relationship with God through obedience, pursuit and service to God. When intimacy is lost through sin or neglect, it does not require a person to be "saved" again, although it does involve repentance for restored intimacy with God.
2. Because salvation is afforded through Christ's work on the cross, water baptism isn't necessary for a person to be saved. However, water baptism is an association with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It symbolizes the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new man in Christ. Baptism is a command for believers modeled by Jesus through His own baptism and is a necessary step of obedience for continued growth in Christ. It is not necessary for church membership, but we encourage all believers to be water baptized after salvation.
3. Every person is born with a sin nature and cannot produce the righteousness required by God no matter how diligent their efforts. This reality forms the basis of our need for Christ. As such, we do not

believe in the inherent goodness of man but instead acknowledge with Scripture our needy condition before God. It is this belief that compels us to share the “good news” of the gospel of Christ with everyone. The essence of the good news is revealed in the truth that it is not God’s desire that any should perish but that all should come to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

4. We acknowledge that every person has been created by God with a free will. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the testimony of those redeemed by Him and enlightenment of scriptural truth, a person is presented with the opportunity to accept the gifts that God has provided through Christ. This begins with salvation and extends through every provision afforded by Christ’s atoning work and every revelation of His great love for mankind. All His work and gifts are appropriated by faith and the exercise of our free will in response to Him.

5. We believe that children can be saved. A response to God through Jesus Christ requires an awareness of His promises and our sinful condition. Because maturation and thinking processes develop individually, we do not limit the salvation experience to a specific age, but rather believe it is a response based on understanding the truth of Scripture and God’s claim on our lives regardless of the age of the individual.

Scriptural References

The following scriptures refer specifically to the experience of salvation and are the basis from which we draw our position stated herein.

Romans 3:23 Romans 10:10 John 3:16–17 Ephesians 2:8–9 Titus 3:5
2 Corinthians 13:5 Matthew 7:13–23 Hebrews 6:1–8 John 15:8

How Do You Receive Jesus Christ?

You receive Jesus Christ by believing in your heart that He is the Son of God and the Redeemer of mankind and by confessing with your mouth your love and commitment to Him. These two responses constitute the act of receiving faith (Romans 10:10).

What Can You Expect to Happen?

There will be a peace that settles over your mind and heart. It may involve an emotional response, but that isn’t necessary for salvation to result. Salvation is not an emotional event; it is a response of acceptance to the truthful promises of God. Often the awareness of what God has provided becomes emotional to the individual, but if it doesn’t, the process is not negated. Jesus stated that it was to our advantage that He went away because then He could send the Holy Spirit to us (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit’s presence and work leads us to a deeper intimacy with God and a fulfillment of His will in our life.

Can I Lose My Salvation?

No believer can presume on God’s grace or His goodness by choosing to live after himself or his own desires. After all Christ did for us, we are encouraged and admonished to passionately pursue Him and to bear much fruit (John 15:8). For those who have received Christ and who evidence the Holy Spirit’s fruit in their life, we affirm that their salvation is eternally secure.

Conclusion

All men are born with a sin nature and need the redemption available through Jesus Christ.

By responding to God from their heart with words similar to those below, one can be saved. “Oh, God, I acknowledge that I am a sinner and I have fallen short of what You expect. I ask You to forgive me of my sins. I receive Jesus Christ, Your Son, as my Savior and Lord. Thank You, God for saving me from eternity without You. Amen.”

Romans 10:10 tells us that by believing in our heart and confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, we are saved. We encourage every believer to give open testimony of their love for God and their faith in Jesus Christ, His Son.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

We believe that God instituted marriage as an earthly picture of Christ's relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:22–32). We also believe that He created marriage to be the foundation of a strong church and stable society. It was His intent, as stated in the Bible, that the marriage covenant should be between a man and a woman for a lifetime. God never intended for the marriage relationship to function without His involvement. We believe that the most successful marriages are those that are Christ-centered and where each spouse is submitted to God and His principles for biblical marriage. We believe every couple needs the full measure of God's grace in their relationship, as well as training and relational encouragement, to have a successful, lifelong marriage. Our desire is for the church to be a place where marriage relationships are nurtured and strengthened. West Ridge will do everything possible to encourage couples to fulfill their covenant commitment in marriage. We will provide West Ridge groups for every couple, whether they have a struggling marriage or a healthy marriage, to learn how to strengthen their marriages in godly ways. We will offer couples loving support and accountability to aid in their success. We will give them pastoral support and biblical counseling as they work through issues on their way to a fulfilling marriage relationship.

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

In our society, couples encounter pressure and temptation from an increasing variety of sources, many of which discourage couples from fulfilling their covenant marriage commitment. Many couples lack the training and tools to have successful marriages. As a result, divorce rates in our nation are at a historical high. Hundreds of thousands of couples are ending their marriages each year. In many cases, the results of these divorces are devastating to all involved. The effects of divorce are widespread and are particularly damaging to the most vulnerable among us—our children. In the United States, single parent families have become the fastest growing segment of families whose income is below the poverty line.

We recognize and have great sympathy and compassion for those who have experienced the trauma of divorce. It is our desire for West Ridge to be part of the solution to the issue of divorce in our nation by bringing healing to those involved. Because of the destructive consequences of divorce and our belief that divorce is not God's best (Malachi 2:16), it is our position that West Ridge will not counsel divorce (Matthew 19:6), but will seek to restore every marriage, believing that God has the ability to heal every relationship, even those that seem beyond repair. (Mark 10:27)

Separation

Separation may at times be appropriate in cases of physical abuse, defiant unwillingness or situations that are so damaging to the marriage that the couples are unable, at that time, to work constructively together towards improving the marriage relationship. Separation should not be entered into quickly or without proper counsel. When separation becomes necessary, it should continue to work on their marriage with the intended result of being reconciled to their spouse.

Divorce

We believe that once a couple has become one flesh through the covenant of marriage (Mark 10:8), it is God's will that they remain in that marriage for life. As the pastors and elders become aware of member couples who are experiencing marriage problems, we will meet with these couples and work with them to resolve the issues, instead of allowing the marriage to suffer damage or divorce. Members of West Ridge will be pursued to the extent that we are aware of their situation. Because we desire God's best for each family at West Ridge, we will not stand aside during times of marital conflict and allow the marriage to disintegrate. We will seek to work with couples to resolve marital conflicts or issues in a way

that will produce a satisfying, healthy and lifelong marriage. In working with them, it may be appropriate to advise temporary separation as outlined above for the protection, healing and restoration of one or both partners.

It is the intention of West Ridge to provide pastoral covering for all member families. When member couples refuse to work to restore or resolve the problems of their marriage and reject pastoral assistance in the process, church membership will be revoked for the resistant party. The member file will be noted. Removal of church membership and its privileges will be deemed as discipline of the church member and will not be restored without a process of reconciliation. When there has been a removal of church membership, the intention of the removal is for the ultimate healing and restoration of the individual whose membership was removed. All member privileges will be removed until there has been a process of restoration completed as outlined below.

Reconciliation

The first step in rebuilding a relationship with a removed church member is reconciliation. Reconciliation is the process of agreeing on the circumstances and events that led to the disciplinary action. Both parties must agree on these circumstances and be able to say the same things in their regard. Reconciliation may involve limited actions of response that demonstrate the person's sincerity in restoring the relationship.

Process of Reconciliation

1. **Repent:** acknowledge wrong
2. **Restructure actions:** demonstrate repentance by changed actions and attitudes
3. **Report:** walk in accountability
4. **Restore:** healing from past hurts

Restoration

When people desire to completely restore their relationship to the church, reinstating church membership and its privileges involves further action. These steps will be determined and outlined as a follow-up to the reconciliation process listed above at the time reconciliation is initiated. Each situation will differ, so the steps of restoration will vary according to the situation and will be determined through pastoral counseling and involvement.

Remarriage

A divorce which has taken place before the person's commitment to Christ is covered under the blood of Christ as any other sin previously committed. If the divorced person's spouse has not remarried, West Ridge will work towards marriage reconciliation as God brings wholeness to the individuals through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit following conversion.

If a couple enters the church in a second marriage, West Ridge will provide tools to help that marriage become and remain a strong, Christ-centered relationship.

Conclusion

It is God's will, as stated in the Bible, that the marriage covenant should be between a man and a woman for a lifetime. We believe this remains God's perfect will for His children. When a marriage is struggling, we believe that God's perfect will is for healing and restoration for the individuals and the marriage, and we will do everything we can to bring this about. For those who have experienced the pain of divorce, we will love, accept and minister to them as they work to see God's healing in their life.

Resources

Marriage on the Rock (Jimmy Evans)

Love Talk (Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott)

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott)

HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION

We believe the need for Holy Spirit's power and presence in a believer's life is as critical today as it was in the day of the Apostles. We do not teach a dispensational view of Holy Spirit's power and the expression of gifts. Rather we hold the position, supported by Scripture, that Holy Spirit's presence and power are for every believer until Jesus returns. We recognize that the families and members of West Ridge Church come from varied and diverse backgrounds. As such, we extend the opportunity for people to grow in their understanding of the person and power of Holy Spirit as well as their understanding of His work in their lives. Everyone at West Ridge is encouraged to seek the power, presence and gifts of Holy Spirit for themselves in a manner with which they are comfortable. No one will ever be forced to receive Holy Spirit or any of His gifts, but all are taught the contemporary work of Holy Spirit from Scripture and encouraged to grow in love and intimacy with God.

As we minister to individuals, we will use all the gifts available to us from God to see healing, deliverance, and freedom developed in a person's life. Public expressions of the gifts of the Spirit will be demonstrated in an orderly manner as directed by church leadership. Appropriate expression of a gift of Holy Spirit in a corporate setting includes submission to pastoral authority and involves expression of the gifts with dignity and order so that it can be received by all. Jesus promised His Church that they would receive a powerful encounter with Holy Spirit after Jesus' own death and resurrection. It is our view that God desires every Christian to experience this same encounter with Holy Spirit's power. In Luke 11:13, Jesus explains that it is our heavenly Father's pleasure to give Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Just like salvation, Holy Spirit is a free gift from the Father which is received by faith.

ISSUES OF CONCERN AND PRACTICE

Through the baptism in Holy Spirit, God extends His power and the blessing of His presence to all believers. Our role is to receive. This baptism is marked by an initial act of receiving and continues as a daily response of receiving what God has made available for our service and relationship with Him. Through this process of receiving, we choose to accept His good gifts and all His provision for our lives. While we acknowledge that emotionalism has often been associated with expressions of Holy Spirit and at times there has been failure in the church universal to properly administrate the manifestations of Holy Spirit, we do not think these are sufficient reasons to limit the work or expression of Holy Spirit at West Ridge Church. The Pastors and Elders of West Ridge Church are committed to teach biblical truth and uphold a biblical standard of order in our corporate worship while at the same time allowing and encouraging an atmosphere for Holy Spirit's work among us.

At West Ridge, there are opportunities to experience the different ways that God manifests His power as we draw closer to Him. We encourage individuals to seek the nine gifts of Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. These gifts are not a reflection of spiritual maturity; they are a response of openness and faith to God. Spiritual maturity combines obedience, faith and character in a process that molds us into the likeness of God.

We believe the gift of tongues has a dual purpose as outlined in the Scriptures. When coupled with the gift of interpretation, it provides encouragement, comfort and exhortation to the congregation of believers. When used in prayer, it also provides personal edification for the believer and heavenly anointing for prayer concerns that we lack words to adequately express (1 Corinthians 14). As a prayer force, it adds a new dimension to our partnership with God.

We believe a person receives Holy Spirit when they receive Christ according to Ephesians 1:13. However, as demonstrated in numerous accounts throughout the New Testament, a believer must receive Holy Spirit in a manner that accepts the full measure of His work in order for Him to be activated in his life. Many believers have been taught that Holy Spirit's role in our day and time is to function as the seal of

the promise of salvation. This teaching is true and right according to Scriptures, but it is only one aspect of Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life. Receiving Holy Spirit after conversion is based on a dawning awareness that His role is more than was understood or explained at conversion. This act of receiving is accepting the broadened biblical role of Holy Spirit by faith.

Major Points and Scriptural References

The following scriptures refer specifically to the experience of the baptism in Holy Spirit and are the basis from which we draw our position as stated below.

Ephesians 1:13 Corinthians 12:4-11 Luke 11:13 Matthew 7:7-11 John 1:32-33 Acts 2:1-4

How Do You Receive the Baptism in Holy Spirit?

You receive Holy Spirit by faith based on the truth of Scripture and the desire of your heart to accept the promise of God for yourself. The acceptance of the promise of God's power is by faith—the same faith used to receive Christ as Savior. To receive Holy Spirit, you simply approach God in an attitude of faith, because according to Luke 11:13, it is His good pleasure to give His Spirit to those who ask.

What Can You Expect?

You can expect things to be different in your life. As demonstrated in Scripture, when a person receives Holy Spirit, there may be a manifestation associated with the encounter. Some become emotional or express a gift of Holy Spirit such as tongues, while others notice a change in their insight on Scripture or boldness to witness. While manifestations are not required to receive Holy Spirit, they are common.

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What About the Gifts of the Spirit?

Holy Spirit brings the experience of the life of Jesus into our lives. The gifts of Holy Spirit are divided into three categories (1 Corinthians 12:7-11):

1. Vocal Gifts—tongues, prophecy and the interpretation of tongues
2. Knowledge Gifts—word of knowledge, word of wisdom and the discerning of spirits
3. Power Gifts—healing, faith and miracles

The Apostle Paul encouraged us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1. Although the gifts of Holy Spirit are available to every person who receives Holy Spirit, they are only activated by faith. If you do not want to demonstrate a gift, God will not make you. If you desire His gifts but don't understand them completely, He may bypass your mind and give you a gift, but it will always be based on your desire.

HOLY SPIRIT

Resources

Holy Spirit Revealed (Sermon series by Robert Morris)

The Promise of the Father (Cindy Rowley)

Living the Spirit-Formed Life (Jack Hayford)

Conclusion

God's purpose is for every one of His children to be filled with the same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus' own life. We cannot reduce this experience to a simple formula. In fact, we are talking about the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. To receive, we simply go to our heavenly Father in an attitude of faith and ask.

Jesus is the Baptizer in Holy Spirit, and He wants to fill His children. Through experiencing the nine gifts and the nine fruit of Holy Spirit, we can effectively share the love and power of Jesus Christ to many people. We can also find the power to overcome many temptations, trials and tests in this life.

ESCHATOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

We believe Jesus Christ will return to earth personally and visibly according to the promises in Scripture. His return will be for the purpose of establishing His absolute governmental rule and authority on the earth. Christians are exhorted to be watchful and obedient until His return. While there are many viewpoints concerning His second coming, we believe Christians should look for His return with great anticipation while obediently pursuing the mandate of the Great Commission. At His second coming, the righteous who have died and are now with Him will be resurrected and rule with Him.

ISSUES OF CONCERN AND PRACTICE

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Matthew 24:36

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” **Matthew 24:42**

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

Matthew 25:13

There is much diversity of perspective concerning the specifics of Jesus’ second coming and the rapture of the church. We embrace a variety of perspectives and do not believe any one opinion can or should be used as a test of orthodoxy within a local body of believers.

Preoccupation with this subject has produced stagnant and sterile churches that are spiritually lethargic, evangelistically passive and weak in their social and cultural impact. A church that embraces her identity as an “overcomer” is generally more concerned with her obedience to God’s command of occupying the earth until Jesus returns rather than with speculation on when He will return. Scripture clearly states that we won’t know when He will return.

How Should We Anticipate His Return?

- We are to continue doing the important work that needs to be completed before Jesus returns—preach the gospel throughout the world!
- We keep working on building His kingdom realizing that we don’t know exactly when Jesus will return.
- We are to keep busy because neither Jesus’ delay nor His imminent arrival should be an excuse for idleness.
- We remain prepared, realizing that each day is the possible day of Jesus’ return (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

Major Points

Jesus’ return will be universally unmistakable. It will be obvious to everyone (Mark 13:26). We should be aware of the signs of Jesus’ second coming, but also realize these signs are easily misread. Paul wrote, “So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure” (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

This group of believers to whom Paul was writing was considered great in the kingdom of God because of their endurance and steadfast continuation of the work of Christ while in the midst of persecution and attack. The point of Paul’s eschatological message to the church was to encourage each one to “stay the course” in their Christ-honoring, relevant lifestyle.

Conclusion

With this in mind, we affirm that Jesus Christ will be returning for a mature bride who has reached “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NASB). He is coming for her as she makes her garments of holiness and righteousness.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

West Ridge strongly believes in recognizing and supporting the contribution of women in the ministry of the church. We believe in the value of women in all aspects of ministry with the exception of those areas that exercise governmental authority within the church. Furthermore, we believe God has ordained the family unit to serve as a model for the entire church with the father as the head of the home and functioning as a servant-leader as described in Ephesians 5. We therefore believe that both men and women can reach their fullest potential in ministry within the structure of the biblical family model. We believe a woman can teach and lead within any of the vast array of ministry roles and positions as long as she demonstrates a biblically-qualifying lifestyle. She must also submit herself, along with other servant-leaders, to those leaders God has placed in positions of governing authority, specifically, the Senior Pastor or the Elders of the church. We believe that the positions of Senior Pastor and Elder are (because of their governmental responsibility) reserved only for men. With the exception of these two positions, we consider all ministry positions and opportunities to be open to women.

Equality of Men and Women

The Bible clearly reveals that God is not a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34; Ephesians 6:9). At West Ridge, we ascribe to a belief in the equality of all men and women. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled both men and women alike without concern for gender (Acts 2:1–21). Both women and men are called to faithful service and good stewardship of all that God provides. We discover throughout the New Testament that both genders participated in a full variety of Christian service including prophecy, leadership and teaching (Acts 2:15–18; Acts 18:26; Acts 21:9; Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9–10).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

One of the most quoted prophetic declarations is found in the book of Joel where the prophet writes that God will pour out His spirit “upon all flesh; and ... your daughters shall prophesy ... and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28–29; see also Acts 2:17). Ministry in the New Testament is defined within Spirit-empowered expressions of God’s wonderful gifts. Nowhere in the writings of the New Testament do we find conditions or exceptions placed on the distribution of spiritual gifts along gender lines. Thus, while some gifts are a spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit and others are recognized ministry gifts to the church, all gifts are given by God for His greater purpose and without regard to social, economic or gender demarcation (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–28; Ephesians 4:7–12; 1 Peter 4:10–11). We conclude, therefore, that women can serve in vital roles in ministry and this position is further illustrated in the apostle Paul’s many references to women serving with him in ministry throughout the church.

Controversial Texts Concerning Women in Ministry

There are two often-quoted passages within the Pauline writings that have caused heated debate over many generations on the topic of women in ministry.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

In the first passage Paul writes to the church at Corinth, “Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak ...” (1 Corinthians 14:34–35, KJV). Unfortunately, this passage has mistakenly been cited to justify a position that rejects the biblical role of women in ministry. Actually, when understood within the context of Paul’s complete letter to a very troubled church, we gain a more informed perspective. Given that earlier in his letter Paul gave instructions regarding how women

should pray and prophesy in public (1 Corinthians 11:5), it can be assumed that Paul must have meant something other than absolute prohibition for women in the public arena of ministry. Such an interpretation would simply fail to coincide with countless other Pauline writings that affirm the ministry contribution made by women. Therefore, we conclude that within the context of the situation at Corinth that prompted the letter to be written originally, Paul's admonition here is in reference to excessive disruptions and disorder taking place. Therefore this passage, like the rest of the chapter, is an attempt to bring correction to the chaos and to affirm that "all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Another challenging passage centers on Paul's instructions to his young apprentice, Timothy, when he writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man ..." (1 Timothy 2:12). This passage has troubled biblical scholars and church leaders for centuries. Was Paul offering some kind of transcultural mandate, or was he instead seeking to provide Timothy with spiritual counsel concerning the improper conduct occurring among some women in Ephesus (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Timothy 5:13; 2 Timothy 3:6)? A review of the entire text of Paul's letter gives a strong indication that he was offering advice to Timothy on how to confront the heretical teaching and misconduct occurring among a number of women within the church. To view this passage in any other context would require denying the legitimacy of Paul's other references to the work and ministry of women within the various churches of his day. Such a perceived contradiction is inconsistent with the proven principles of biblical interpretation.

Biblical Examples of Women in Ministry

While the debate over the role of women in church ministry predominantly centers around the interpretation of two challenging New Testament passages (1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12), a fair and thorough review of biblical records reveals explicit and overwhelming evidence to support West Ridge's stated position affirming the role of women in ministry. In the Old Testament, for instance, Miriam was used of God as a prophet during the time of the great exodus (Exodus 15:20). As both a prophet and a judge, Deborah was an instrumental leader in guiding God's army (Judges 4-5). And Huldah, another prophet, was a vital contributor to the powerful religious reform under King Josiah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34).

The New Testament also reveals the essential role women shared in the ministry of the early church. Contrary to the cultural norm of that time regarding the status of women in society, the apostle Paul frequently refers to the contribution made by women. For instance, Paul speaks of women who "worked hard with him" in the work of the gospel (Romans 16:6, 12; Philippians 4:3). At Philippi, Euodias and Syntyche were described as "fellowworkers" alongside Paul. This description is the same wording used to also describe other young ministers who served with Paul such as Timothy, Epaphroditus, Titus and Luke.

Furthermore, as a servant (diakonos) at the church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1-2), Phoebe was obviously viewed as more than simply a helper. In fact, Paul uses the same word (diakonos) to refer to other ministers and leaders in a congregation, including himself. From these and many other writings, we discover that Paul was an advocate of women in ministry. And contrary to the social order of the day, he frequently recognized the Spirit-inspired work that many women shared as fellow-laborers. We can conclude, therefore, that Scriptural evidence affirms the call of women to spiritual leadership and vital ministry roles in the early church. Such divine acknowledgement provides us with the irrefutable evidence we need to believe that God continues to call women to serve alongside men in the vital work of ministry today.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Conclusion

We believe that this equality of men and women represents the heart of God and the revelation of Scripture. While recognizing that certain governmental roles in the church do have some gender distinctiveness within the community of faith as it is true within the biblical construct of the home, we do affirm the tremendous contribution women have made in the early days of the church and must continue to make as we move forward in the ministry of West Ridge. The Spirit of God is being poured out on all flesh and we seek to walk in step with the Holy Spirit in power and practice until Christ returns.

FREEDOM MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus ministered to the broken and needy and had an ability to deeply address the real needs of people He dealt with. He provided all that people needed to move out from under the dominion of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God. As Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, His ministry was characterized by teaching about the kingdom and instruction regarding life as a kingdom resident. Along with this teaching, Jesus provided demonstrations of power evidencing the kingdom at work among the people. It was His stated task to reclaim what was lost (Luke 19:10) and to undo the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The works of the devil in our day and age are varied and complex. These works cripple humans and impair their ability to know and worship God. Satan's reach has gained inroads into our minds, emotions, bodies, relationships and culture. To help people be free today, we must follow Jesus' model and instruct people regarding kingdom life. We must also help them encounter our living and present God who acts in power and authority to overcome the impact of living in a fallen world system. Such an encounter is designed to help people break free from strongholds and demonic oppression in their lives, allowing God's people to live fully as the redeemed sons and daughters He has intended.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Three issues need to be addressed for people to find freedom from bondage in their life:

- The issue of bondage and strongholds in the lives of believers
- The issue of learning to walk and grow in freedom
- The issue of maintaining healthy balance where there has historically been a tendency toward imbalance

Helping People Become Free

People living in a fallen world system live under the effects of Satan's rule. Our response to these conditions must be varied, Spirit-led and appropriate to the needs of people. Since people are tripartite (1 Thessalonians 5:23), it is important to address spirit, soul and body for them to find true freedom. Focusing too much on one particular aspect often becomes detrimental to the other two aspects. Our ministry sessions include elements of Spirit-empowered ministry, biblical counsel, expulsion of demonic spirits and healing prayer for physical, spiritual and emotional wounds.

Helping People Walk and Grow in Freedom

We want to instruct and model the kind of life and activities which allow people not only to obtain freedom but also to maintain and increase it in their lives. The kinds of activities that we consider important to help in these areas include educating people regarding their identity in Christ and the fullness of life available to them, engaging their will in the process, helping them engage in spiritual warfare for themselves and their loved ones and gaining an ability to recognize and eliminate the things that got them into bondage in the first place. We desire to help people step into a community of friends that can be a support in their journey.

A Healthy Balance

Because this ministry deals with demonstrations of God's power and engages demonic forces, it is important to minister within biblical parameters. At one end of the spectrum is a completely rational approach which disavows any concept of the supernatural. At the other end of the spectrum is the belief that we are all pawns in some cosmic battle and we have no role in becoming and staying free. We will maintain a healthy balance between these two extremes; discerning and responding with

FREEDOM MINISTRY

authority to strongholds and demonic spirits while helping individuals recognize and accept their own responsibility for life choices.

Focus of Freedom Ministry to Individuals

Our focus is based on core values anchored in Scripture that help maintain balance as we minister freedom to individuals.

1. **Biblical Foundations (2 Timothy 3:16):** To maintain the health of our Freedom Ministry, we will consider Scripture as our foundation for all we do. All experience will be screened through our understanding of Scripture.
2. **Solution-Focused (Philippians 4:8):** We will make Jesus, His work and the work of the Holy Spirit more prominent than the work of unclean spirits.
3. **Spirit-Guided (John 5:19):** We will develop our ears for the guiding voice of God so that we may do what we see the Father doing.
4. **Compassion (2 Timothy 2:24):** We will treat people with the love and compassion which have been shown to us. We will treat God's children the way we would want our children to be treated.
5. **The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23):** We will conduct ourselves and our ministry in a way that reflects the fruits of the Spirit.
6. **Discipleship (Ephesians 4:16):** We are growing disciples with long-term fruit and the ability to reproduce.
7. **Personal Growth (Matthew 10:8):** We are not teaching techniques; we are passing on what we have freely received.
8. **Unity (Psalm 133:1):** We are stronger together than we are as individuals. We will accept and grow from one another's differences.

Christians and Demonization

A common debate among believers revolves around the relationship between Christians and demonic spirits. Often at the core of this debate is the question, "Can a Christian be possessed by a demon?" At the heart of this question is a need to understand the interaction between the spiritual realm and the daily life we live as Christians. The Bible has some clear descriptions about this issue.

We must first realize that any time we read the term "demon possessed" in English, this is not the phrase used in the original language of Scripture. Two common terms in the Greek, the language of the New Testament, are "daimonion echei," translated "has a devil" (Luke 8:27), or "daimonizomenou" (John 10:21), best understood as "demonized." In neither case is the term "demon possessed" found in the original language. In fact, in the case of the first phrase, the implication is just the opposite. The spirit does not have the person; the person has the spirit.

Although realizing this does not address the issue of a born-again believer and demonization, it is important to understand that the issue is influence and not necessarily possession. Satan did not have to claim ownership of Adam and Eve to exert influence over them.

The terms Jesus used when doing away with demonic forces clearly imply that the spirits were issued forth from the person (ap autou—off or out of the self, Matthew 17:18; ekbleethentos—plucked out and expelled from within, Matthew 9:33; exelthontos—to issue forth from, Luke 11:14). These phrases would indicate an internal position of influence much like bacteria or infection is internal.

All of these verses indicate the position of influence that Jesus dealt with regarding demons and people. Regarding that same influence with born-again believers, our clearest scriptural example is found in

2 Corinthians 12:7 (NASB). Paul states: “because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself!”

The apostle Paul testifies concerning himself that God sent a “messenger of Satan” (angelos) to be a thorn in his flesh (sarki). These phrases clearly indicate that an angel of Satan was in the physical person of Paul. The same position of influence described in the encounters with Jesus is indicated even more clearly in Paul’s own description of his condition.

It is our position that demonic forces can influence a person in varying degrees from an external position as well as an internal position. The body and the soul (mind, will and emotions) can provide a haven for influencing spirits. The spirit of a born-again believer is the Holy Spirit of God, but as Paul makes clear, we can either live by the flesh or live by the Spirit.

When we live by the flesh, we give the devil an opportunity (topos—a place or geographical location, Ephesians 4:27).

Scriptural References

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| Matthew 28:18–20 | Matthew 10:5–8 |
| Matthew 4:17, 23 | Luke 4:16–21 |
| Romans 6:16–18 | Romans 6:6 |
| 2 Corinthians 5:17–18 | John 8:31 |

Conclusion

As our response to Jesus’ command to declare the gospel of the kingdom and demonstrate it as we go, our Freedom Ministry seeks to encompass the ministry of Jesus to undo the works of the devil in the lives of individuals. We desire to help people grow in their soul (mind, will, emotions) through elements of teaching and discipleship so that they can grow in the freedom they obtain as they seek to know and serve Jesus Christ.

We also work to make compassionate settings of ministry available for groups and individuals so that people can encounter God in the areas of their need.

Resources

Victory over the Darkness (Neil Anderson)
The Bondage Breaker (Neil Anderson)
Shadow Boxing (Henry Malone)
Deliverance and Inner Healing (John Sandford)