



## Pathway Life Church - Open Hand / Closed Hand Policy

Pursuing the Unity of the Spirit

**Ephesians 4:1-16**

**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, **we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him,** who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

## [IN THE CLOSED HAND:]

In order for a church like ours to be in unity we must rally around a few fundamental beliefs. While we desire to be inclusive and accepting of others and their scriptural beliefs – at some point there has to be a line in the sand that we will not cross. At Pathway Church we rally around, defend, and unify around these central truths.

**THE BIBLE:** The Holy Scriptures, as originally given by God, are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

**THE TRINITY:** There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**JESUS:** Our Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; we affirm his virgin birth, sinless humanity, divine miracles, vicarious and atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, ongoing mediatorial work, and personal return in power and glory.

**SALVATION BY FAITH THROUGH GRACE:** The salvation of lost and sinful humanity is possible only through the merits of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, received by faith apart from works, and is characterized by regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

**THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT:** The Holy Spirit enables believers to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THE GLOBAL CHURCH:** The Church, the body of Christ, consists of all true believers.

**ETERNITY:** Ultimately God will judge the living and the dead, those who are saved unto the resurrection of life, those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

The above list is provided by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/page.aspx?pid=265>

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## [IN THE OPEN HAND:]

When we speak about open handed issues we are not saying they are unimportant issues. What we are saying is that they are not worth fighting and dividing over. There are certain beliefs that we can simply agree to disagree on. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul writes these remarkable words,

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”*

**FACT - Pathway Church will never have the final authority on everything Biblical and neither will you.** There must be some breathing room for people to search, explore and discover the rich depths of scripture without running into formal church policy on every subject.

At Pathway Church you will find people who hold varying beliefs on the following issues:

- Church Methodology (how should the church operate?)
- The Power of God (does God still do that?)
- Practical Theology (how does God work in the world?)
- Christian Lifestyle (how should a Christian live?)

The 4 items above represent just a few of the areas where Christians have disagreed throughout the centuries and they will likely continue to until Jesus returns. We have outlined some notes below on each of these four subjects.

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**CHURCH METHODOLOGY:** How should the church operate?

- Service style (culturally relevant service vs traditional style)
- Music style (modern music vs organ and hymns)
- Clothing style (casual dress vs formal attire)
- Use of Buildings and programs. (meeting in a school instead of a sanctuary)
- Church governance

The New Testament does not give us a formal model (how to) for operating a church. It gives us mission, doctrine, principles, and examples which we do our best to follow. ***We love and accept any style of church that leads people to a life giving relationship with Jesus*** --- we will lovingly agree to disagree, but we will not divide over church methodology.

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**THE POWER OF GOD:** Does God still do that?

There are some who believe that the power of God, including the gifts of the spirit, healing, and miraculous signs and wonders passed away with the original Apostles. There are other who believe that God continues to do the miraculous through his faith filled church. In Paul's opening remarks to the Roman church he writes,

*"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God for salvation** to everyone who believes ..."*

At Pathway Church we believe that the central theme of scripture and the centerpiece of our mission are to see people saved from sin and brought into the family of God through the finished work of Christ. We believe this will occur **primarily through the proclamation of the gospel** and **secondarily through demonstrable power**.

Demonstrable power may include such things as:

- Healing, Miracles, Signs and Wonders
- Prophecy, Tongues & Interpretation as well as the other spiritual gifts
- Visions, Dreams & Angelic visitation
- Anything else God chooses to do that can be confirmed by scripture

While we will not enforce any formal belief in the supernatural we simply ask that people do not limit God or discourage others who do believe in the supernatural. If a person does not believe that God works in this way we can lovingly agree to disagree, but we will not divide over any type of Charismatic Theology.

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**PRACTICAL THEOLOGY:** how does God work in the world?

Some of the theological issues that have the potential to divide people in the church are as follows:

**Calvanism vs Arminianism** – These two opposing views on how God saves people have been in heated debate for centuries. Both sides of this argument typically would be in agreement with our fundamental beliefs and as such will not be a point of division at Pathway Church.

**Doctrines of Suffering** – Some people believe that suffering, persecution, and hardship are attacks from the enemy (Satan and Sin) and others believe that they are instruments used by God to shape and form us into the image of Christ. Ultimately each person must examine scripture and decide for themselves how they believe their Heavenly Father is dealing with them in their specific situation. The problem becomes amplified when one person has the definitive answer and tries to enforce their wisdom on everyone else. This will not be tolerated.

**Eschatology** (study of the end times including - death, judgement, heaven, and hell) – There have been innumerable interpretations on the subjects of rapture, judgments, historic timelines and the afterlife. While we faithfully pursue understanding of these things ... we will not divide over interpretive issues.

**Science and the Bible** (Gap theory, creation / evolution combinations) - There are a number of theories which attempt to line up scripture with science and science with scripture. While these theories can be extremely stimulating we refuse to adopt any official doctrine outside of our belief in the scriptural record.

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#### **CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE:** how should a Christian live?

Lifestyle can easily become one of the greatest points of division in a church because it is external – it can be seen and measured by others. There is great difficulty involved in defining rules and regulations for the church with such a varied mix of people. Here are just a few scriptural guidelines we will use as a church when examining sin.

1. **We recognize that sin is rooted in the heart of man** – In Matthew 5:21-30 we find Jesus addressing the hypocritical judgements of religious men and pointing to the real source of the problem – the sinful heart of man. We cannot eradicate sin through the use of rules.
2. **We are saved by His mercy, not our own righteousness** – Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy”
3. **We judge others with great humility knowing that we too will be judged**
  - a. 1 Cor 4:5 (The Lord will judge each of us)
  - b. Matt. 18:21-35 (We will be treated with the same severity we have treated others)
  - c. Hosea 6:6 (God desires mercy)
4. **We enforce only those laws and regulations given to the gentile church**
  - a. Acts 15:28-29 (things which are prohibited)
  - b. 1 Cor 10:23-33 (live with a clean conscience and do all things for the glory of God)
  - c. Galatians 5:16-25 (walking according to the Spirit means we will not gratify the desires of the flesh)
5. **We deal with people on an individual basis (where they are at, not where we are at)**
  - a. Jesus was merciful to sinners and judged the religious people. We often judge sinners and show mercy to religious people.

- b. The level of accountability a person will be held to within Pathway Church will always be determined by their stage / level of involvement. Here is a general outline:
- i. Visitor / Guest / Attender
    - little to no expectation of Christian behaviour
    - sin will be discouraged (through preaching and public teaching)
  - ii. Attender who professes Christ
    - expected to be in pursuit of Christlikeness through repentance of sin and obedience to his word
    - sinful behaviour will be personally confronted and encouraged to change
  - iii. Small group leader
    - expected to be in pursuit of Christlikeness through repentance of sin and obedience to his word
    - sinful behaviour will be personally confronted and encouraged to change
    - may be asked to step down as a leader depending on the severity of the sin, the receptivity to correction, and the restoration process (if any)
  - iv. Deacon / Ministry Leader
    - expected to be in pursuit of Christlikeness through repentance of sin and obedience to his word
    - will be expected to adhere to the general commands of Christ **and** to live in such a way that is beyond reproach and will not offend the conscience of others wherever possible. This may involve giving up questionable activities.
    - sinful behaviour will be personally confronted and encouraged to change
    - may be asked to step down as a leader depending on the severity of the sin, the receptivity to correction, and the restoration process (if any)
    - Restoration process may be public depending on the ministry position.
  - v. Elder
    - expected to be in pursuit of Christlikeness through repentance of sin and obedience to his word
    - will be expected to adhere to the general commands of Christ **and** live in such a way that is beyond reproach and will not offend the conscience of others wherever possible.
    - Lifestyle, family, finances, public image must all represent Christ and his church.
    - sinful behaviour will be personally confronted and encouraged to change
    - may be asked to step down as a leader depending on the severity of the sin, the receptivity to correction, and the restoration process (if any)
    - Restoration process will often be public.