…As He Leads…

Maintaining Unity Amid Non-Essential Doctrinal Differences

As ***…as He leads…*** grows, we will see people holding to many differing non-essential doctrines in our ministry. Calvinists may want to change the official position of the ministry in favour of their doctrine. Strong grace doctrine people may want us to change our position to theirs. We may get letters that detail why a certain approach is no longer suited for today in the ministry. Some will believe Christians can be demonised, others won't. Some members will hold to pre-tribulation, others post-tribulation. Others will read NKJV only. Some will share their critiques regarding our vision and ministry, believing there is an over-emphasis in one area and/or an under-emphasis in another… and so on and so on.

In every situation like this, it is important to listen openly and honour them in their personal pursuits. However, as leaders and members of ***…as He leads…*** we cannot allow ourselves to become distracted from our primary focus, or compromise the mission we are on. We have to use great caution and wisdom in the way we handle such matters. Confusion, distraction, division and disunity will creep in if we aren't careful.

"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love," is a wonderful Christian motto. In practice it can bring challenges because people often differ on what qualifies as an essential of faith. Even so, for the sake of unity in the Body of Christ, this motto remains a core guiding principle for us at ***…as He leads..***.

'Essentials' are foundational Christian doctrines pertaining to salvation that we cannot allow to be violated. If someone were not to adhere to an essential, then that person would not be a Christian. For example, it's mandatory for salvation that we agree on the absolutes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came in the flesh and died for the forgiveness of our sins so that we can be restored to the Father and enjoy eternal life. However it's not mandatory for salvation that we agree on the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church.

With these principles in mind, leaders and members of ***…as He leads…*** are encouraged to follow these protocols. Together, we can maintain corporate unity whilst holding differing non-essential doctrinal viewpoints.

1. **Protect Essential Doctrines**
   First and foremost, we maintain absolute clarity on our core theological positions. We ask all leaders and members to commit to upholding total unity regarding these essential beliefs *(see our 'Statement of Faith').*

2. **Discuss Non-Essential Doctrines Privately Outside of Ministry**
   Leaders and members will naturally hold varying personal views on non-essential doctrines. To keep our ministry environments focused and healthy, please avoid discussing these during ministry times. If they do arise, try to gracefully redirect these conversations:

- If asked about your personal views on non-essential doctrines during ministry you could respond for example with: *"Personal study on such topics is very healthy. If you want to discuss the different perspectives one-on-one, let's catch up outside of ministry."*
- If a public discussion begins during ministry on a non-essential doctrine, try to wrap it up gently. For example, *"The debate between Calvinism and Arminianism is centuries old and I doubt we will resolve it today. I lean toward the Arminian position myself, but let's all catch up and discuss it outside of ministry time."*

3. **Value Unity Over Personal Affirmation**
   Protecting the leadership, vision, and health of this ministry is a collective priority. It is always better to remain unified while disagreeing on non-essential Scriptures than it is to fracture a team to validate a personal stance. Choosing to voice public support for the ministry - even when your personal non-essential theological opinions vary within it - serves as a powerful witness of Christian oneness to the world *(Jn 17:20-21, Phil 2:1-3)*.

4. **Guard Against Divisiveness**
   To prevent splinter movements and friction within the ministry, we adhere strictly to the wisdom of Titus 3:9. Let us actively avoid foolish controversies, arguments, and quarrels about minor details, recognising that they are unprofitable and pull us away from our core mission.

UNITY OF VISION

While ***…as He leads…*** is accepting of leaders and members holding various perspectives on the non-essential aspects of Scripture, we must still honour the distinct vision, and mandate God has given us as a local ministry, which includes a specific doctrinal focus and position.

For example, we are a ministry that openly encourages the active use of spiritual gifts such as praying in tongues and prophesying. While we deeply love and honour our fellow Believers who do not practice these gifts, we will not compromise or diminish our focus on them. We recognise that God has called us to run with a specific spiritual focus and we are comfortable in that identity. Our God-given vision is worth protecting.

Ultimately, there is no single denominational stream that our leaders and members will agree with completely. While we align with certain Pentecostal, Baptist, or Church of Christ doctrines, we may differ on others.

To help us navigate these distinctions, the following framework taken from Ted Haggard's book, *Primary Purpose*, has been used to help us differentiate between the absolute and non-absolute truths of Scripture…

When discussing ministry doctrines, styles and focuses, it's important that we identify exactly where the particular topic rests within the whole spectrum. There are several different levels in which we can examine structure or style of ministry. Most church bickering and splits would be eliminated if we understood this. Unity would thrive and the Great Commission would be more quickly achievable. Watch the progression from Absolutes of Scripture to Interpretations and beyond:

- ***Absolutes:*** *Every Christian ministry must agree on the absolutes of salvation and the Gospel message. If a ministry doesn't accept an absolute, it would certainly not be considered Christian. Absolutes include for example, the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who lived a sinless life, was crucified for the sins of the world, rose from the dead and ascended to right hand of the Father and salvation only comes through Him. We can never sacrifice an absolute truth regarding salvation and the Gospel message. We must never waiver from them. An example of a violation of an absolute is a minister who said, "We have closed our minds to such trivial considerations as the question of the resurrection of Christ. If you fundamentalists wish to believe that nonsense, we have no objections, but we have more important things to preach than the presence or absence of an empty tomb 20 centuries old."*

- ***Interpretations:*** *Resting on the foundation of absolutes, are interpretations. These are Scriptures that we form opinions or sometimes even doctrines on. They are always taken within the context of the passage. They are fairly focused ideas, but since they are interpretations, there can sometimes be disagreement. The problem is when we allow this disagreement to divide the church. Examples of interpretations can be that every Christian is meant to speak in tongues or believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. Since these aren't absolutes for salvation, it's ok to disagree. It's tragic when people deem certain movements and people as 'false' because they disagree with them over an interpretation of the Bible.*

- ***Deductions:*** *Deductions are broader and more general than interpretations. They are a logical conclusion drawn from studying multiple passages of Scripture that aligns with core absolutes but aren't explicitly commanded. An example of a deduction is concluding that churches should establish formal mentoring programs for younger believers: The Absolute: The Bible commands older Believers to teach and disciple younger ones (Titus 2). The Deduction: You can deduce that a structured church-wide mentoring program is an effective, practical way to carry out this command across the whole congregation, even though the Bible doesn't mandate a specific 'program.'*
  Doctrines should never be made on deduction alone, but there is much liberty to allow your ministry to include deductions as long as they agree with and enhance the absolutes. As with interpretations, it's certainly sad and negative to identify deductions as unbiblical when they in fact don't contradict an absolute. We must work to maintain unity and avoid division at all costs within the Body of Christ

- ***Subjective Opinions:*** *Broader still, subjective opinions are arrived at by individuals that experience certain insight when searching the Scriptures coupled with living out what they find. Subjective opinions must always agree with absolutes and must not contradict Scripture, or they must be thrown out. Subjective opinions may include teaching that hymns in our church are more effective or that we should dress like the culture that we are trying to minister to. This is where ministry style can have a lot of freedom to experiment by trial and error. Discovering what works best in your situation at this level should never be accepted as absolute truth, or even as a deduction.*

- ***Personal Preferences:*** *Personal preferences may have less to do with controversial Scriptural matters and more to do with personality, likes and dislikes. For example, a minister may prefer to have a robed choir every Sunday while another may prefer a single barefoot guitar playing worship leader. Another example would be to take offerings by passing a plate rather than having the congregation bring their monetary gift to the front of the sanctuary and lay it on the altar. The Bible is usually silent on such preferences.*

- ***Feelings:*** *Feelings would include simply what we like and don't like. Sadly, there have been Church splits on this level. Examples include, what colour the church carpet should be, or whether to use hymnals or a video projector. These matters have more to do with the church atmosphere more than with anything else.*

- ***Cultural Norms:*** *This simply has to do with the style and system of a particular culture. For example, you may find loud 'Amen's!' in an Afro-American church while it may be more subdued in a Baptist church. You will also find a lot of cultural difference between different denominations and different socio-economic classes. If every church were loud and vibrant, then there would be a large segment of society that would not be reached, and vice versa.*

To conclude, sometimes Scripture doesn't demand something be done a certain way. If we all focus on the absolutes and resist creating divisions based on lower levels, we will certainly have a powerful army ready and equipped to accomplish the Great Commission.

At ***…as He leads…***, we highly value theological dialogue, believing that iron sharpens iron *(Prov 27:17).* Yet, we also recognise that Scripture is often silent or non-specific on secondary matters. We resolve to not let these non-essential topics cause division among us.

Our goal is to cultivate a healthy, unified ministry around the essentials of Christian salvation, while fully respecting the liberty of individual Believers to navigate their own faith with the Lord on non-essential matters of doctrine.

Hence, ***…as He leads…*** warmly extends fellowship to every person who personally believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life *(Jn 17:3, Acts 16:31, 1 Cor 2:2),* and who can affirm and demonstrate a lifestyle aligned with the Biblical teaching contained in our Statement of Faith.
