

MAKE A STATEMENT

A NEW YEAR'S EVE MESSAGE



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New Year's Eve
Brian Shiu
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The end of the year sermon has been traditionally a spot for one of the elders at PBC who typically doesn't get to preach. I serve as one of the elders, and while I don't preach often, I have had the privilege over the past several years of teaching the 5th and 6th-grade Sunday school class during the first hour of service along with many other great teachers in our Body. One of the studies we have gone through as a class is a three-month series on the PBC Doctrinal Statement. I wanted the children that go through the class to be introduced to some of these core principles before leaving Children's Ministry. If you're not familiar with our Doctrinal Statement, you can find that on our website under "What We Believe" (<https://pbc.org/we-believe>). It is the one statement that as elders we annually review and sign in agreement that these are the core principles that we believe our church should uphold and follow. These are not the only things we believe are true, but these are the core principles. Ray Stedman has a series of sermons on these very statements, and you can also find those online.

Next week we will be starting a new preaching series on topics that we consider are distinctive to PBC—PBC's DNA. At the foundation of these distinctive are these core truths in the Doctrinal Statement. The sermon this morning serves as a bridge to those upcoming messages.

Several times this year I have found that many of these concepts in the Doctrinal Statement have repeatedly arisen in different ways in my life. I want to share some of my experiences with you this morning, and I hope they will be an encouragement for the upcoming year.

The Doctrinal Statement consists of 10 statements. Since I preach infrequently, you're going to get a 10-point sermon instead of the normal three-point sermon. Just kidding. I am going to focus on three statements that made an impact on me this year.

The first point should be easy to guess. It is part of our church's name. Can you guess?

Do you want to know what the 5th and 6th graders guessed? "B," as in PBC. So I'm glad we figured this out this morning.

The other two statements I want to touch on are Man and His Need, and the Christian's Responsibility.

Concerning the Bible

We believe that the original writings of both the Old and New Testaments were breathed out by God to prophets, apostles, and apostolic associates by means of the Spirit, who chose the words employed according to the personality and background of the human author, and that these writings were without error and are of supreme and final authority in the lives of believers in any age.

Our Doctrinal Statement starts with the Bible. The following passage tells me why.

2 Timothy 3:14-17:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Ultimately the Bible makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ. It is God's actual words. The Bible helps us grow to be the people of God.

Where do you go for information? How do you know it's true? Fake news has been a popular topic this year. For me, it gets harder and harder to separate pundits' opinions from what is really happening. With the Scriptures, we believe we are getting God's inspired words communicated through human writers, and we have direct access to it. Sermons are great, Christian books are great. But get into the Scriptures for yourself.

At the end of last year, Paul Taylor sent a note out that he was going to follow a one year Bible reading plan and was going to track his progress on the Bible Application. I thought this was a good thing to try this year—to try to read the Bible in its entirety in one year. Throughout the year I found myself numerous times feeling, wow, I don't quite remember this or I never knew that. It is vitally important to read the Scriptures so that you are directly informed from the source; that your thoughts and challenged to be aligned with what is written by God.

In our 5th and 6th-grade Sunday school class we start with something more basic. You can't read your Bible if you don't bring your Bible. So, we have a fairly modest and arbitrary goal of trying to get 70% of the class to have their Bibles that day. If they do, they get a treat. I wonder what the percentages would be if I asked that this morning. Granted, we live in an era where most of you carry your Bibles on your smart devices or read the Scripture on the projection screen behind me. The fact of the matter is we aren't in an area of the world where Bibles are scarce; if anything we take them for granted. So while we have Bibles in abundance, we can't take our access to them for granted.

Once we get the Sunday school class to bring their Bible, the goal is to get them to read the Bible. Of the verses we read in 2 Timothy, verses 16 and 17 usually are the most recognized of these verses. I really like verses 14 and 15, especially as they relate to the importance of teaching our youth. Alice Yan, Rolana Smith, Paco Lopez, and all of the children's and youth directors have the same mindset of teaching the Scriptures to our young people so that they will know Jesus. In turn, when they grow into adults, they will be able to draw on these teachings, knowing they've learned them from trustworthy people.

A few years ago Alice Yan and her team started AWANA on Wednesday nights. It is being led by a strong crew of leaders and really reaches a lot of families who may not attend PBC regularly on Sundays. A big part of AWANA is memorizing Bible verses. Memorizing verses is another way to internalize God's Word.

I've also tried to memorize some Scriptures this year. Our family adopted a dog named Moe. He's a medium-sized dog, which means he needs a decent walk. So instead of driving or riding bikes to school with my youngest child, we walk. I realized that time could be an awesome time where we memorize together Bible verses. So we started. It is humbling to know how much better children are at remembering things than adults.

So read the Bible, try to memorize some passages. But what happens when you read it, and you don't understand it? At PBC we have a history of wanting to be faithful to teaching the Scriptures. Not only to teach, but to teach others how to study for themselves, and maybe then they, in turn, can teach others when ready. So hopefully you'll find that there are several ways to learn how to study the Scriptures and opportunities to pass on that knowledge to others.

I have also heard that this principle can create a culture that might feel a little intimidating. Maybe you feel that you don't know the Bible well enough and that may make you feel a little awkward. When I first started going to church regularly as a high schooler, I loved learning; I loved reading new things. But the part I was most embarrassed about was not knowing where the books of the Bible were, or how to find them. To this day I get a little nervous when someone says, "Turn to Habakkuk..." where is that? If you look at the Bible I've had since college you'll see little Bible tabs with the books of the Bible in them. My wife says I'm cheating. I just say do what you have to do.

If we are creating a culture that makes anyone feel uncomfortable because they don't feel they know the Bible, please hear me, that is not our intent. Our hope is to help everyone have access to the Scriptures so that they will find salvation in Jesus and then everyone will be equipped to do whatever it is God has called them to do.

So, how can you do that? Here are a few suggestions for the New Year. Now that our Remodel is done, our Sunday School class offerings will resume. You will find some new options as well as some familiar ones. Come check them out. Don't just come to one service and leave. Learn from someone, teach someone. Find a community group where you can do these things. Start a reading plan—the whole Bible, or just parts. Devote yourself to a regular reading of God's Word. Listen to the Bible on your commute.

Scott Grant commented in one of his Ezekiel sermons that he wasn't quite sure what he was going to find out about studying and teaching Ezekiel. He said he ended up finding that it brought him life. That is what the Scriptures do.

Read the Scriptures. Read them often. Read them regularly. In them, you will find Jesus.

Concerning Man and His Need is the next doctrinal statement that I want to touch on.

Concerning Man and His Need

We believe that man was created in the image of God, but because of Adam's sin that image was damaged, and that all human beings are now born with a sinful nature, are unable to function in moral responsibility before God, and need a spiritual regeneration before they can become what they were meant to be.

Genesis 1:27:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Romans 3:23:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We just finished talking about why the Scriptures are so important. In the Scriptures we will find salvation through faith in Jesus. Stop and think for a second. Is finding salvation in Jesus on the top of your list of things you think you need? It should be if we realize our need. We can't be God's image bearers because we are damaged by sin and need to be restored by Jesus.

Tim Keller has a very practical way of describing the Gospel. He says, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."¹

In many ways we have no idea how much we need Jesus. One of the things that struck me as I read through the Bible this year was just how angry God seemed to be in the Old Testament. The language used is often quite brutal, quite graphic. But, it also made me wonder, if God is truly just and this is the reaction that sin incites, do we really understand how dire our situation is? Time and time again, these Old Testament passages talked about how the people of God chose other gods, other idols, other images.

One event drove this home for me this year. There have been a lot of newsworthy stories this year, but there was one in particular that caught my attention, starting in the summer. Given the nature of the story, I wasn't really surprised by how drawn I initially was to it. I noticed as the story went on into the fall I was becoming more and more passionate about it, more and more emotionally engaged. And then it all came crashing

down as the Dodgers lost to Houston in Game 7 of the World Series. I know it's a very trivial pursuit, especially for all the Giant fans. But that's the point. My passion for the Dodgers frankly overmatched any obvious passion I had for God, and that's a problem. I had invested in my image as a Dodger fan more than as a follower of Jesus. I chose to invest in something trivial rather than the image of God.

Broken images are not just in the trivial images we seek for ourselves. Jeff Louie came and spoke to us this past year during our Kingdom Work series. He relayed his story about how he had the wrong image of what it meant to be a pastor and how that did not give him life. Our image can be broken even in the very good things that we aspire to do and be.

What is the image or identity that you hold on to for yourself?

I want to warn against holding a negative image of yourself. This too is not God's image. It is not true humility either. It doesn't necessarily mean you've acknowledged your need.

2 Corinthians 7:10

(Paul says)

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

We know we're not good at this or that. Maybe you think you're not good in school. Not athletic enough. Not talented enough. Maybe we've failed in certain areas of life. But that experience cannot be what defines us either. This is not the image that God intends for us.

Pride is the most obvious broken image and perhaps nowhere in the world do we have this mindset more than in Silicon Valley. We even dress this up with a fancy description: the Silicon Valley Hubris. We think we can change the world with our next invention. If we just work hard enough, if we're just passionate enough, if we just have the right idea or the right team, we can do it. Except when we can't. What do we do then?

One of the hardest challenges I have found in my experience as a parent is to teach your children that they need Jesus. As parents, our instinct is to teach, to correct, to improve, to push to be better, to instruct to behave correctly, to instill good work habits. But there

comes the point where we can't just ask them to be better because they can't be better. None of us can. This is our real need. Do we turn to Jesus?

I need Jesus to have God's image restored in me. This is the spiritual regeneration that is mentioned in the Doctrinal Statement. We are completely and totally incapable of restoring God's image in our lives. That is left to what Jesus has done for us. I'm very thankful for our preachers as I've noticed throughout the year they've constantly repeated Jesus' great restoration work in their sermons. Hopefully, we can all recognize our true need.

We need Jesus.

Concerning the Christian's Responsibility

We believe that all believers have been made new persons in Christ, through spiritual rebirth. We are still capable of acting on the urges of the sinful nature (the flesh) with which we once were identified. When we do so, we can produce only works which are not pleasing to God. We can choose, rather, to rely upon the Holy Spirit and his love living within us. The choice leads to a fruitful life that glorifies and pleases the Father.

This statement tells us that as we individually come to Jesus Christ in faith to save us from our broken sin-filled condition, we become entirely new people, whose identity is in Jesus Christ, reflecting God's image. We are not perfect yet, but we do have a new resource to live in a way that now represents to the world who God is. And, it is even more powerful when we live it out together as a church.

This statement goes along with our "SENT: Living the Mission of the Church" sermon series that we started in January of this year. In that series, we considered different ways God is using us individually and collectively in his mission. We heard from several different parts of our Body about how God is sending them into this mission.

There are several ways of approaching this concept as I teach this section to my Sunday school class. I could talk about the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians. Or, I could talk about how to find and use your spiritual gifts. But I think the most powerful expression of who we are individually and who are collectively is made by Jesus:

John 13:34-35:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What sets us apart as the people of God is not firstly our perceived morality, knowledge, or good works. Jesus makes it very clear—it is our love for one another. Jesus says when we love one another with the kind of love that he has for us, it will be noticed by all people. This is an incredibly timely thought for our world that seems to be in growing more and more divided.

At a recent meeting with the PBC pastors and deacons, someone brought up a Pew Research report that visualized the growing divide that exists in our country as characterized by our political parties over time. The data showed that between 1994 and 2004, there were differences but a majority of the parties overlapped. However, by 2014, that overlap had shrunk, and the split between the parties grew. It certainly feels like the divide has widened since 2014.

Before we can address the divide in our country, we need to look and see if there is a divide in here. If we take Jesus' words seriously, that all people will know us by our love for one another, how well do we practice this here?

A few weeks ago in our Ezekiel series, Paul Taylor taught us that God doesn't pick sides in our battles. Rather Paul urged us to be on God's side. We can start by loving one another.

For us, this concept doesn't mean we all think the same or have the same opinions as if we are robots programmed to be identical. It means more than just agreeing to disagree. It means that the love of God permeates through us and covers us despite those differences. Those differences do not define us. Our positions should not be our defining image of ourself, but instead, we are united in the image of Jesus Christ who exemplified love by laying down his life for our sake. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do. There is no formula. Trying to love as Jesus loves us, sacrificially, giving up rights, perceived or actual as he did, for the sake of someone else—this is not easy.

At times over the past year, the elders and pastors have had some difficult conversations on different topics. Perhaps the hardest part of the discussions are not the topics themselves, but how to move forward together

despite different opinions. But we must if we take Jesus' words in this passage seriously. For me, understanding that we are all on Jesus' side helped me to hear different thoughts and viewpoints without having my first reaction be to defend "my side." Can we listen to each other and hear what God's side is?

In my marriage, my wife often diffuses contentious discussions with a similar phrase, "We're on the same team". It is an incredibly helpful phrase to hear and it resets my perspective on whatever the argument is. I've noticed she has started using that phrase when discussing issues with the kids and hopefully they find it helpful also. Perhaps this is something that can help you in your relationships.

What else can we do? Practically at PBC, we aren't a huge church, but large enough where we have lots of vibrant, individual communities. Our communities are sometimes based on geographic locations, sometimes on a stage of life, differing ages from youth to adult. A primary goal of the Remodel this year was to bring as many parts of our Body together on Sunday morning to increase our chances to connect with one another. I hope it is a chance for all of us to grow beyond the smaller, tight-knit communities that we're apart of, perhaps successfully crossing divides that face the world outside of us.

Could PBC be a model for our world of what it looks like to bring people from different communities and, despite our differences, be united in love? Achieving this kind of togetherness is not simply believing in tolerance or inclusion. It is because of the reconciliation found in Jesus Christ. It is through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that allows us to love with the love of Jesus. We are told in the Scriptures that in Christ these differences are no longer there.

Looking internally at how well we love one another is just the start, and not where we should stop. Let us ask for wisdom to see where God can take us when we follow his commandment.

These three doctrinal statements have been very helpful for me to reflect on the things God has shown me this past year. I have seen him weave these themes throughout the life of our church and in my own life. I saw them woven through our sermon series: *SENT*:

Living the Mission of the Church," "Kingdom Work," and "Knowing the God of Justice and Hope: Book of Ezekiel." Tomorrow brings a New Year, 2018. If you are still wondering what kind of resolutions you can make for the New Year, make a statement.

Read the Bible.

Know your need.

Love one another.

Endnotes

¹ Keller, Timothy J. and Keller, Kathy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. Dutton Adult. 1 Nov 2011.

² Caumont, Andrea. "10 big questions the Pew Research Center has tackled in the past decade." *Pew Research Center* <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/16/10-big-questions-the-pew-research-center-has-tackled-in-the-past-decade/>. Accessed Dec. 2017.