

2.01 DOCTRINAL BELIEFS

These basic doctrines within the Branch Life Church Statement of Faith represent what we believe to be core elements of Biblical teaching. We expect all members of Branch Life Church to affirm these doctrines.

A. Revelation

We believe that it is possible for man to know God (1) but only to the extent God reveals Himself to man, for apart from the divine self-revelation, finite man cannot know the infinite God (2).

We believe that God reveals Himself to all people through creation and conscience. This gives them a general sense of God's existence (3); a general awareness of His power (4), wisdom (5), majesty (6), and goodness (7); and a sense of man's ultimate accountability to God (8).

We believe that God has further revealed Himself through the incarnation of His Son (9), and through the Holy Scripture (10).

B. Scripture

We believe that the Bible is the final, complete, and infallible authority for our lives; that the Bible consists of sixty-six Old Testament and New Testament books; that as originally written it is in its entirety verbally inspired by God; and that it is indeed the Word of God (11).

C. God

We believe that there exists one living and true God (12); that in His being He is infinite (13), eternal (14), self-existent (15), unchanging (16), and ever-present (17); that in His nature He is spirit (18); that He is personal (19); that He is perfect and absolute in all His attributes (20), including those of His Holiness (21), His power (22), and His knowledge (23); that He is therefore sovereign in His position, just in all His decrees, and righteous in all His actions; that He is the cause of all existence beside Himself (24); and that the full comprehension of His person is beyond the capacity of finite man (25). We further believe that in His divine and infinite being there is a trinity of persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (26), sharing equally in every divine perfection while executing distinct but harmonious offices in every divine work (27).

1. God the Father

We believe that the Father is truly God, and that in the Godhead He occupies a functional but not a positional superiority (28). These functions include, but are not limited to, creation (29), planning redemption (30), sending the Son (31), sending the Holy Spirit (32), raising the Son from the dead (33), and giving authority to the Son to judge the world (34). It is to the glory of the Father that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (35).

2. God the Son

We believe that Jesus Christ is truly God (36); that He is eternal (37), was active in the creation (38), and entered the realm of humanity by means of birth from a virgin, human mother, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit (39); and that although in His humanity He possessed a human nature and human limitations (40), yet without sin (41), He nevertheless did not cease to be God. We believe that the purpose of the incarnation was to provide redemption for men (42) by means of a predetermined (43), substitutionary (44), propitiatory (45) death on the cross; that Christ bodily rose from the dead (46) and ascended into heaven (47); and that He will one day return to earth (48). Furthermore, we believe that Jesus is presently the Advocate (49) and Great

High Priest (50) of His people, the exalted Head of His Church (51), and the only Mediator between God and man (52).

3. God the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is truly God (53); that Scripture was given by Him (54); that He convicts of sin; that He bears witness to the truth of the Gospel in preaching and testimony (55); that He is the regenerating agent in the new birth (56); that He seals (57), indwells (58), guides (59), gifts (60), teaches (61), confirms (62), sanctifies (63), and comforts (64) believers.

D. Satan

We believe in the spirit being of Satan who was created by God as an angel but through pride and Rebellion became the enemy of his Creator. Satan is the unholy and temporary god of this world and ruler of all powers of darkness and sin (65).

E. Sin

We believe in the reality of sin, that sin is departure from the purpose and will of God, and that the active originator of sin in the universe was Satan (66).

F. Creation and Man

We believe that God created all things (67) and that man was created and is made in the image of God (68). Man was originally created sinless (69) but by choice fell from his sinless state (70). All of mankind are now sinners by nature and by choice (71), naturally inclined to evil (72), utterly devoid of the righteousness required by the law of God (73), and therefore, under just condemnation without defense or excuse (74).

G. Salvation

We believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Each person must choose to accept the forgiveness, salvation, and the reconciliation that God offers to us through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. There is nothing we can do to deserve this life—it is a free gift of God, and our responsibility is simply to receive it.

1. Grace

We believe that it is by grace, God's unmerited favor, we are saved through faith, and this is not from ourselves, but it is a gift of God. Grace is given freely not based on any good works, kind deeds or through baptism, intercessory prayer or communion (75).

2. New Birth

We believe that in order to be saved, sinners must be born again (76); though formerly dead in sin, we are made alive in Christ (77).

3. Repentance and Faith

We believe that repentance, a change of mind and purpose from sin and toward God, is an integral part of saving faith (78), and that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation (79). We believe that saving faith is trusting in Christ alone for salvation.

4. Justification

We believe that justification, occurring at the time of new birth, is that judicial act of God whereby He imputes the righteousness of Christ to the believer and therefore declares the believer righteous; that it includes the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life, not in

consideration of any works of righteousness we have done, but solely by grace through faith in Christ (80).

5. Sanctification

We believe that sanctification is the work of God in all believers by which He changes our hearts and minds, and He continues making our character more and more like Jesus Christ (81).

6. Eternal Destiny

We believe that death seals the eternal destiny of each person. At the final judgment, each unbeliever will be separated from God and condemned to the lake of fire. Each believer will be received into God's loving presence and rewarded for their faithfulness to Him in this life. Believers will spend eternity with God in the new Heaven and the new Earth (82).

H. Marriage

We believe that the Bible teaches that marriage is to be exclusively the union of a man and a woman. We furthermore accept the Biblical prohibition of sexual union outside of marriage (83), and the Biblical directives concerning husband, wife, and family as fully applicable to believers in our time (84).

I. The Church

We believe that born-again believers everywhere compose the Church in the universal sense, but the church is always expressed locally. The local church consists of a group of born-again, baptized believers who are organized according to Scripture; willingly submitted to the authority of the Biblically established leadership of the elders/overseers/pastors; served by deacons; self-governing; meeting together for the worship of God, fellowship, growth in Christ, serving each other, and reaching the lost (85).

2.02 DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS

The following Distinctive Beliefs demonstrate our particular interpretation of the Bible in several areas. These Distinctive Beliefs are not universally held by all followers of Christ. Members of Branch Life Church may differ in their interpretation of Scripture regarding our Distinctive Beliefs yet for the sake of unity may not cause division or recruit others to their position. Members should expect that the distinctive will be maintained in all ministry environments at Branch Life Church, and members may not teach contrary to them.

A. The Ordinances

We believe that the following acts of obedience are symbolic in nature and provide a vivid picture of the love and grace of God.

1. Baptism

Baptism is an outward sign of a person's internal faith in Jesus Christ. This physical demonstration symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, but more importantly, communicates a believer's loyalty and allegiance to Jesus Christ in a public way. Baptism is commanded in Scripture as an initial act of obedience by Christ-followers but it is not conditional for one's salvation. We believe in believer's baptism by immersion in water (86).

2. The Lord's Table

The Lord's Table (or Communion) is a physical act in which believers remember the death of Jesus. Jesus created this expression during an intimate moment with his closest followers, and we are instructed to continue observing this act of worship. (87).

B. Civil Government

We believe that God ordains human government for the good of mankind and that believers are to obey civil law unless such law contradicts the commands of the Word of God (88). In the event of such conflict, we believe that we must obey God rather than man, and that we must not renounce our profession or Christian practice, even in the face of trials, afflictions, persecutions, or imprisonments (89). We furthermore believe that the affairs of the church must be kept distinct from the civil government.

C. Election and Free Will

We believe that election is the eternal purpose of God according to which He graciously chooses to regenerate and save sinners. It is a glorious display of God's sovereign goodness. We also believe this election is done in a manner above our comprehension, solely by the power of the Holy Spirit, so as to secure our voluntary, free will obedience to the Gospel. Election is evidenced by repentance, faith, and newness of life (90).

D. Perseverance

We believe that all who are truly born again are eternally secure in God's salvation and that they will persevere by the power of God, through faith (91).

E. Last Things

We believe in the personal, premillennial, imminent return of Christ (92), the resurrection of the righteous dead (93), the change of the living in Christ (94), His millennial reign on earth and the creation of the New Heaven and a New Earth where Believers from all of human history will live with God, with no evil or sin (95), the resurrection of the unrighteous (96), and their judgment at the Great White Throne and subsequent sentencing to the Lake of Fire (97).

F. Supernatural Gifts

We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers and gifts believers for their ministry (98). Some of these gifts can be categorized as "supernatural" gifts because their expression overrides natural laws and ordinary human abilities. These gifts have included speaking in unlearned foreign languages, the ability to miraculously heal, and speaking prophetically of future events (99). Although we believe that God is no less capable of working through His people in these same ways today, there is evidence from Scripture that these gifts were linked specifically to the birth of the early church as a way of confirming the message (100), and so for the sake of unity within this church family we do not practice or teach these supernatural gifts. We do encourage believers to focus on loving one another and to pursue the gifts that are certain to edify the church (101).

G. Complementarian Roles of Men and Women

We believe the Bible clearly says that there is equality between men and women before God (102), yet there are distinctions in roles for men and women in the home and in the church (103). Every leadership opportunity is open to women except those that are excluded by Scripture. Therefore, women are not permitted to serve as elders on the Oversight Team (104). Additionally, because Paul reasons from Creation as opposed to a specific cultural context, we believe women are not permitted to serve as authoritative pastor-teachers within the context of the local church (105).

H. Evangelism and Mission

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to actively make disciples of all nations. Our personal growth in understanding God's love and forgiveness

through the Gospel must result in personal love for our world. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by persistent prayer, personal connections, verbal witness, Godly love and living, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ. (106)

[REFERENCE NOTES]

1. John 17:3; 1 John 5:20
2. Psalm 145:3; Romans 1:19, 11:33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:9-10
3. Acts 17:24-28; Romans 1:19-20
4. Isaiah 40:26; Romans 1:20
5. Psalm 19:2
6. Psalm 19:1
7. Acts 14:17
8. Romans 1:20
9. John 1:1-5, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3
10. John 5:39
11. Psalm 33:11, 119:89; Matthew 24:35; John 10:35, 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-20
12. Isaiah 45:21-22; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 2:5
13. 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 147:5
14. Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 1:17
15. Exodus 3:14; John 5:26
16. Malachi 3:6; James 1:17
17. Psalm 139:7-10
18. John 4:24
19. Exodus 3:14; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Hebrews 1:3
20. Matthew 5:48
21. Isaiah 6:3, 57:15; Psalm 47:8; Habakkuk 1:13; 1 Peter 1:15-16
22. Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26
23. Psalm 147:5
24. Genesis 1:1; John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16-17
25. Romans 11:33-34
26. Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14
27. John 14:26; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:6-9
28. John 3:35; 5:19; 14:10
29. Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 40:28; Matthew 19:4
30. John 3:15; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:7-10
31. John 5:36-38; 1 John 4:14
32. John 14:26
33. 1 Corinthians 6:14; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20
34. John 5:22, 27
35. John 5:37, 14:16-17; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:10-11
36. Isaiah 9:16; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:15-16
37. John 1:1-5, 8:58
38. John: 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2
39. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:27-31
40. Matthew 8:24; John 4:6, 19:28
41. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15, 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 3:3
42. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Revelation 5:9-10
43. Acts 2:23; Revelation 13:8
44. 1 Peter 2:24
45. 1 John 4:10
46. Matthew 28:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:4; 2 Timothy 2:8
47. Acts 1:9

48. John 14:3; Acts 1:11
49. 1 John 2:11
50. Hebrews 4:14
51. Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15-16, 5:23
52. 1 Timothy 2:5
53. Acts 5:3-4
54. 2 Peter 1:21
55. Acts 5:32
56. John 3:3-6
57. 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 4:30
58. Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 20
59. Acts 16:6-7; Romans 8:14
60. 1 Corinthians 12:4
61. John 14:26, 16:13-14
62. Romans 8:16
63. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 5:22-23
64. John 16:7; Acts 9:31
65. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:26; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9-10
66. Proverbs 15:19; Isaiah 14:12-15, 59:1-2; John 1:29, 8:44; 1 John 3:4, 8
67. Genesis 1-2; Exodus 20:11; Colossians 1:16
68. Genesis 1:27
69. Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 5:12
70. Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 5:12-19
71. Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-12, 23, 5:12
72. Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:14-17; Galatians 5:19-21
73. Isaiah 64:6-7; Galatians 3:22-24
74. Romans 1:19-21, 2:14-16
75. Ephesians 2:8-9
76. John 3:3, 6-7
77. Ephesians 2:1-3
78. Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19, 17:30
79. John 1:12, 3:16; Acts 16:31
80. Romans 5:15-21; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21
81. Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11; Hebrews 10:10; Jude 1
82. Psalm 9:17; Proverbs 14:32; Malachi 3:18; Matthew 25:34-41; Luke 16:19-31; John 8:21; Romans 6:23
83. Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 6:24-33; Matthew 5:27-28; Acts 15:20; Romans 7:3, 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5:9, 6:15-20, 10:8; Galatians 5:19-21; James 2:10-11
84. Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:4; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:17-21; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Peter 3:1-8
85. Acts 2:41-42, 20:28; Romans 6:1, 4-5, 16; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 5:12, 11:2, 16:1-3; Philippians 1:1, 4:15; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:14
86. Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12-13, 36, 38; Romans 6:1-10
87. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-23; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
88. Exodus 18:21-22; Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17
89. Daniel 3:17-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:17-20, 29
90. Matthew 22:14; John 15:16; Romans 8:33, 9:16, 20-24, 16:13; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:2, 2:9
91. Psalm 89:30-34; Matthew 16:18; John 5:24, 6:3-7, 10:28-29, 14:19, 17:2; Romans 8:1, 29-31, 38-39; 1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:12, 2:13; Heb. 5:9, 9:12, 13:5
92. John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:8
93. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:5-6

94. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
95. Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-9, 32:1; Luke 1:32; Acts 2:29-30; Revelation 20:6-7; Mark 13:31; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation chapters 21-22
96. John 5:29; Revelation 20:5
97. Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:28-29
98. Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:11-16
99. 1 Corinthians 12:28
100. Hebrews 2:4; 2 Corinthians 12:12
101. 1 Corinthians 12:31
102. Galatians 3:28
103. Ephesians 5:23-24; 1 Timothy 2:11-12
104. 1 Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:6-9
105. 1 Timothy 2:12-14
106. Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8, 16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17.