

Theology Questionnaire

NOTE: I assume you are seeking a short answer to these questions. I will provide a clear and convictional answer to these questions. However, some of my answers will be longer than what you are expecting. In the last few months, I have been thinking about the need for our church to have biblical-theological positions on some of these topics. Idlewild has adopted the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 as our statement of faith, which I uphold and teach. However, there are many important topics (some of which are covered in these questions) that are not addressed in the BF&M. I believe our pastoral leadership needs to articulate our official theological position on some of these issues —i.e. position papers. In a moment of so much confusion in our society about the nature of God, humanity, and creation, the church needs to be graciously clear about what the Bible teaches. We cannot be ambivalent about things that the Bible is clear on. Gracious and firm conviction will protect both the unity and the health of the church. Thus, some of my long answers.

1. What is your view on the inerrancy of Scripture? Do you have strong opinions about various translations?

I affirm the inerrancy of Scripture. The inerrancy of Scripture is a consequence of its inspiration. And by “inspiration,” I mean the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors of Scripture such that their writings were precisely what God intended for them to write in order to communicate His truth. As such, they are completely trustworthy and authoritative. Paul tells us that the Bible is “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:15-16), and the apostle Peter writes that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-2).” Thus, the Scripture is free from error in all its teaching/affirmations because it is in its entirety the product of a sovereign-personal, omniscient God who cannot make mistake (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18). Furthermore, Paul emphatically declares that God is true and this is a complete non-negotiable (Rom 3:4). To deny the inerrant and infallible character of Scripture is to reject the perfect character of the God who stands behind it (cf. John 17:17).

I do not have “strong opinions” about various translations. We are blessed to have so many good translations of the Bible in our English language. Of course, there are bad translations of the Bible (e.g., New World Translation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses), because they change and remove words from the original manuscripts. There are different theories of translations. Broadly speaking, we have translations that are “word by word translations” (e.g., NASB) versus others that seek to offer a more “meaning by meaning translation” (i.e. NLT). I like the ESV as a translation that is close to “word by word” while it is also smooth in its reading.

2. Concerning the creation, is the Bible a historical record of events or an allegorical document? What is your view of Young Earth Creationism?

Last year, I preached a nine-message series on Genesis 1-3 at The Springs, where I addressed these questions and several others. Here is a brief answer to these two questions:

- First, a biblical view of how the world was brought into being: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Bible begins simply but dramatically: “In the beginning God.” He is. He is not the object whom we evaluate. He is the Creator who has made us, which changes all the dynamics. This God is not a local or national deity, He is the Creator of the universe.

Everything created is dependent upon Him, but He is not dependent upon us. In addition, the phrase ‘the heavens and earth’ points to the totality of creation.

- Second, the Bible clearly presents the creation account as a historical event. God made the heavens and the earth, and without the doctrine of creation, there is no Christianity as the Bible describes it. The verses immediately following Genesis 1:1 summarize God’s all-inclusive creative activity. Genesis 1 is both truthful and factual. If the biblical account of Creation and the Fall is not read and understood as historical, then the rest of the Bible goes away. For example, if we reject the historicity of those events, we would reject the historical fall, and thus the need of Christ to save us from our sins.
- Third, we should not treat these chapters as a scientific textbook, for that is not the intent of Moses. There are literary features and symbolism in the text, and the main purpose of these texts is to give us a theology of creation. I believe that the “young earth creation” view is the correct reading of the text. The view that the days of Genesis 1 are solar days is supported by the repeating phrase – ‘it was evening and morning, the x day.’ The phrase occurs after each of the first six days. In addition, other biblical passages (e.g., Exodus 20:9-11; 31:17; Sabbath) seem to assume 24-hour days.

3. Can you summarize your understanding of the Bible’s teaching about election? Who are the elect?

First, Scripture teaches three propositions simultaneously:

- God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is minimized or mitigated (e.g., Gen 50:19-20).
- Human beings are morally responsible creatures – they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, and make decisions – and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent (e.g., Lk 22:21-22).
- Despite everything Scripture says about God’s sovereignty, the Bible insists that God is perfectly good. God is *never* presented as an accomplice of evil, or as secretly malicious, or as standing behind evil in exactly the same way that he stands behind good. The goodness of God is a *non-negotiable* in Scripture (e.g., Dt 32:4; Hab 1:13; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 15:3-4).

Second, the doctrine of election has been affirmed by Christian pastors and theologians since the Second Century. It has been a consistent teaching throughout the history of the church (e.g., Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, Ambrose, Luther). The theme of election runs through the story of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. In the Old Testament there are several Hebrew terms that describe the concept of election that speak of God “taking knowledge of one with loving care,” or “making one the object of loving care or elective love” (e.g., Gen. 18:19; Amos 3:2; Hos. 13:5). After the fall of Adam and Eve, sin and death ruled over all humanity (e.g., Genesis 5). The influence of the serpent became rampant on the earth to the point that in Genesis 6:5, we read that “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In the early chapters of Genesis, we see an ever-growing avalanche of sin, and a continually widening chasm between humanity and God. It is in that context that hope appears, when in Genesis 6:8 we read that “Noah found favor before the Lord.” It is the grace of God that calls Noah to serve as a picture of redemption. Yet, Noah’s drunkenness demonstrates that the condition of humanity after the flood remains as it was before. The similar pattern appears with Abraham, who is elected by God out of an idolatrous family (Genesis 11). Similarly, in the OT we see the election of Jacob as the chosen one through whom the redeemer of the world would come (Gen 25:22-23; Rom 9:11-13). The notion that God set his favor over some individuals and groups finds its fullest expression in the affirmation that Israel is God’s chosen people. For example, in Deuteronomy 7:6-8, we read: *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you*

were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

In the New Testament, we see the same pattern with Jesus calling and selecting His disciples (e.g., John 6:44; 10:27; 15:16; Mark 13:20). Peter describes Christians as those who were elected by the foreknowledge of the Father, saved by the blood of Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:1-2). Paul speaks in detail about Christians being those elected by God before the foundation of the world in Romans 9, and Ephesians 1, Timothy, (2 T 1:8-10) and Titus (e.g., 1:1). One of the most comforting passages related to the doctrine of election is Romans 8:33, where Paul asks: “who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” and the answer is NO ONE. He goes on to say that nothing can separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus (v.39).

In short, the doctrine of election is clearly taught in Scripture. The controversy over election emerged in the last five centuries over “how God elected us.” That is, did God elect us because He saw that we would believe, or did we believe because He elected us? Charles Spurgeon, the famous English pastor of the last century, after examining the biblical teaching on election and knowing his sinful heart, stated: *I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine.*

To the question “Who are the elect?”, the answer is *those who believe in Jesus*. The responsibility of the Christian is to proclaim the Gospel and call all men and women to repent and believe (Acts 17:30). It is interesting that Paul’s teaching on election in Romans 9 leads to Paul’s teaching on evangelism and mission in Romans 10. As the Apostle writes, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” but they will not believe unless they hear the Gospel, and they will not hear the Gospel unless someone preaches to them, for faith comes by hearing the message of Christ.

4. What is the extent of the atonement? For whom did Jesus die?

The question of the extent of the atonement is a more technical debate. This was never a point of debate among Christians until 1610, when a group of Christians who followed the teaching of Jacobus Arminius published a statement called the “Five Articles of Remonstrance” which was responded to by the Synod of Dort in 1618. The statement of Dort articulated what came to be known as the “Five Points of Calvinism.” This was a debate within the Dutch Reformed Church that later influenced Protestantism in most European countries.

I reject both the language of “Limited Atonement” and “General Atonement.” I see both as *logicalism* —the excessive use of human logic to draw casual relations of things that the Bible does not connect. I think both systems restrict the language of Scripture. Let’s take the Gospel of John for example. In one hand, we have passages like John 1:29 and 3:16; and on the other hand, we have passages like John 10:14-15, 28 and 17:9. The first two passages are used to argue general atonement, while the last two passages are used to argue limited atonement. In my teaching I want to use the language of Scripture. I don’t have any problem saying that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and whosever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life, while at the same time saying that Jesus is now praying specifically for those the Father gave Him.

In short, I reject both the language of the general view and the limited view. When responding to pastors and seminary students in a class, I summarize my position the following way: the death of Christ is sufficient to save all humanity but is only effective for those who believe. Repent and believe!

5. Do you believe in eternal security or the perseverance of the saints? If so, please explain.

This is a shorter answer. Yes, I believe in eternal security. Those who have truly repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior will be saved. I can think of John 6:39, where Jesus says that it is the will of the Father that He should lose none of those He has given to Him, and Jesus will raise them to eternal life the day of judgement. 1 John 2:19 is also helpful in this debate, explaining why some people who once made a profession of faith have abandoned and rejected the Gospel. John writes: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

I affirm article V of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, when it states:

- *“All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”*

6. Are spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing continuing in the present age?

Let me begin by stating that this is not a “first order” debate (i.e., Theological Triage), as the doctrine of the Trinity, the humanity and divinity of Christ, and salvation by faith are. However, it is very important because our church needs to decide whether or not the “gifts” will be exercised in our congregational gatherings. I believe and teach that the Spiritual Gifts of tongues and prophecy have ceased. Those gifts were given by the Lord for building the foundation of the church (e.g., Ephesians 2:20). This is true of apostleship. We no longer have apostles. The prophets and apostles are the foundation on which the church was built. I also believe that the “gift of healing”— that is, a pattern of healing as seen in the NT where a person heals others of blindness, lameness, death, and near-death illnesses—have ceased. However, I also believe that the Lord miraculously heals people today. I believe we should pray for the sick, and sometimes the Lord answers those prayers in ways that doctors and scientists cannot explain (e.g., James 5:14-16). I also believe that the Lord uses dreams to trouble unbelievers and prepare them to hear and receive the preaching of the Gospel.

In short, I uphold the theological position called *Cessationism*, that those spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing have ceased, but it does not mean that there are no miracles today. So we can and should pray for healing and miracles.

7. Define a disciple. How would you measure personal transformation in the lives of believers?

A disciple is a follower of Christ. There are two aspects to disciple making: evangelism and discipling.

Evangelism is telling people who don't follow Jesus what it means to follow him. We do this by proclaiming and living the gospel where we live, work, and play. *Discipling* is helping other believers grow in Christ-likeness. Jesus has designed his church to be a body (1 Cor. 12), a kingdom of citizens and a family who actively build each other up into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 2:19; 4:13, 29). Thus, discipleship is relational in nature.

The most basic way I measure personal transformation in the life of a believer is two-fold: affection and obedience. For example, is this person growing in love for Christ and the Bible? Is this person enjoying communion with God through Scripture and prayer? Is this person resisting temptation and fighting sin? (I gave a talk of disciple making to the staff of the church, and I would be happy to share it with you if that would be helpful.)

Of course, this explanation could sound subjective. And that would be the case if we approach discipleship from a programmatic approach. My vision of discipleship is connected to my understanding of pastoral ministry, the nature of the church and church membership. I believe that, as challenging as it might be in our large congregation, leaders must observe, listen and watch over our flock (that is what the Lord Jesus told Peter when he asked him three times “do you love me?” in John 21:15-17; cf. Colossians 1:28). In relational discipleship, the transformation of the heart and the mind of the disciple is the goal. As we help others to grow in Christ-likeness, we do not measure progress simply by the performance of tasks, but by the integrity of the heart: obedience and affections. Under this understanding of discipleship, members of the church are known to others. I want us to think about people individually and work out where they are up to, and how and in what area they need to grow, which is different from a scattergun approach.

They are not simply names on a roll. As Leroy Eims writes in his book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, “The ministry is to be carried on by people, not programs. It is to be carried out by *someone* and not by *something*. Disciples cannot be mass-produced. We cannot drop people into a ‘program’ and see disciples emerge at the end of the production line. It takes time to make disciples. It takes individual, personal attention. It takes hours of prayer for them. It takes patience and understanding to teach them how to get into the Word of God for themselves, how to heed and nourish their soul, and by the power of the Holy Spirit how to apply the word to their lives. And it takes being an example to them of all of the above.”

Of course, there are “tasks” that would be expected for church members: bible reading, corporate worship participation, giving, service, regular gathering with other believers (e.g., small groups). Our church has called it “the six practices of abiding.” And even for those expected tasks and to-dos they must be known by a leader. I want us to create a culture where members are caring for one-another. This is something that I would be constantly teaching and illustrating from the pulpit.

As to a specific way to measure the progress or growth of each individual, I would like to implement a “CRM Funnel” or “pipeline funnel” to classify the members and attendees of the church. The categories would be as follows:

- Engaged – an unbeliever or believer who has been visiting us for the last few months, and is friend with a member.
- Evangelized – an unbeliever who has visited the church and has heard the gospel clearly explained, along with a call to repentance and faith.
- Established – a person who has joined the church in the last six months, and is being established in the faith.
- Established but struggling – a member who has been a Christian for some time but who seems to be struggling or stagnating spiritually.
- Established and growing – a member of the church who shows signs of ongoing growth in knowledge and godliness, including his willingness to serve others and give.
- Equipped – a growing member of the church that has been through one of our training programs (e.g. Discipleship Training, Missions Academy, Idlewild Institute, Counseling Certificate)
- Equipped and multiplying – a growing and equipped member of the church that is discipling other people—in one-on-one relationships or a small group context.

I hope this is helpful. I would be happy to clarify any specific point and talk more about the subject.

8. How would you address issues like CRT and social justice, from a Biblical perspective?

This is something that I addressed publicly a year ago when Pastor Ken called me to the platform to articulate Idlewild’s position.

First, I would say that racism or ethnocentrism is a sin. Any type of abuse and oppression is also sinful. All human beings are created in the image of God. All human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic background, have infinite value as image-bearers. The Bible speaks loudly against the sins of racism and oppression (e.g., Amos, James). And as Christians we need to lament and weep with those brothers and sisters who have experienced racism, and empathize with them. When one member of the body suffers, we all suffer.

Second, the solution to sin is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that sinful human beings can be saved, redeemed and transformed. Only the Gospel can achieve true transformation. We need a strong biblical anthropology and Christ-centered ethics, and we have that in the Bible.

Third, I reject CRT and the “Social Justice Movement.” These are built on ideologies that are contrary to the message of the Bible. For example, CRT is built on a Marxist worldview, as articulated by Herbert Marcuse and other critical theorists, which divides society into dominant, oppressor groups and subordinate, oppressed groups along lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The world view of critical theory begins not with creation, but with oppression. The omission of a creation element is very important because it changes our answer to the question: “who are we?” There is no transcendent Creator who has a purpose and a design for our lives and our identities. We don’t primarily exist in relation to God, but in relation to other people and to other groups. Furthermore, for critical theory, our identity is not defined primarily in terms of who we are as God’s creatures. Instead, we define ourselves in terms of race, class, sexuality, and gender identity. As a consequence, the biblical teachings about marriage and family are described as oppressive.

In conclusion, we do not need CRT or any other worldly ideology. We need a robust biblical theology about what it means to be human and how we should live in society.

9. What is your view of women in ministry, deacons, and pastoral leadership?

The ministry of women is essential for our church. And that ministry includes: discipling other women, counseling, prayer, evangelism, hospitality, and service. I believe that for us to have a healthy and thriving congregation, we must acknowledge and celebrate God’s gifts to and through our sisters. We need to understand that Jesus specifically chose twelve male apostles. Yet, he also taught a larger group of disciples which included women (e.g., Matt. 15:28; Lk 10:39). He traveled with the twelve, but also with some women, including Mary (called Magdalene), Joanna (whose husband was the manager of Herod’s household), and Suzanna—many of whom funded the ministry of Jesus out of their own means (Lk 8:2–3). Men and women have different roles in the church and in the family, but they both are created in the image of God with equal and infinite value.

I believe the Bible teaches that a pastor is a man who meets the biblical qualifications of an elder/overseer as described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, and who has been recognized by the local church as one set apart by the Lord to shepherd and feed Christ’s sheep. The office of elder/pastor/overseer is exclusive for qualified men, that is, a woman cannot be a pastor. This has also been the historical position of the Church. It was not until the 1900s that churches started to move away from this teaching. For many, this is a challenging topic. I have talked with friends who would say, “Well, that’s not how we did it in my previous church,” or, “I think we need to allow our sisters to use their gifts, and if she’s called to be a pastor, who am I to deny that?” While these statements may sound humble, the problem with both of them is that what a church does or what one feels/thinks is not the foundation in which truth is grounded. What is truth and what is right must flow from what God has ordained.

Historically, Christians have proclaimed and obeyed the teaching of Scripture, while celebrating and affirming God's gifts in the lives of both men and women. A church that does not encourage, recognize, and utilize the gift of its female members is a church that is impoverished. Similarly, a church that disobeys the teaching of Scripture regarding elders/pastors/overseers is a church in disobedience to the Lord. We need to teach the whole counsel of God so that all our people will be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that we may do that which is good and acceptable and perfect, which is always God's will (Romans 12:2). We should pray that our churches will be led by godly men who will shepherd the flock of Christ with gentleness and humility, never "domineering over those in [their] charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9).

10. Explain your conviction on abortion?

Abortion is a sin; it is the intentional killing of an innocent human life. The Bible teaches that life is a gift from God, and that God creates and sustains life (e.g., Gen 1-2; Ps 139:13-14; John 1:3-4; Acts 17:25, 28; Col 1:16-17). Not only is human life a gift from God, but human beings are created by God in His own image (Gen 1:26-28). That human beings are created in God's image is the ground for the prohibition of shedding human blood (Gen 9:6), and Scripture calls for the protection of innocent life (Ex 20:13; 21:22-25; Dt 22:8).

11. Explain your convictions on homosexuality. Would you marry a homosexual couple? Can they be church members?

I will be very precise here, since I have already built a broad biblical-theological understanding about human beings, created male and female in the image of God. Here is brief response to these three questions:

1. Homosexuality is a sin. This is clearly taught in Scripture. For example, see Genesis 19:1–13; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10
2. No, I would not marry a homosexual couple. Marriage is an institution created by God, that points to Christ and the Church. Marriage is the covenant union between a man and a woman.
3. No, a person who practices homosexuality cannot be a member of a biblical church. For example, Paul tells the church in Corinth: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:9-11)
 - o One pastoral observation: We can have members of our churches who struggle with same-sex attraction, but that is different from practicing the sin or even identifying himself or herself with a sinful desire. I have counseled members of our church who have struggled with same-sex attraction, and they are fleeing temptation and fighting those sinful desires. They would never call themselves homosexual, gay, or lesbian.

12. Explain your convictions on gambling?

I personally oppose gambling, and I would encourage Christians to abstain from it. As I have read a few articles and essays on the subject, I will say that although I cannot give a Bible verse that prohibits gambling directly, I believe that the Bible discourages gambling implicitly. I say this aware that there is no virtue in adding to Christian ethics more than God requires, and doing that—regardless of our good intentions—is condemned

throughout the Bible (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18-19). While the Bible does not contain a direct “you shall not” in regard to gambling, it does contain many insights and principles which indicate that gambling is wrong. The basic impulse behind gambling is greed—a basic sin that is the father of many other evils. Greed, covetousness, and avarice are repeatedly addressed by Scripture—always presented as a sin against God, and often accompanied by a graphic warning of the destruction which is greed’s result. The burning desire for earthly riches leads to frustration and spiritual death. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil” (1 Tim 6:10). The Bible indicates that man is to work creatively and use his possessions for the good of others (Eph. 4:28); gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible calls for careful stewardship; gambling calls for reckless abandon.

In addition to these biblical references, gambling compromises worship, discourages gainful work, damages marriage and family, destroys community responsibilities, and is built on an industry that incentivizes greed and sexual immorality. For example, the growth of crime in states and cities with legalized and high rates of gambling is easily demonstrated. Several studies have shown that after three or four years, counties with casino gambling experience an increase in rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft.

In all humility, this is a subject that I would like to discuss with the pastoral staff and some godly and thoughtful leaders of the church. This is a subject that I had not studied in depth.

13. What are your experiences and convictions about divorce?

Divorce is such a difficult topic. Before I address the topic of divorce, I want to say something about the Bible’s view of marriage.

The covenant union of marriage points to something greater than the husband and wife – it points to God. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5:31-32, quoting Genesis 2, says, “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*” The marriage between a man and a woman is to be a living testimony of the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, whom He purchased with His own blood. His love for her knows no end. Therefore, to be unfaithful to the marriage covenant will not just bring shame upon the couple and lead to negative consequences in their life but will also bear false witness to the world about Christ and His church. To walk away from this marriage covenant would be to dishonor the name of Christ.

For this reason, the Bible teaches that marriage is a lifetime commitment. “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt 19:6). Through the prophet Malachi, God tells us that he hates divorce (Mal 2:16), but not from a safe and smug, self-righteous distance. God despises divorce the way a divorced person despises divorce. Not as a disinterested third party, but as someone who knows the pain personally. As we read in Jeremiah 3 and other prophets, God was abandoned by His people Israel when they committed spiritual adultery by worshiping false gods. In Jeremiah 3:8 we read, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.” God knows what it means to be betrayed and forsaken. He hates divorce!

However, God knows that since marriages involve two sinful human beings, divorces are going to occur. Despite God’s opposition to divorce, he does in fact allow divorce in some cases. In the Old Testament, He laid down some laws in order to protect the rights of divorcées, especially women (Deut 24:1-4). Jesus pointed out that these laws were given because of the hardness of people’s hearts, not because such laws were God’s desire (Matt 19:8). Biblically, there is one ground for divorce: the breaking of the marriage covenant. The Bible gives us two examples of the breaking of the covenant: sexual immorality

(Matt 5:32 and 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor 7:15). In Matthew 19:8-9, the Lord Jesus said, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” Of course, this doesn’t mean that adultery necessitates divorce. I personally have walked with couples who have stayed together after adultery, and the Lord has restored, healed, and blessed their marriages. Abandonment by an unbeliever is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. Being married to an unbeliever is no reason for divorce. But, Paul says, “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.” I personally believe that the case of abuse is covered under abandonment. Abuse is contrary to everything godly. Physical violence against a spouse is evil and should not be tolerated by anyone. No one should remain in an unsafe environment. Physical abuse is also against the law, and civil authorities should be the first ones contacted if abuse occurs. In short, God allows divorce in the event of abandonment and adultery, but even those circumstances do not automatically trigger divorce proceedings; divorce is still a last resort.

14. Is it permissible for a man to serve as a deacon if he or his wife has been divorced?

It depends. I examine these situations case by case. It depends when the divorce happened (e.g., before they were saved) and the context of the divorce. I know some people think that a man would be disqualified if he or his wife has been divorced. The only passage that mentions the qualifications for deacons is 1 Timothy 3:8–13. In verse 12, we read, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.” Some people interpret this verse to mean “one wife for life.” Under this view are those who do not allow for (1) a divorced, (2) a widower, or even (3) a single person to serve as deacon. I disagree with that interpretation. That interpretation is highly unlikely. It is clear that Paul wasn’t married, at least at this point in his life, and certainly the Lord Jesus was never married. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul acknowledges that there are certain advantages to being single in the ministry. Similarly, in Romans 7, Paul insists that there is nothing dishonorable about remarrying, marrying a Christian spouse the second time around after the first one has died. The Bible certainly warns against divorce in many ways. Some have tried to impose a prohibition against anyone becoming a servant of the gospel who has ever been divorced at any time in his life. So he might have been a murderer, and then paid his debt to society, got out of prison and been converted and become a minister of the gospel. But if he’s been divorced, he can’t enter the ministry – which somehow projects an image of divorce as the “unforgivable sin.” While divorce can disqualify a person from serving as a deacon, I think it has to be analyzed under the umbrella of being “above reproach.” Divorce is not an unforgivable sin, yet it may disqualify a person for ministry precisely because it destroys so much of a person’s credibility. In summary, the “one wife for life” is not the best interpretation.

I think the phrase “husband of one wife” (both in 1 Tim 3:2 and v. 12) is referring to the faithfulness of a husband toward his wife. He must be a “one-woman man.” That is, there must be no other woman in his life to whom he relates in an intimate way either emotionally or physically. Paul is writing to Timothy as a young pastor in a Greco-Roman context where polygamy was normal. Both in the aristocracy and in the borderlands of the Empire – places like Lystra – polygamy was not all that uncommon. For example, if you go to Africa today, you discover that in some tribes polygamy is not uncommon. In those contexts, the more power you have – if you are the chief, for instance – the more likely it is that you have a plurality of wives. Suppose one of our missionaries moves into one of those tribes, and a large number of people, including the chief, become Christians. Does the chief of the tribe who has several wives become pastor or deacon of the local church? Not according to the Bible. This is precisely what Paul is ruling out in 1 Timothy 3.

In short, I think it is permissible for a man to serve as a deacon if he or his wife has been divorced, but it has to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

15. What is your stance on alcoholic beverage consumption or legalized recreational drug use in general, but specifically for pastors and church leadership? Is it sinful?

I do not consume alcoholic beverages or any legalized recreational drugs. I encourage all believers to abstain from alcohol and any recreational drugs, especially those in church leadership.

I tend to classify ethical issues into three categories: Law, Wisdom and Preference.

- Law refers to those issues that are clearly addressed in the Bible. For example, lust is a sin (e.g., Matt 5:28; 1 Jn 2:16). There is no argument around it. The Bible is clear about it.
- Wisdom refers to those issues that are not biblical law, but are issues where abstinence or avoidance are encouraged in Scripture. (E.g. “food sacrificed to idols” in 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 14). Another example would be an issue that relates to a law in Scripture. Let me illustrate it: I was counseling a brother who struggled with lust, and he felt tempted to sin when he would go to the beach. I asked him not to go to the beach, not because going to the beach was sinful, but because it was unwise to expose himself to temptation and sin by going there.
- Preference refers to issues related to personal preferences or traditions. One example of this would be the style of music or musical instruments used in worship. I personally love the cello. It is the most beautiful instrument. But it would be unhelpful for me to ask a worship pastor to primarily use the cello during corporate worship. My personal preferences should not become issues in the life of the church.

With that background, the issue of alcohol is not law, that is, I don’t think one can make an exegetical argument to call drinking a glass of wine a sin. I consider the consumption of alcoholic beverages to be an issue of wisdom. So, out of wisdom, I encourage people to abstain from drinking alcohol. I personally support our church policy that ask our staff and lay leaders (e.g., deacons) to abstain from it, and discourage others to do the same. I’m comfortable with our current policy.

The Bible, especially in the law, addresses the consumption of alcoholic beverages (e.g., Lev 10:9; Num 6:3; Deut 29:6; Prov 20:1; Is 5:11), and it clearly condemns drunkenness and its effects (e.g., Prov 23:29-35; Eph 5:18). However, Scripture does not necessarily forbid a Christian from drinking a glass of wine, or any other drink containing alcohol.

16. Would infidelity disqualify someone from serving as a pastor?

If a pastor commits adultery, I believe that person is disqualified from serving as a pastor. So the answer to the question is yes.

However, if an unbeliever is unfaithful to his girlfriend or wife, and then he is saved, and walks faithfully with the Lord and is now “above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2), then that person could be considered for serving as a pastor, as long as he meets all the biblical qualifications.

17. What is your preference concerning local church polity?

The church is the new covenant people of God, a community of regenerate believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, whose sins have been forgiven by God on the basis of the work of Christ. A local church is a group of forgiven sinners who regularly gather in Christ’s name to affirm and oversee one another’s union in Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching, hymns, prayers, and the breaking of bread. Individuals are incorporated into this new covenant community through water baptism upon repentance from sin and faith in Christ. The church is where we live out the multiple “one another” commands that we find in Scripture. The Bible commands us to “love *one another*” (Jn 13:34), to “encourage *one another* and build *one another* up” (1 Thes 5:11), to “confess our sins to *one another* and pray for *one another*” (James 5:16), to “serve *one another*” (Gal 5:13), to “speak truth” to *one another* (Col 3:9; Eph

4:35), and to “bear *one another’s* burdens” (Gal 6:2). These “one another” commands reflect God’s intention for us in Christ, and we cannot do these alone.

I am a congregational Baptist because I believe Paul was one. I believe the New Testament prescribes a normative pattern of church polity. The doctrine of the church should be very important to all Christians. A biblical ecclesiology guards the Gospel, protects the unity of the body, and shapes Christian discipleship. The New Testament is filled with examples of how the early Christians structured their churches. In the epistles we learn about the centrality of corporate meetings (Acts 20:7; Heb 10:25), about two officers: pastors and deacons (e.g. Acts 6:1-6; Phil 1:1; Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-12), about instances of discipline (1 Cor 5), about offerings (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1-2), about the administration of the ordinances (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 11:23-26), and the qualifications for membership (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:47).

So when I say I’m a congregational Baptist, I mean that the membership of the church is regenerate and meaningful, that the congregation is led by pastors, that deacons are servants, and that the congregation is the final court of appeal in issues that are foundational to the life of the local church.

18. How have you handled church discipline within your congregation?

I have been a member of several churches where church discipline is practiced. I have walked with brothers through the process of church discipline. I also teach church discipline in seminary. In fact, next year I’m teaching a Doctor of Ministry Seminar on *Church Polity, Membership, and Discipline*. Church discipline is taught in the Bible (e.g., Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5—cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1; 2 Thes 3:13-15).

God disciplines us because he loves us (Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19). That must be the same motive of the church. In Matthew 18:15, it is the goal that discipline be ended at the first step (one brother confronting another). First and foremost, church discipline is to have the goal of personal reconciliation among individual believers (cf. Gal 6:1; James 5:20). Even when discipline gets to the final step, it must still have the same goal. For example, in 1 Cor. 5:5, Paul writes to the church about a person who was practicing sexual immorality, “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus.” Paul is not speaking with a vindictive attitude. Church discipline is not retributive action, it is not the enactment of justice, *per se*. It’s rehabilitation. It is intended to help the individual Christian and the congregation to grow in holiness and godliness – to become more like Christ. The “be handed over to Satan” has a goal: the destruction of the flesh, so that the person can be saved on the day of judgment. The goal is the healing and restoration of a person who is not living in tune with the confession of faith that he or she has made. “Deliver unto Satan” is similar to what Paul had already said in verse 2 (“removed from our midst”), as well as what he says later in verse 9 (“...and not associate with him”).

Many people try to persuade themselves and others that discipline is not an act of love. But love is not a license to do anything. Rather, it seeks the good, the fair, and the pure. Love is a person, a Person who is Love and Truth. As Bonhoeffer writes in his book *Life Together*, “Nothing can be more cruel than an indulgence that leaves others in sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than a stern rebuke calling another Christian from the path of sin and destruction.” Similarly, a pastor in the XIX century wrote, “if you know about your brother's sin, and you don't call him out and confront him, you are just as cruel as the person who walks by and sees his neighbor's house on fire and does not warn him while he sleeps in it.” I believe that when discipline leaves the church, the Lord Jesus Christ leaves with it. A church that tolerates indiscipline and ungodliness, under any excuse, is a church that is being unfaithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Historical Background – Understanding why church discipline disappeared from many of our churches:

Greg Wills, research professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has brought to light a crucial change in how churches have thought about *church covenant* and *church discipline* between the generations of our great-grandparents and our grandparents; for example, he finds that corrective discipline has virtually disappeared from our churches. In *Democratic Religion*, Wills shows that a great part of the historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty was motivated by a desire that churches be free to exercise church discipline without the interference of the state.

Wills shows that in pre-Civil War days, “Southern Baptists excommunicated nearly 2% of their membership every year. Incredible as it may seem, while they were doing that, their churches grew! In fact, their churches grew at twice the rate of the population growth. Wills argues that this commitment to a holy corporate witness to the world declined as other things gained the attention of the Christians between the late 19th century and early 20th century. Wills writes,

“In fact, the more the churches concerned themselves with social order, the less they exerted church discipline. From about 1850 to 1920, a period of expanding evangelical solicitude for the reformation of society, church discipline declined steadily. From temperance to Sabbatarian reform, evangelicals persuaded their communities to adopt the moral norms of the church for society at large. As Baptists learned to reform the larger society, they forgot how they had once reformed themselves. Church discipline presupposed a stark dichotomy between the norms of society and the kingdom of God. The more evangelicals purified the society, the less they felt the urgency of a discipline that separated the church from the world.”

As Wills explains, “After the Civil War, ... observers began to lament that church discipline was foundering, and it was. It declined partly because it became more burdensome in larger churches...Urban churches, pressed by the need for large buildings and the desire for refined music and preaching, subordinated church discipline to the task of keeping the church solvent. Many [leaders] shared a new vision of the church, replacing the pursuit of purity with the quest for efficiency. They lost the resolve to purge their churches of straying members. No one publicly advocated the demise of discipline. No Baptist leader arose to call for an end to congregational censures. No theologians argued that discipline was unsound in principle or practice... It simply faded away, as if [Christians] had grown weary of holding one another accountable.” In all these changes, “the distinction between the church and the world began to be lost. And this loss was to the great detriment of the churches’ evangelical ministry—and to our own lives as Christians.”

Os Guinness, in *Dining with the Devil* (1993), laments so many churches having fallen prey to secularizing influences in the way they approach ministry or choose their leaders. He writes, “*In distinct contrast to the widespread conservative fallacy of the eighties, the sharpest challenge of modernity is not secularism, but secularization. Secularism is a philosophy; secularization is a process. Whereas the philosophy is obviously hostile and touches only a few, the process is largely invisible and touches many. Being openly hostile, secularism rarely deceives Christians. Being much more subtle, secularization often deceives Christians before they are aware of it, including those in the church-growth movement. How else can one explain the comment of a Japanese businessman to a visiting Australian? ‘Whenever I meet a Buddhist leader, I meet a holy man. Whenever I meet a Christian leader, I meet a manager.’*”

19. Are there any unique theological views or personal convictions that have been controversial in your other ministry opportunities? If so, explain.

No, there are not any unique theological views or personal convictions that have been controversial in other ministries. I have clear convictions, but I’m not controversial :)