

Stone Ridge Church

Debatable Matters & the Middle Ground

Stone Ridge has long been a place where people come from a variety of spiritual backgrounds. We have people with no previous spiritual history, as well as Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Catholics, Pentecostals and a host of other traditions.

Embracing the diversity of our body means being comfortable with the fact that we don't all see things the same way. While there is diversity of perspectives at Stone Ridge, we do think it is important to agree on some fundamental truths (these are articulated in our statement of faith). And we believe that its important to articulate what perspectives have room for debate, and what perspectives we can't embrace.

The beliefs and practices subject to this kind of evaluation are far too wide and varied to cover in a single statement. So, in the pages that follow, we take them one at a time - as they seem relevant to the life of our church. This document develops over time as we have opportunity to address the issues and articulate the middle ground that we have found at Stone Ridge.

You'll see a graphic like this on each page to help make our position clear on the issue being discussed...



Our goal in these evaluations is to provide clarity regarding the beliefs found at Stone Ridge, and to respect each other when our own study has led us to different conclusions. When these issues are raised in church life, we encourage leaders to freely share their own conclusions while acknowledging that it is a debatable matter (even among the Stone Ridge family).

Stone Ridge Perspective: Spiritual Gifts

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Bible describes the church as a body where everyone has a function - a role to play. In order to fulfill our purpose in the body, God gives “gifts” to his people. These gifts are a God-given ability, which is for the benefit of the body.

These gifts are discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 (along with a few other scattered references). There are a variety of perspectives concerning spiritual gifts (summarized in the diagram below).



At Stone Ridge, we do not believe that spiritual gifts have ended. We believe that all the gifts in scripture are still given to the church today. We also do not believe that spiritual gifts are the same as natural talents.

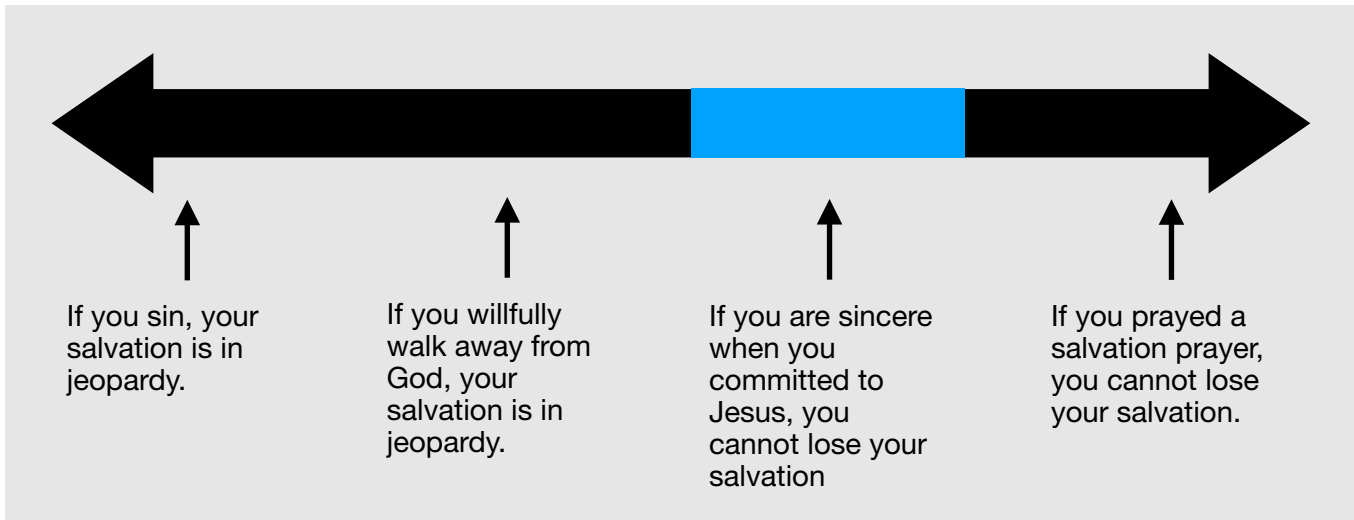
There are, however, a variety of perspectives regarding spiritual gifts that are debatable, and that we are comfortable teaching. These are 2 of the most common...

- **Spiritual gifts are limited to those in the scripture.** This comes from a desire to avoid speculating on the intended application of scripture.
- **The lists of gifts in scripture are representative.** This springs from the observation that the lists are all different.

Both perspectives have merit, and both are likely to be taught at Stone Ridge. We encourage anyone teaching on spiritual gifts to include both perspectives, but also to feel free to explain which perspective they find most compelling.

Stone Ridge Perspective: Eternal Security

This hotly debated issue can be argued from a variety of scriptures: Jude 24, John 6 & 10, Romans 8 & 11, 2 Timothy 2, Hebrews 6 & 10, Matthew 7, Ezekiel 17 and a host of other passages.



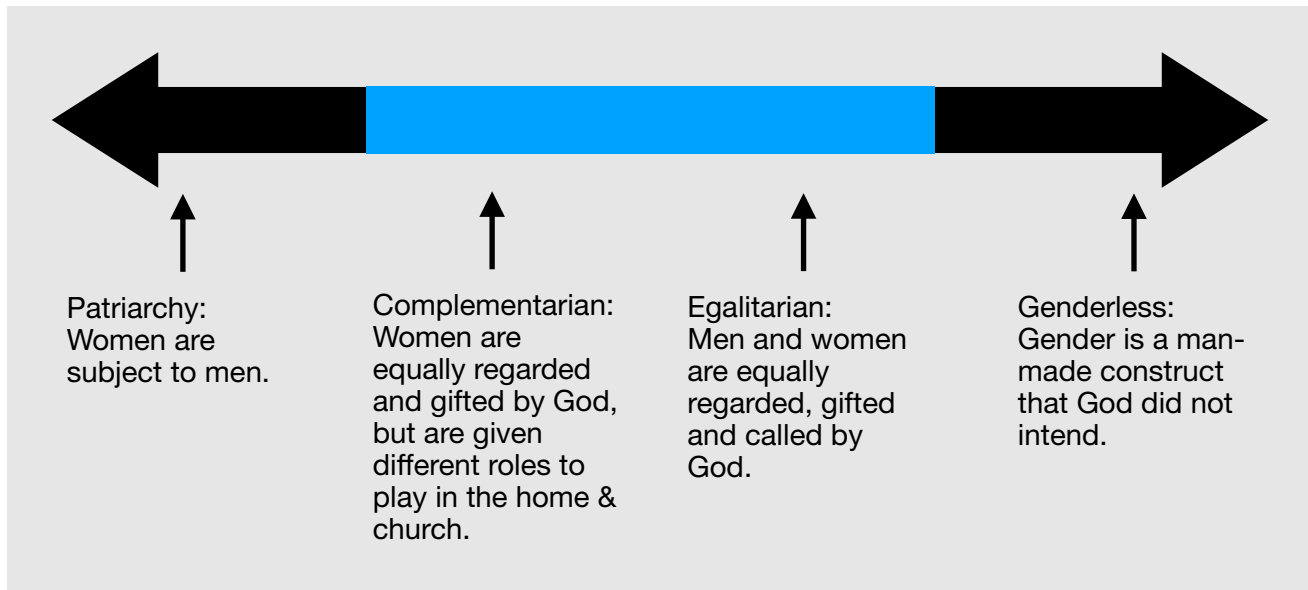
At Stone Ridge, we believe that sincere faith leads to an irrevocable union with God. We believe the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient for all sin, even the tragic sin of losing your way. We are passionate about the sufficiency of Jesus and the forgiveness and grace he offers us. We will not teach another perspective of this debate.

We do understand that not all churches agree on this issue. And while we are firm in our conviction, we love and respect our brothers and sisters who disagree. This issue would not prevent us from cooperating in projects with churches who see this differently.

In the end, only this matters...if you are far from God, turn and seek him, and you will find grace and mercy in your time of need.

Stone Ridge Perspective: Roles of Men and Women in the Church

Complementarian and Egalitarian are the two primary views that frame the debate about gender and leadership in God's kingdom.



Complementarians, what many refer to as the “traditional” view of gender roles, believe that God calls men to lead in their homes and in the church. Men’s leadership should reflect the love and sacrifice that Jesus demonstrates for the church. Women are called to willingly submit to and complement that leadership with their God-given gifts and abilities.

Egalitarians believe that men and women are called to mutual submission in their relationships. Leadership roles are not predetermined by gender, but should be given to those called and gifted to lead. Leadership should always reflect kingdom values of love and respect.

Both these views are supportable with Biblical arguments and both have passages that are difficult to reconcile with their position. It is clearly a debatable matter. A deeper look at the Biblical debate is available upon request. You will find both perspectives among the people of Stone Ridge, and we respectfully worship and serve together.

The common ground that we observe at Stone Ridge was developed by learning from the example of the early church as they wrestled with integrating Jewish and Gentile believers. There were two opposing viewpoints in the church. Church leaders asked proponents of each viewpoint to make some concessions to respect each other. Jewish believers were asked to consider the Gentiles free from the requirements of the law. Gentile believers were asked to observe a few restrictions that would be most challenging to their Jewish counterparts.

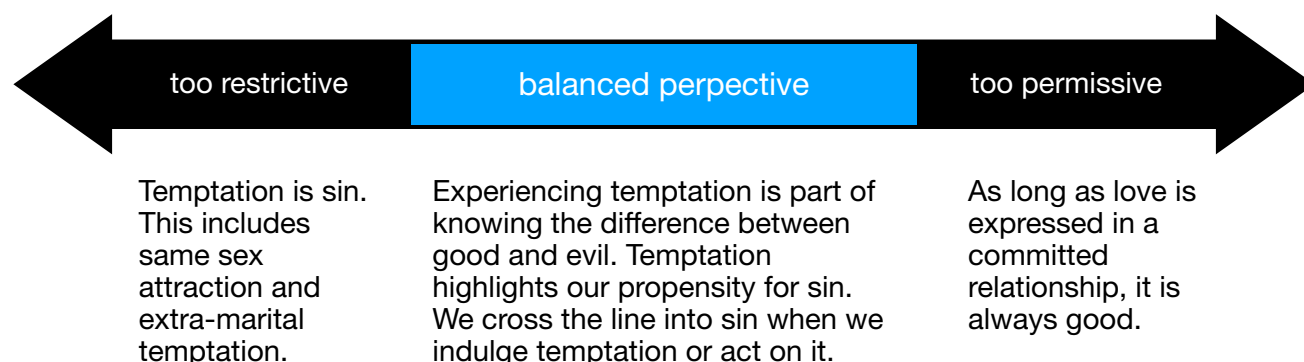
- **At Stone Ridge, we ask Egalitarians to observe two restrictions that would be most challenging to Complementarians: Elders & Lead Pastor as male roles in the church.**
- **We ask Complementarians to consider women free to engage in all other capacities (under the authority of the Lead Pastor and the Elders).**

Stone Ridge Church: Debatable Matters

Sexual Temptations & Choices

The Bible clearly teaches that God's intent for marriage is for man and woman to be united until parted by death. He created sex as a gift to build intimacy, trust and joy in the marriage relationship. Sexual activity outside of marriage misses God's intent for building thriving marriages.

Historically, the western church has wielded this conviction like a club - lacking grace and kindness for those wrestling with temptations that are outside of God's plan. We believe that all people wrestle with temptation, and what matters is how we handle the temptations we face.



Jesus provides a case study for the debate. Was the temptation Jesus faced aimed at him (having no effect) or experienced by him (and rejected)? Hebrews 4:15 tells us that he was tempted as we are. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness before he began his ministry (Luke 4:1-13). This temptation seemed to have no effect. He also faced temptation to avoid the crucifixion, which seems to be felt and rejected (as evidenced in his prayer at Gethsemane - Luke 22:39-46). We know that Jesus did not sin, so we know that being tempted is not equivalent to sinning.

James 1:14-15 tells us that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin..." Sin doesn't come into the picture until desire is indulged and "conceives" a result. When sexual temptation is indulged or acted on, the resulting sin has spiritual, relational and physical consequences (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). We should carefully guard this area of temptation.

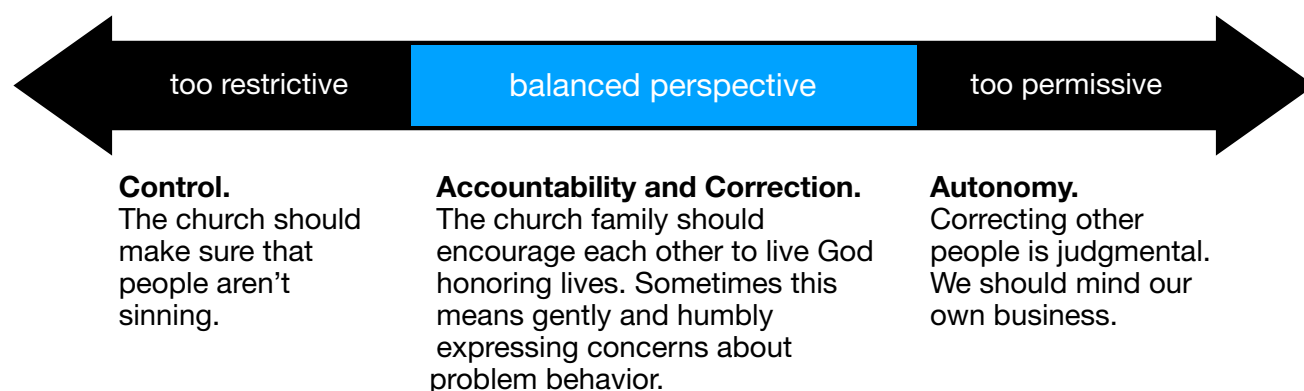
We all face sexual temptation. For some its pornography, for others its entering into a sexual relationship before the marriage commitment, attraction to the same sex or pursuing another relationship when the marriage commitment grows difficult. All these temptations are a departure from God's intended purpose for our lives. All these temptations demonstrate our need to humbly submit our lives to the leadership of our Savior. Our own struggle with temptation should lead us to gentleness as we encourage others to follow God's plan.

Stone Ridge Church: Debatable Matters

Accountability & Correction

The scriptures paint a picture of a church that is mutually accountable (Hebrews 10:23-24). We are counseled to encourage and challenge each other to live in a way that honors Christ. Our concern for each other's well being should compel us to confront obvious sin with a gentle and humble spirit (Galatians 6:1-2). Redemption (not condemnation) is always the goal of Christian accountability.

Once a follower of Jesus becomes regularly engaged in the life of the church, they should expect the level of care and concern for their well-being that leads to biblical accountability and correction.



At no time does the Bible encourage us to investigate the church family for hidden sins. There are, however, many references to providing accountability and correction (in the context of our relationships) when followers of Jesus clearly stray off course. Biblical accountability and correction are motivated by love. Love for Christ compels us to care when his reputation is undermined by the choices of his followers (Matthew 6:9 - see the NLT translation). Love for each other compels us to care when our brother or sister wander into dangerous territory (James 5:19-20). Love compels us to enter into these conversations humbly, prayerfully, and gently (Galatians 5:26-6:3).

Being open to accountability is a minimum standard in God's kingdom. In calling us to die to self, Jesus asks his followers to **invite** accountability (Matthew 5:23-24). The church provides a mutual accountability that helps each of us choose goodness (and honor the Savior who offered us his undeserved favor).

Objections to accountability and correction frequently cite biblical cautions on judgement. Scripture warns against judging those outside the faith (1 Corinthians 5:12), but leaves room for accountability within the church when it is applied humbly, gently and regarding matters that are not disputable (Romans 14:1). Another objection to accountability and correction centers around a misguided joining of love & approval. God, however, frequently demonstrated love for his people even as he disapproved of their choices. And God frequently calls his people to choose his values over their own inclinations.

When there is a clear pattern of sin that dishonors the name of Jesus, coupled with an unrepentant spirit, accountability moves to correction. Correction may also come when someone promotes false teaching. Like accountability, correction should always be offered in love and aimed toward redemption. Correction may involve drawing boundaries around someone's involvement in the church according to biblical guidelines (Matthew 18:15-17).