



MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET

2011-2012 Edition

*“Experiencing and expanding God’s Diverse Kingdom in the city
and throughout the world”*

A WORD FROM PASTOR CHRIS



Greetings Brothers and Sisters!

I welcome you to Strong Tower Bible Church and we praise God for your interest in this ministry! We want you to know off the top that we are not looking for more church members, so please feel no pressure from us. However, we are looking for **Kingdom-minded Christians** who wish to make be difference makers.

We are looking to be sharpened by people who want to know Christ and make Him known, representing Him well in every sphere of life. Therefore, we trust God to provide STBC with gifted ministry partners and like-minded co-laborers to do the work He has called us to do for His glory. We hope and pray this description fits you. At STBC you have something to receive, something to give, and something to do. Beginning first with our leadership, we expect everyone that is officially associated with STBC to **Grow Spiritually, Serve Actively and Give Obediently.**

You must be advised that God wants to pour His Spirit into **new wineskins** that are flexible, stretchable, and adaptable (Mark 2:22). If you come to STBC without these qualities, you will “crack” under the pressure. As God pours into us and we pour into one another, we want to then pour into a world that needs life, light, and hope. Strong Tower will be unlike any other church you’ve attended, so therefore be open to the new thing God will do in you, through you, and around you.

I believe this booklet will be a blessing to you because in it we try to clearly and concisely articulate our history, beliefs, expectations, and purpose. Our vision is to experience and expand **God’s Diverse Kingdom** in the city and throughout the world. I pray that in the course of time you will be able to see the vision, add to the vision, and run with the vision!

Fired Up,

Chris Williamson
Senior Pastor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Foundations.....	p. 3
2. Core Values.....	p. 7
3. What We Teach and Where We Stand.....	p. 10



SECTION 1: FOUNDATIONS

OUR PASTOR AND HIS WIFE

Chris Williamson was born July 17, 1968 in Baltimore, Maryland as the youngest of five children to Harold and Betty Williamson. He was born again through Jesus Christ on June 29, 1984 at a Christian camp in the hills of Maryland sponsored by former professional baseball player and Evangelist Pat Kelly. After graduating from Milford Mill High School in 1986, he went on to attend the Christian, liberal arts institution Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Chris was called to preach on July 4, 1987 in New York City.

Dorena McFarland Williamson was born on December 20, 1970 in Washington, D.C. as the second oldest of five children to Dr. Allen and Doris McFarland. Dorena met Christ as small child and was subsequently reared in a godly home. After graduating from high school in Portsmouth, VA. She went on to Liberty University and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology.

Chris began courting Dorena McFarland on Valentine's Day of 1988 and the two were later married on December 28, 1991. While at Liberty University, Chris participated in an evangelistic rap music ministry called Transformation Crusade for six years. Upon completion of his undergraduate degree in Biblical Studies in 1990, a Masters of Religious Education at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in 1992, and ordination into the gospel ministry under Dr. Allen McFarland and Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church, the Williamsons came to Nashville, Tennessee to further explore their musical options. It became quickly apparent, however, that God did not bring them to Nashville for music.

OUR BIRTH AS A CHURCH

When Transformation Crusade decided that God had brought an end to their musical ministry Chris began working with Christ Community Church (PCA) in Franklin, Tennessee. He came on staff with the church in January 1993 as an intern with Franklin Community Ministries. While working with Pastor Scott Roley and Paige Overton Pitts of FCM in the lower income communities of Franklin, God began to move upon Chris' heart to plant a church. Planting a church, by the way, was something Chris said that he would never do.

Nevertheless, God had burdened Chris' heart for black men and the need to teach them the realness and relevancy of God. He believed this knowledge of Christ would transform them personally, their homes, and subsequently their communities. He began a bible study in his apartment complex to minister to the parents of the young people he worked with. In the meantime, Chris preached on several occasions at Christ Community Church which gave some of the white believers on hand a glimpse into his heart and burden for ministry. It appeared that God was at work in the "deep South" putting together an interracial fellowship of believers.

In the summer months of 1995, Chris held a series of prayer and informational meetings for anyone who may have been interested in forming a non-denominational, bible based fellowship. Because of the outpouring of God's favor, Strong Tower Bible Church held its first service on September 3, 1995 at the Franklin YMCA in the aerobics' room. There were 68 friends, relatives, and well-wishers at that first service. The core membership of the church was about 30 folks.

OUR VISION

*To experience and expand **God's Diverse Kingdom**
in the city and throughout the world*

1. The Biblical Basis for the Vision- Revelation 5:9-10- BY YOUR BLOOD!

- A. Every Tribe
- B. Every Tongue
- C. Every People
- D. Every Nation

2. The Outworking of the Vision- Ephesians 4:1-6 - THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT!

A. Experience God's Diverse Kingdom by:

- 1. Worshipping together and Praying together
- 2. Learning together and Ministering together
- 3. Living together and Eating together
- 4. Serving together and Fighting together
- 5. Suffering together and Standing together

B. Expand God's Diverse Kingdom by:

- 1. Building a diverse staff
- 2. Being intentional to reflect authentic ethnic and cultural diversity
- 3. Raising, sending, and supporting missionaries in diverse fields
- 4. Supporting Para-church ministries and church plants that intentionally build God's Diverse Kingdom
- 5. Leading the charge for diversity in the local community among churches
- 6. Writing and publishing materials on God's Diverse Kingdom
- 7. Ministering locally and abroad with teams and activities that model and promote God's Diverse Kingdom
- 8. Encouraging and supporting cross-ethnic adoptions and bi-racial marriages

OUR MISSION

*Strong Tower Bible Church exists to **make disciples** of Jesus Christ by being a Bible-based multidimensional fellowship of believers.*

We **make disciples** through **R.O.A.M.**:

R - Revelation- This is Biblical

O - Observation- This is Relational

A - Application- This is Personal

M - Multiplication- This is Intentional

By **Bible-based** we affirm that the Holy Scriptures are our sole authority and source for preaching, teaching, living, worship, and governing (II Timothy 3:16-17, II Peter 1:19-21).

By **Multidimensional** we celebrate the fact that we are:

1. Multi-Ethnic

4. Multi- Gifted

2. Multi-Cultural

5. Multi- Political

3. Multi-Economic

6. Multi- Generational

OUR MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

*Strong Tower Bible Church strives to be **balanced** in Up-Reach, In-Reach, and Out-Reach.*

OUR MEMBERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

*We expect every member of STBC to **GROW** spiritually, **SERVE** actively and to **GIVE** obediently*



SECTION 2: CORE VALUES

OUR CORE VALUES

1. **LOVE:** We love God! We love Jesus! We love the Holy Spirit! We love all people and do our best to make sure that everyone feels loved, even when love is displayed through truth and discipline. Our love for one another is to transcend our gender, our race, our economics, our politics, our past, and our shortcomings.
2. **SOUND TEACHING:** We love the truth of God’s Word and we do our best to read it and expound upon it properly. Regardless of who is teaching or preaching at STBC you can expect a biblically accurate message to be presented.
3. **AUTHENTICITY:** We strive to keep it real as a local church, never hiding behind religiosity, cliché’s or falsehoods. We are free to be who we are because of the love and grace of God. Get rid of your masks.
4. **FREEDOM IN WORSHIP:** We plan to have order in our worship services but we are not afraid to break from that plan when we sense the leading of the Holy Spirit to go in another direction. We love to incorporate diversity and various musical styles, cultural expressions, and arrangements into our services.
5. **PRAYER:** Even though we don’t do it as much as we would like, we love to pray. We believe the church is to be a “house of prayer” above anything else.
6. **UNITY IN THE MIDST OF DIVERSITY:** We love to experience unity without surrendering to conformity. We can agree to disagree on secondary issues of the faith without being harsh or judgmental with one another. We respect differences on our way to being one without having to be the same. We strive to keep the main thing the main thing, which is the gospel, and we are persistent to keep the Main One the Main One, who is Jesus Christ.
7. **GRACE:** Grace is the overwhelming sufficiency, security, supply, and motivation of the believer. Daily experiencing God’s grace personally allows us to be dispensers of this grace to others around us.
8. **PURPOSES OF CHURCH:** We believe the primary purposes for Sunday church gatherings are the corporate worship of God, and the edification and equipping of the saints of God. We believe that church truly starts when we leave the church building.
9. **THE HOLY SPIRIT:** We rely on the presence, moving, leading, and empowering of the Holy Spirit to do all things.
10. **FACILITIES:** We have never made ministry about the necessity to own or build buildings. Over the years, we have been content to rent and lease facilities. We have enjoyed not having debt and putting the bulk of God’s financial resources into people and ministry. However, if God should ever lead us to acquire our own land and facilities our goal will be to accomplish the project in cash unless God leads otherwise.
11. **MONEY:** God doesn’t “need” our money. It’s already His. God calls us to invest His money that He allows us to use properly on earth, so as to store up true riches in heaven. Giving is just one aspect of

stewardship. In every church there are people who rob God, tip God, tithe to God, and cheerfully give sacrificially to God. The goal for all of us is to grow in the grace of giving at the local church and beyond.

12. **EXPECTATION:** Every member of STBC is encouraged to grow spiritually, serve actively and give obediently with the purpose of advancing the kingdom of God.
13. **G-RACE:** We teach that racial issues, political differences, theological perspectives, and cultural distinctions, though real, are not the primary focus of STBC. It is the Gospel that drives STBC, giving us the proper context to address all things and race must be discussed and expressed in light of grace.
14. **ISRAEL:** STBC loves and prays for Israel! We acknowledge the Jewish heritage of our faith and we do not replace promises made to Israel with the church. We take study trips to Israel on a regular basis.
15. **MISSIONS:** Every member is a missionary of some kind. STBC sends and supports missionaries locally, nationally, and internationally. We believe that the scope of missions involve specific evangelistic efforts as well as acts of mercy, deeds of kindness, and points of social intervention and contact among the lost, the last, and the least of society. A minimum of 10% of our annual operating budget goes to missions.
16. **KINGDOM:** We believe that the kingdom of God is the reign, reach, return, and redeemed of God. Jesus has authority over every realm, person, situation, and problem. The local church functions best when it understands its kingdom teachings and authority.
17. **CHURCH DISCIPLINE:** We believe in and practice church discipline if a matter calls for it based on following the principles of Matthew 18:15-20. The goal of church discipline is always the restoration of the defiant believer. Byproducts of church discipline are a healthy reverence for God and a personal inventory of holiness among the membership.
18. **LEADERS:** Leaders lead best when serving all. STBC respects its leaders and submits to their authority when properly exercised from biblical parameters. We do not put our leaders on pedestals or believe they are above rebuke or being wrong.
19. **CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS:** We know that we are not the only church in our city that God is using to bring glory to Himself and to accomplish His purposes. STBC loves to fellowship with several churches of various denominations in the area.
20. **THE GOSPEL:** STBC preaches the gospel to the lost and we preach the gospel to ourselves. Lost sinners and saved sinners must rely solely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ and the total redemption it accomplishes in the sight of God.



SECTION 3: WHAT WE TEACH AND WHERE WE STAND

WHAT WE TEACH

Strong Tower Bible Church is based, sustained, and directed by the Word of God and not upon man's opinion or tradition. STBC holds the Bible as our primary authority and final source of teaching, preaching, and church government.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach the Holy Scriptures to be the inspired, infallible, authoritative, inerrant Word of God (in the original autographs). We also teach that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are designed for our practical instruction in faith and conduct (II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21; Psalms 19:7; Matt. 5:18).

THE GODHEAD

We teach that the one true and living God eternally exists in three co-equal Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and these three are one God (Deut. 6:4; Gen. 1:26; Isaiah 6:8; Eph. 4:4-6; Matt. 28:19). The God we serve is one in essence yet plural and distinct in person. This is known as the “trinitos” or the “trinity”, i.e. three in one.

GOD THE FATHER

We teach that God the Father loved the world, sent His Son, punished His Son for our sins, raised Christ from the dead, elects and chooses individuals, draws people to Jesus, adopts believers in Christ as His very own children therefore becoming their heavenly Father (Eph 1:3, 3:14-15; James 1:17; John 3:16,6:44; Isaiah 53:4-5; Rom. 8:29, 9:11; Gal. 4:5,6).

GOD THE SON

We teach that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who came into the world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy, and become the Redeemer of a lost world. To this end He was born of the Virgin Mary, received a human body and a sinless human nature without ever ceasing to be God (Luke 1:3-35; John 1:1,14,18; Hebrews 4:15; Philippians 2:5-11).

We teach that in infinite love, He voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb of God and took away the sins of the world once and for all (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25-31; II Cor. 5:14; Hebrews 10:5-14; I John 2:2).

We teach that He victoriously rose bodily from the dead defeating Satan, hell, and death. Upon ascending back to Heaven with all authority, Jesus was accepted by His Father and is now seated on His right hand as a soon coming King (Matt. 28:6; John 20:20; I Cor. 15:55-57; Col. 2:13-16.3:1; Rev. 19:11-16).

We teach that Jesus is the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, and He does not cease to intercede and be an advocate for the saved (Eph. 1:22-23; I Tim. 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; I John 2:1-2).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, being co-equal to the Father and Son in all attributes pertaining to deity (Acts 5:3-4; II Cor. 3:18).

We teach that in the work of redemption He justifies, washes and sanctifies sinners in cooperation with the Son; He regenerates unbelievers and indwells them at the moment of salvation, thus baptizing them

into the body of Christ and sealing them until the final day of redemption (I Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:12-14, 4:30).

We teach that through the Holy Spirit, God provides every believer power to live the Christian life. We further teach that every Christian receives grace from God in the form of a spiritual gift which enables him or her to function as a contributing member of the body of Christ (Rom. 8:9-11; Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 12:6; I Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7-13).

ANGELS AND DEMONS

We teach that Satan, the devil, is the prince of demons and is the declared adversary of God and man. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, He limited the power of Satan and guaranteed the ultimate triumph of God and His people (Eph. 2:2; I Peter 5:8; I Cor.4:4; Rev. 20:10; Col. 2:13-15).

SALVATION

We teach that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he or she is born again spiritually, and that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 1:12-14, 3:3-8).

We teach that our salvation has been accomplished by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this redemption is by the grace of God, which is an unmerited gift, given in love by God and is not a result of any human works whatsoever (John 3:7-18; II Cor. 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Romans 4:4-5).

We teach that upon receiving the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, the believer passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life, and into fellowship with God (John 1:12, 5:24)

We also teach that once this salvation is accomplished, we and all true believers everywhere shall be kept saved forever (John10:28-29; Romans 3:24, 8:35-39; II Tim. 2:11-13; Galatians 2:16; Eph 2:5, 8-9).

THE CHURCH

We teach that all who are united to the risen and ascended Son of God are members of the Church, which is the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-27; Acts 2:42-47).

We teach that the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved is to make Christ known to the whole world and that this is the purpose of the Church through the individuals within it (Matt. 28:18-19; Acts1:18; II Cor. 5:1-21).

We teach that local churches, such as Strong Tower Bible Church, gather together for practical instructions in the Scriptures, for fellowship with God and with other believers, and for corporate witness to the unsaved world. Our common spiritual goal is to grow toward Christ's likeness (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:5; Eph. 4:13-16).

THE RAPTURE AND THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

We teach that Jesus Christ will return in the air to receive unto Himself His own who are alive and all those who died in saving faith. This snatching away is called the rapture and it can happen at anytime. We teach that after the rapture a future period of "Great Tribulation" on the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. At this return Jesus will defeat the armies of Satan and the Anti-Christ and reign on the earth for 1,000 years (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Zechariah 14:4-11; Rev. 3:10; 20-22).

THE ETERNAL STATE

We teach that at death the souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for his own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory. All those who rejected Jesus Christ will eternally be separated from God to endure His eternal wrath forever, first in Hell, then in the Lake of Fire (II Cor. 5:8; Rev. 20:11-15, 21:1-27; I Thess. 4:13-18).

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS

We teach that God appoints leaders (Elders/Pastors) to guide His church in the understanding and application of Scripture. It is their responsibility to be examples of godliness as they see to the spiritual wellbeing and protection of the flock over which God has given them charge (Acts 6:1-8; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:1-3). We also teach that God appoints Deacons and Deaconesses to serve the specific felt needs of the body as hands on representatives from the Elders (I Tim.3:8-13; Rom.16:1-2).

CHURCH ORDINANCES

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper to be observed by all believers until His return (Matt. 28:19; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 10:47-48).

We teach that the ordinance of baptism in most practical cases is the immersion of the believer in water as it sets forth the essential facts of redemption: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:4; Acts 8:26-39), but the church will baptize by pouring if it is ever necessary due to extraneous circumstances. STBC practices baptism in the "name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt.28:19-20).

We teach that the Lord's Supper is a privilege offered to all believers in commemoration of our Lord's death until He comes. The actual elements of bread and wine (juice) are symbolic of Christ's body and blood (I Cor. 11:23-28).

WHERE WE STAND

Strong Tower Bible Church is a non-denominational church it is necessary to state where we stand on many of today's "hot topics" of contemporary Christianity. In no way are we trying to say that we have the final, best, or only interpretation on these matters. Many of these topics we deem as "non-essential" matters and should not be used by the enemy to divide God's people. **STBC firmly believes that the essential issue on the floor is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.** We try to keep the main thing the main thing. We firmly believe that "*sound doctrine*" (Titus 2:1, which literally means healthy or balanced teaching) is to conform to the message of the gospel of God's grace, which is the premise of our teaching (Acts 20:24).

Therefore, we are asking you to respect where we stand even if you don't agree, so that there may be unity and oneness in this particular local house of God. We believe that God's people can be one without being the same. These answers will obviously be concise and to the point. If you need clarity and further explanation on these topics or any others, please call the office to set up an appointment with one of the elders. If you have a differing perspective, please be ready to support it in writing by sound, biblical, and logical interpretation.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON WOMEN BEING USED IN THE MINISTRY?

We must begin with the premise that men and women are intrinsically equal before God in all matters pertaining to humanity (Gen.1:26-27) and redemption (Gal.3:28). A woman is not more than a man or less than a man when it comes to personhood. Male and female are equal in essence; however, ***equality of essence doesn't mean sameness of role or function.*** That is the key to shaping a balanced understanding. Men and women can be one without being the same or doing the same thing in the church.

Jesus valued women and included them in God's program like no other rabbi in his day, however, He didn't compromise God's standard in order to "validate" women through hierarchical promotions. ***Jesus did not appoint one woman to be a part of His leadership team of the Twelve Apostles*** (Luke 6:12-16). That truth needs to be greatly considered. It can't be said that Jesus didn't want to offend the Pharisees in that male dominant culture by having women on His team because Jesus never allowed the religious establishment to hinder His agenda on any other issue. In fact, if Jesus' first coming was in this "all inclusive" era His leadership team would have still been comprised of all males. Why? It would have been unnatural to have women in primary places of spiritual leadership because He would have contradicted the order of the home that He established in Genesis 2 and Psalm 128. Plus, with the church being built on the foundation of the apostles (Eph. 2:20), He would have opened the door to confusion and controversy for future generations. Jesus would not and could not contradict His creative order for the sake of total female accommodation (I Cor. 11:3, I Timothy 2:13)

For Jesus, He could love, value, esteem, and use women in the ministry, but He would not compromise His creative order of male leadership (not male dominance) in the domestic home and in the church house to do so. He is a God of order but Satan is the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). Therefore, any kind of female posturing over a man in the home or in the church is essentially satanically influenced (I Timothy 2:14, 5:14-15). Satan, who is a fallen, un-submissive angelic being, despised, rejected, and resisted ***established authority*** as ordained by God. He purposefully tempted and influenced Eve with his own folly so that she would step out from her role as helper to become the head or primary leader of the

family (Genesis 3:1-7). This brought chaos. The sad thing is that Adam became passive and let the devil turn his home upside down. He should have done what God did in heaven and that was to expel the serpent.

With that being said, Jesus brought respect, honor, and dignity to women during His earthly ministry that even surprised His disciples (John 4:27). He championed and redeemed the status of women in society through His public dealings and affirmations of them in a male dominant and sometimes abusive culture (John 4:4-26, 8:1-11). He often used women in positive ways as examples in His teachings (Luke 15:8-10, 18:1-8), and it was women who helped finance the disciples' ministry (Luke 8:1-3). But most significantly it was women whom Jesus appeared to first when He resurrected (Luke 24:1-11).

He went on to tell the women in His resurrected state to, *"Go and **tell my brothers** to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."* (Matt. 28:10). Jesus told women to communicate a message from God about God to men. They even had to give the men instructions and teach them about the future plans of Jesus concerning where to meet. Do you think that was purposeful in that culture? Yes it was! Jesus knew the nature of men (John 2:24-25) and He knew the disciples would not initially heed the women's message (Mark 16:11, Luke 24:9-11) due to their cultural upbringing. In this case, if the men had not listened to the women proclaim the truth about the resurrection they would have sat in a temporary state of ignorance and lacked a blessed experience.

We teach that a woman can possess any gift of the Spirit like pastor/teacher or prophecy, but she cannot hold the office of pastor/elder/bishop in the local church. A woman can use her prophecy or teaching gift to minister a Word from God to the congregation at large if she has demonstrated a non-usurping attitude toward male authority. In short, a woman cannot be an authorized, recognized, ordained pastor/elder in the local church, but she can preach in the church once it has been demonstrated to the pastor(s) that she has a right attitude and the right perspective on church government. This standard goes for any man who preaches in the church as well. Preaching is not a right but a privilege.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON TITHING?

When it comes to giving, STBC teaches, encourages, and expects all of its members to be **givers** (Luke 6:38) and **generous** ones at that (II Cor. 9:5-7). Giving to God is a joy, a privilege, and an act of worship. When we give God our hearts first in daily obedience and surrender, He then moves on our hearts to be givers of everything we possess. No sacrifice is too great for Him when He calls, asks, or commands. God wants our giving to be motivated by love (I Cor. 13:3) because it has been said, "You can give without loving but you can't love without giving". STBC teaches that we should give the King of Kings our first and best financial gifts (Proverbs 3:9-10). We are always encouraged to be generous and not stingy with God's money because all of it is His (Haggai 2:8). Regular giving reminds us of this truth. Our use of God's money is always an acid litmus test of where our hearts are before Him (Matt. 6:21). We are most like Jesus when we give (II Cor. 8:9). Therefore, we give because of what we become because of it: Christ-like.

With that being said, **how much** should a believer give to God? What's interesting is that the NT doesn't give specifics on how much believers are to give regularly to God. Perhaps God does this because giving is more of a heart issue than it is an amount issue (Luke 21:1-4). The examples of giving cited in Acts 4-5 and II Corinthians 8-9 were situational offerings taken to help poor, needy, and suffering saints in the body of Christ. They were not meant to be templates for ongoing local church giving among believers. Overall principles for giving can obviously be gained from these cases, but the Scriptures do not

specifically tell a believer how much he or she should give in the context of maintaining the ministry of a local church. For instance, Paul wrote that pastors should be compensated from the people they minister to (Galatians 6:6, I Timothy 5:17-8), but he didn't spell out how that should actually happen. In this context Paul quotes from the OT passages of Deuteronomy 25:4 and Leviticus 19:13. Therefore, **principles** can be gained from the OT economic system for sustaining the local church financially (I Corinthians 10:11).

STBC teaches that believers are not under the law or the tithe for that matter (Romans 6:14); instead we are under grace and grace when properly understood should invoke a greater response in God's people than the Law of Moses ever could (II Cor. 3:7-18). It would be impossible and unnecessary to tithe today under the parameters of the Old Covenant. However, there are principles that can be gained from the OT discipline of tithing (Romans 3:31, 15:4, I Cor.10:11). We can't tell you how much to give, but we can teach you from the Scriptures **a consideration to start with** in your giving. Many young, new, or spiritually immature believers often need a guide and a starting place in their giving, therefore, ***"The STBC Tithe Principle"*** states that giving 10% of our gross income to God at the local church is a great place to aim for and launch from in our giving to God.

Why aim to start our giving with a tithe or with 10%? Before the Law mandated tithing, Abraham and Jacob gave God a tithe of their resources out of **appreciation** and not obligation (Genesis 14:20, 28:22). Therefore 10% can be used as a base number, a barometer, and a launching pad in the context of NT giving to show our appreciation to God. Aiming to start our giving to God with 10% is like using training wheels on a bike. The training wheels were never meant to stay on the bike. Rather, they simply help get us started until we become mature enough to ride without them. As we grow in grace and in our commitment to God we believe our financial giving and spiritual sacrifice should grow as well. Paul said that growing and excelling in giving should be one of our goals as Christians (II Corinthians 8:7).

STBC teaches that our financial gifts or "tithes" are to be given to Jesus at the local church and not to a ministry, individual, or needy person. These instances call for an **offering** or a donation, but not your tithe (II Cor.8:5). Under the Old Covenant, *"the whole tithe"* was God's and it was given to Him at His *"storehouse"* which was also called *"my (God's) house"* (Mal.3:10), and today we give to God all that is His at the local church, which is called *"God's household"* (I Tim. 3:15). STBC takes collections every week on Sunday (I Cor.16:2). These funds, as overseen by the Elders (I Timothy 5:17) are to be used for the furtherance of the gospel, church programs, and the support of church staff and missionaries worldwide (I Cor. 9:14, Philippians 4:12-19, I Tim. 5:18).

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

STBC believes that speaking in tongues is one of the wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:10) that some, not all, believers possess. This blessed gift, like any other spiritual gift, is not available or necessary for every believer to experience. All believers have been baptized by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13), but not every believer will speak in tongues (I Cor. 12:30). All believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit, but not every believer will speak in unknown languages.

One expression of tongues as seen in the early church stage was when a person spoke a known human language that they themselves did not learn or know prior (Acts 2:4, 11). ***These are tongues spoken to men.*** It is highly unlikely that this gift will occur again in today's context with our advancements in linguistics.

Another expression of tongues in the Bible is a worship tongue (I Cor. 14:16) or an unknown prayer language (14:9) that some, and not all (I Cor. 12:30) believers in Corinth experienced. **These are tongues spoken to God.** Paul regulates the use of this gift by suggesting that it be performed privately (14:28) and not publicly in the worship service (I Cor. 14:19) apart from an interpreter (I Cor. 14:27-28) so as not to confuse immature believers or unbelievers who may be present (I Cor. 14:23). This expression of tongues does not make this believer “more spiritual” than another believer who doesn’t have the gift. The manifestation of this gift does not give the recipient “more power” or make them any closer to God than a Christian who does not speak in a “heavenly prayer language”. God always looks at and listens to the person’s heart for worship, praise, and prayer and not what comes out of their mouths per se (Matt. 15:7-9). The goal is for Christians to pray and worship from their heart to God on a regular basis whether in known or unknown languages.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE?

STBC starts the discussion about divorce the way Jesus did and that is with a defense for marriage (Matt. 19:3-6). STBC fights for the sanctity and perseverance of all marriages. We believe that through the grace of God, any situation can be worked out if both partners are willing to submit to God’s Word, counseling, accountability, time, and hard work. We believe that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) because it destroys the family (Malachi 2:15; I Cor. 7:14). From the beginning, God intended marriage to be between one man and one woman for life (Matt. 19:6), but due to sin and the hardness of hearts that often develop in marriages (Matt. 19:8), God allowed divorce only under certain circumstances as an act of grace and mercy.

The two clear observances for a Biblical divorce are as follows:

1. **Sexual Immorality** (Matt. 19:9)- Sexual immorality is the defiling of the sacredness of the covenant through inappropriate sexual conduct with another person. The word Jesus used as recorded in the Greek is “porneia” which means illicit sexual behavior. This can specifically cover sexual intercourse, as well as a wide range of grossly deviant perversions.

In this context “porneia” speaks of **a habitual lifestyle** of illicit sexual behavior and not necessarily a one-time occurrence.

2. **Abandonment by an Unbeliever** (I Cor. 7:15) If an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the believing (Christian) spouse, the believing spouse is not under bondage to the marriage covenant.

Irreconcilable Differences and Church Discipline:

Irreconcilable differences are not Biblical grounds for divorce. Neither is emotional abuse, as devastating as it can be, grounds for a divorce that would have God’s approval. In rare cases, however, when someone who professes to be a Christian with lip service, but is not rendering life service to God and their mate, he or she can fall into the category of being judged as an unbeliever by the church (I Tim. 5:8). This will result in **church discipline**, which is the dismissal of the unrepentant, sinning “believer” from fellowship in God’s church house (I Cor. 5:1-5; Matt. 18:15-20) and the barring of fellowship in the social house or domestic house (I Cor. 5:9-13). The initial dismissal of the “believer” obviously calls for a marital separation, but not necessarily a divorce because the goal and prayer of church discipline is repentance and restoration. In the meantime, the church will help provide (along with extended family) for the

appropriate felt needs of the remaining spouse until some sort of decision is reached.

No divorced person in the church will be loosed (Matt. 18:18-20) without elder approval (Heb. 13:17). Once someone has been “loosed” by the elders they are free to remarry, but our suggestion, however, is that they **wait for at least one year to begin seeing someone else**. This one year time period allows the person to heal, grow, be objective, and leave room for a possible miracle of restoration of the previous marriage.

For a female believer in our ministry who divorces her husband for reasons that are not biblical, the church will ask that woman to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her original husband (I Cor.7:10-11). Failure to observe this biblical ordinance may result in church discipline because the woman is knowingly committing adultery when she marries again (Matt.19:9-10). Remarriage may be a possibility if the divorced husband remarries someone else. Each situation must be thoroughly reviewed by the pastors.

Any married couple that comes into our ministry with a prior unbiblical divorce will be loved, used, and encouraged. We believe that God can still bless the union even though there may be a level of unique stress to the union because it is not God’s original ideal and perfect will. The couple’s service in the body by way of elder, deacon or deaconess may be denied due to the qualifications of I Timothy 3. Each situation must be thoroughly reviewed by the pastors.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON ELECTION AND FREE WILL?

STBC teaches that God’s choosing and man’s choosing in salvation are two truths that run parallel in Scripture but do not intersect. The Bible makes it clear that God elects (I Peter 1:2), chooses (Eph. 1:4), predestines (Rom. 8:29, Eph. 1:5) and draws people to Himself for salvation (John 6:44). At the same time, the Bible states that men are responsible if they should choose to reject God’s Son (Matt. 23:37, John 5:40).

STBC does not try to reconcile these two intangibles of election and free will. For instance, in Acts 27:23-25, God in His sovereignty says to and through Paul that **all** of the lives of the sailors would be spared in the storm. Yet in Acts 27:30-32 the soldiers could make their own freewill choice to stay on or attempt to get off of the boat which would appear to nullify the sovereign promise of God that said, “*God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.*” How can God save all the lives on one hand, and yet any man could lose his life by his own decision? This is a beautiful mystery.

We love the glorious aspect of a God whom we cannot fully define or figure out (Dt.29:29). God is not like man. He is perfect in His emotions and choices, unlike us. We must trust His loving heart, boundless wisdom, and sovereign preeminence. We know that He is not willing that **any** should perish (II Peter 3:9), but we know that **many** will nevertheless perish (Matt.7:13). Our motivation in sharing the gospel with everyone is out of our love for God and people, as well as an appreciation for being chosen. Our peace in sharing the gospel is in knowing that God will do the saving, and not us (Acts 13:48, John 1:13, I Corinthians 3:5-8).

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON ETERNAL SECURITY?

STBC believes that Jesus gives the believer eternal life at the moment of their conversion (John 3:16, 36, 5:24). If eternal life can be lost, and the key word is “**eternal**”, then it wasn’t eternal to begin with. It

would be conditional, temporal life, but the Bible doesn't teach that. God sees every true believer as presently glorified (Rom.8:30) and seated in the heavenly places (Eph.2:6). We cannot be separated from God's love (Rom.8:35-39) or snatched out of God's hands (John 10:28-29). God will complete the work He started in us (Phil.1:6, II Tim.1:12). Jesus purchased for us with His blood an eternal redemption (Heb.9:12). The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit until heaven (Eph.4:30) and the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance (Eph.1:13-14). The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph.4:30), but he will never leave (Heb.13:5-6).

STBC believes that salvation is the work of God and He secures those He saves. For God to take our salvation away makes Him to be a liar, which is impossible (Heb. 6:18), and it puts the sacrifice of Christ on a conditional basis and a limited range of effectiveness. We believe that God was capable enough to choose us (Eph. 1:4), and He is also capable enough to keep or secure His chosen (Heb. 7:25). Because salvation is not earned by works, how can it be lost by works? If our sins are eternally paid for by **one sacrifice** (Heb. 9:24-28), what sin can cause a believer to lose their salvation? Some have suggested unbelief and turning from God but that's not possible eternally speaking because God turned the unbeliever to Himself and gave him or her the faith to trust in Jesus in the first place (Eph. 2:1-10; I Tim. 1:14). You can't turn from someone in your own strength or choice when you didn't turn to Him in your own strength or choice. If they "turn" it may be evidence that they were never truly a part of Christ to begin with (I John 2:18-19) because the saved will endure to the end (Matt. 24:13).

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON WATER BAPTISM?

STBC believes that water baptism is a public declaration of one's personal faith in Jesus as their Savior. Water baptism is also a symbol of the gospel, for when it is practiced by immersion it sets forth the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom.6:1-4). The water also symbolizes cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16), but in no way does water have any saving power to it (I Peter 3:20-21). The cleansing from sin comes through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:22), not water. To be "*born of water and the spirit*" (John 3:5) means to be born again spiritually just as sure as you were born the first time naturally through water, i.e. the embryonic fluid in the placenta. The context of John 3 in no way mentions water baptism but rather the birthing experience (3:6).

STBC in no way believes that water baptism is essential for salvation. In Mark 16:16 where it says, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...*" is not the whole verse. The rest of the verse says, "*...but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*" If water baptism is essential for salvation the verse would have said, "*whoever does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.*" So we deduce that the thing that saves a person is belief or faith in Jesus, and the thing that causes a person to not be saved is a lack of belief or faith in Jesus. The understood principle is that if you truly come to believe in Jesus as your savior you will be baptized. We believe that any believer who has not been baptized should be baptized as soon as possible as an act of obedience (Matt.28:19-20), as an act to follow the example of Christ and fulfill all righteousness (3:13-15), and for public identification of their relationship with Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41, 10:47).

The word "baptizo" in the Greek literally means to identify with by way of immersion or submission. It comes from an understanding of clothing textiles in the first century. A cloth dyer would identify a plain piece of fabric with the color of dye that he dipped it into. Whatever color he dipped it into, the cloth became identified with that color. As we are dipped into, identified with, that is baptized into the Body of Christ by spirit baptism (I Cor.12:13), we are to be baptized into water to show publicly of that spiritual

reality (Acts 10:47). The children of Israel were baptized (submitted to, identified with) into Moses in the wilderness (I Cor.10:2).

STBC practices baptism by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded (Matt.28:19-20) for the purpose of identifying the convert with the triune God. There may be certain instances where baptism by immersion would be difficult (a crippled person) or even impossible (person on their deathbed), therefore we will baptize by pouring in these cases. If a believer comes under our ministry and they have not been baptized we will encourage them to do so. They will not be accepted as a member of the church because they are in direct disobedience to the Lord's commission because of their refusal to be baptized. If they have been baptized prior as an infant of "covenant parents" we will acknowledge that and not demand of them immersion baptism as a prerequisite for membership. If they choose however, to experience baptism by immersion for themselves, we will be glad to oblige them.

Because it is not written anywhere in the Bible that only pastors and clergy are to do the baptizing exclusively (I Cor.1:13-17), we encourage heads of homes to baptize their children and family members at a church service if they so desire. We also believe that if a believer wants to get re-baptized as an act of rededication, re-identification (Jordan River), or celebration (spiritual birthday, church anniversary, etc.) that there is no scriptural mandate to say that cannot happen. The "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 is spiritual baptism, not water baptism.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION?

If it is brought to the attention of the elders of STBC that one of its members is living in a lifestyle of known, unrepentant disobedience, the matter will be investigated based upon the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17. This passage teaches that the offended Christian, i.e. the one sinned against, is to first confront the offending Christian one on one for the purpose of seeking restoration. If the offender does not "hear" the offended Christian's case, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance, then two or three witness are to be brought in to confront the offending believer for the purpose of restoration.

If the offender does not "hear" the witnesses, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance then the church (leadership and laity) is to be notified. The church leadership will confront the sinning, unrepentant offender for the purpose of restoration. "Telling it to the church" can also imply telling the church body on a Sunday morning so that they can fervently pray for the person who is spiritually trapped by Satan to do his will. If the offender does not "hear" the church, i.e. confess their sin, repent, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance then the church is to put that person out of the church (I Cor. 5:2). The elders of the church will agree and "loose" that person from the confines of the church (Matt. 18:18-20).

The charges are to be announced to the membership during a Sunday gathering (I Cor. 5:4, I Tim. 5:20, Prov. 5:14), usually at communion. Putting the person out of the church is a protective measure for the state of the church itself in order to keep her pure and free from the leaven of un-dealt with sin and rebellion (I Cor. 5:6-8, Josh. 7:11-12). This public and dreadful procedure causes fear to spread through the church (Acts 5:11, I Tim. 5:20) and this can turn out to be quite healthy for the church (Acts 9:31).

The disciplined Christian loses the privileges of local church fellowship, resources, and spiritual covering (I Cor. 5:5, 9-11). In this unfortunate alternative the person is handed over to Satan (I Tim. 1:20), since it appears that they are submitting to him and not to God, for the purpose of destroying their flesh (I Cor.5:5, Num.12:10). Once the protective umbrella of God's grace is removed (Num.12:10, 14:22), then Satan will be used to teach them a lesson (I Tim.1:20), destroy their flesh (I Cor. 5:5), and run them back into fellowship with God and His people. The prayer of the church is "Lord break him/her, but please don't take him/her" (I John 5:16-17). In the meantime until this person repents, the church members are to refrain from fellowshiping with the offender (I Cor.5:9-11, Num.12:14-15) for the purpose of shaming them (II Thess.3:14-15, Num.12:14).

When this person repents they are to publicly confess their repentance to the church (Prov. 28:13). They are to then be publicly restored to church fellowship (Gal. 6:1-5, II Cor. 2:7-8, John 21:15-17).

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON GIVING AND RECEIVING PROPHETIC WORDS?

STBC relies more upon the "*prophecy of Scripture*" (II Peter 1:16-21) than we do upon prophetic words spoken by individuals. We abide by I Thessalonians 5:19-20 which says, "*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.*" We encourage our members to know and study God's Word (II Tim. 2:14-19) so as to test all prophetic words with the whole counsel of God's Word because if God does speak prophetically or futuristically through a person, it will never contradict His established, written Word.

If someone does have a word for the body of STBC it will be in line with the words God has already spoken to the pastors and elders (I Cor. 14:33). Before several Christians (Acts 21:4) and the prophet Agabus spoke to Paul about his fateful destiny in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14), God had already spoken to Paul prior (Acts 20:22-24). Also, the test of a true prophet was 100% accuracy in the fulfillment of that which was told (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). Perfection and/or the consequences of imperfection appear to not be demanded of today's prophets or those who listen to them.

We encourage our members to walk by faith (II Cor. 5:7) looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2) and not to look for "a word" or "a sign" (Matthew 12:39). We believe that God speaks to His children primarily through His Word and the Spirit who indwells the believer (John 14:26, 16:13, I John 2:26-27). However, we strive to maintain balance that God can speak to His children through unconventional means (Acts 21:9), but we also know we live in an age where there are many self-promoting, self-absorbed, and self-called prophets who have "a message from God", usually for a fee. Therefore we are admonished to "*test the spirits*" (I John 4:1). Spiritual people judge all things (I Cor. 2:15). Our goal is to be rooted in Christ, knowing His voice and His Word while maintaining sound doctrine so as not be blown away by every wind of doctrine that is so prevalent (Ephesians 4:11-16).

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON HEALING?

We believe emphatically that God is a healer (Exodus 15:26) and He still heals today (Hebrews 13:8), but He does not always heal in every situation (II Timothy 4:20). We are to pray with expectancy that God will heal our loved ones who are sick, but we also pray submitted to His sovereign wisdom and plan. This is not wavering faith. Rather, this is **praying with balance**. The Hebrew boys taught us to pray like this when they said to the king in the face of the fiery furnace, "*Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from*

the fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand O king. But if not, let it be known to you O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18). We will not bow to sickness whether God heals us or not. A merry heart is our medicine (Proverbs 17:22) and God’s joy is always our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

There are times that God heals us and delivers us from sickness in this life, and then there are times when deliverance will be experienced through death in glory with God (Romans 8:18). Faith is not always the criteria for whether or not we will be healed because Jesus healed people according to their faith (Matthew 9:22, 29) and He also healed people who had little faith (Mark 9:24) or no faith at all (Luke 22:51, John 5:1-8). Whether we have faith or not, God is gracious and loving towards His children and He has made provision for them through Jesus whereby death, or the things that cause death, loses its sting (I Cor. 15:55-57).

God gave Paul the ability to heal others (Acts 19:11-12) and even raise the dead (Acts 20:7-12), but he was not healed himself of his mysterious infirmity (II Cor. 12:7-10, Galatians 4:13-15). Paul didn’t heal Timothy but told him to take wine, which is a modern day equivalent to medicine (I Tim. 5:23). He didn’t tell Timothy to “claim his healing”. Paul also left Trophimus sick in Miletus (II Tim. 4:20). This implies that healing is never to be seen as an automatic occurrence, nor should a lack of healing be viewed as a defeat. The stripes of Jesus heal us first, foremost, and entirely from the spiritual effects of sin. Physical healing in this life is possible but always secondary.

STBC believes in divine healing but we do not endorse people who claim to be divine healers. We bear in mind that Satan has ability to mimic the power of God (Exodus 7:8-12, Rev. 13:12-15), therefore every “healing” is not proof that God is operating. When the focus is on healing and not on Jesus, Satan is pleased with that. We should have faith that God can heal and faith that God may choose not to heal.

WHERE DOES STBC STAND ON INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE AND INTERRACIAL ADOPTIONS?

STBC teaches that for Christians, the only stipulation that a marriageable person should have is that future spouse be in the Lord, i.e. saved (I Cor. 7:39). God does not prohibit or discourage interracial marriage. A marriage minded couple should receive pre-marriage counsel regardless of their racial or cultural differences. As far as interracial adoption is concerned, the only prerequisites to have are love and the desire to raise the child in the fear and admonition of the Lord. In fact, STBC encourages adoption period and not just interracial adoption.