

GRACE CHURCH

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

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Statement of Faith

1. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the inspired Word of God, the written record of His supernatural revelation of Himself to man, the supreme and final authority in faith and life, and without any errors in its teaching. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
2. God is one God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19).
3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and is true God and true man. (Luke 1:30-35; Acts 1:8).
4. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity sent to glorify Jesus Christ, to indwell, guide, teach, empower the believer, and to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgment. (John 14:16-18, 26; Acts 1:8).
5. Although every person is created in the image of God, everyone in the natural state is lost, alienated from God and spiritually dead. (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:16-17; Romans 3:10-23; Ephesians 2:1-3).
6. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a perfect representative and complete substitutionary sacrifice; and all that believe on Him are justified on the basis of His shed blood. (Romans 5:8-10; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 4:15).
7. The Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the same body that was laid to rest in the tomb. He ascended into heaven at the Father's right hand and is for the church High Priest and Advocate. (John 20:25-27; Acts 1:9-11; 1 John 2:1-2).
8. The bodies of all believers who die will be raised from the dead, and they will receive an incorruptible body. All unbelievers will be raised unto judgment and everlasting conscious suffering. (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:1-50; Revelation 20:1-6).
9. Salvation is only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who receive the Savior have their sins forgiven, are regenerated by the Spirit, become children of God, and are indwelt, baptized, sealed by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:8-9, 1:7; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:30).
10. Sanctification is separation unto God and is threefold:
 - a. Positionally, the believer was sanctified at his conversion by virtue of his union with Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:2).
 - b. Progressively, he is conditionally being sanctified through the Word by obedience to that Word as he walks in the Spirit, thereby controlling the lusts of the flesh and producing the fruit of the Spirit. (John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26).
 - c. Ultimately, he will be completely conformed to the image of Christ when he sees his Savior face to face. (1 John 3:1-3; Romans 8:29-30)
11. The local church is a body of believers in Christ who are joined together for the worship of God, for edification through the Word of God, for prayer, fellowship, proclamation of the Gospel, and the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Acts 2:1-47; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 1 Corinthians 11:23-31; Acts 2:38, 41).
12. The commission to witness the Gospel to those around us and to those in the uttermost parts of the earth has been given to all believers. (Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:9-17).

13. The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be personal and visible. This is the believer's blessed hope and is a vital truth which is an incentive for holy living. (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Zechariah 14:1-21; Revelation 20:1-6).

Chapter 1

The Church and its Members

1. A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, submitting to the lawful government of Christ's kingdom, in order that there be instruction, worship, ministry, fellowship and evangelism.
2. Its officers are its Teaching Elders (Pastors), Ruling Elders, and Deacons.
3. Its jurisdiction, being a joint power, is lodged in the church Session, which consists of its Senior Pastor, and its Ruling Elders.
4. Members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been admitted by the Session, and have been baptized. They are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church including the right to vote in congregational meetings upon attaining the age of 18 years.
5. All who seek admission into the church as members shall be first examined by the Session with respect to their knowledge and piety, and shall give to the Session a testimony of their Christian experience that evidences their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
6. Those who have been approved by the Session shall make a public profession (or reaffirmation) of their faith in the presence of the congregation by assenting to the following:
 - 1) Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
 - 2) Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
 - 3) Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becometh the followers of Christ?
 - 4) Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
 - 5) Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?
7. Any who have not been previously baptized shall thereupon be baptized.
8. The time when young persons come to understand the Gospel cannot be precisely fixed. This must be left to the prudence of the Session, whose office it is to judge, after careful examination, the qualifications of each individual who applies for admission as a member.
9. When a member has willfully neglected the church for a period of one year, or has made it known that he or she has no intention of fulfilling the church vows, then the Session should exercise proper discipline by deleting such names from the church roll.

Chapter 2

Church Officers – General Classification

1) The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the church are Elders and Deacons. Within the class of Elder are the two orders of Teaching Elders (Pastors) and Ruling Elders. The Elders jointly have the governmental and spiritual oversight of the

Chapter 3

The Elder

church, including teaching. Only those elders who are specially gifted, called and trained by God to preach may serve as Teaching Elders (Pastors). The office of Deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people. In accord with Scripture, these offices are open to men only.

2) No one who holds office in the church ought to usurp authority therein, or receive any official titles of spiritual preeminence, except such are employed in the Scriptures.

1. This office is one of dignity and usefulness. The man who fills it has in Scripture different titles expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed Pastor. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ, he is termed Elder. As he expounds the Word, and by sound doctrine both exhorts and convinces, he is termed Teacher. These titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office.
2. He that fills this office should possess a competency of human learning and be blameless in life, sound in the faith and apt to teach. He should exhibit a sobriety and holiness of life becoming the gospel. He should rule his own house well and should have a good report of them that are outside the church.
3. It belongs to the office of Elder, both individually and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight of the spiritual interests of the church. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the church. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.
4. As the Lord has given different gifts to men and has committed to some special gifts and callings, the Church is authorized to call and appoint some to labor as Teaching Elders (Pastor).
5. When a man is called to labor as a Teaching Elder (Pastor), it belongs to his order, in addition to those functions he shares with all other Elders, to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God, and to administer the ordinances. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed Ambassador. As he bears glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing, he is termed Evangelist. As he stands to proclaim the Gospel, he is termed Preacher. As he dispenses the manifold grace of God, ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed Steward of the mysteries of God.
6. Christ has furnished others besides Pastors with gifts and commission to govern when called thereunto, which are called Ruling Elders who possess the same authority in the Church as Teaching Elders (Pastors). They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so. It is permissible for Ruling Elders to administer the ordinances under the authority of the Teaching Elder.

7. Ruling Elders shall serve for a term of 3 years. At the end of any term, the Elder may be re-elected to an immediate successive term as an active member of the Session. Inactive elders retain their ordination.

Chapter 4

The Church Session

1. The church Session consists of the senior Pastor and the Ruling Elders of the church. A quorum shall consist of the senior Pastor and at least one half of the ruling elders.

When the church has no senior Pastor, or when the senior Pastor waives his presence, a majority of the Ruling Elders shall constitute a quorum. If there is only one Ruling Elder, he does not constitute a Session, but he should take spiritual oversight of the church. If at all possible, there should always be at least three active members of the Session.

1. The Pastor is moderator of the Session. A vice moderator shall be elected from the members of the Session to act in the absence of the Pastor or as otherwise requested by him. The moderator has all authority necessary for the preservation of order and for the proper and expeditious conduct of all business before the Session and for convening and adjourning the Session according to its own ruling. The Session shall approve the agenda for each meeting at the beginning of the meeting. Each member has the right to propose agenda items.
 2. A clerk shall be elected by the Session to serve for a definite period. It is the duty of the clerk, besides recording the transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required. Minutes shall be available only to Session members or those approved by the Session.
 3. The church is governed by the Session, which is also its court.
 4. Assistant pastors may substitute for the senior Pastor as moderator of the Session at the discretion of the Pastor and the Session.
 5. The church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the church, for which purpose it has power to inquire into the knowledge, principles and Christian conduct of the church members under its care; to censure those found delinquent; to receive members into the fellowship of the church; to remove them for just cause; to grant letters of dismissal to other churches; to examine, ordain, and install Ruling Elders and Deacons upon their election by the church, and to require these officers to devote themselves to their work; to examine the records of the proceedings of the Deacons; to approve the budget submitted by the Deacons which shall be finally approved by the congregation; to approve actions of special importance affecting church property, and to call congregational meetings when necessary; to establish and control Sunday schools and Bible classes with special reference to the children of the church; to establish and control all special groups in the Church such as Men in the Church, Women in the Church and special Bible Study groups; to promote world missions; to order collections for pious uses; to exercise authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Ordinances, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put; to take the oversight of the singing in the public worship of God; to assemble the people for worship when there is no pastor; to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the church and congregation.
 6. The Session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. Moreover, the Pastor has power to convene the Session when he may judge it requisite; and he shall always convene it when requested to do so by any two Ruling Elders. When there is no senior Pastor, it may be convened by two Ruling Elders.
8. Every Session shall keep an accurate record of baptisms, members and of the deaths and dismissions of church members.

Chapter 5

Jurisdiction of the Session as the Church Court

1. These assemblies are altogether distinct from the civil magistracy, and have no jurisdiction in political or civil affairs. They have no power to inflict temporal pains and penalties, but their authority is in all respects moral or spiritual.
2. The jurisdiction of the Session as the church court relates to the doctrines and precepts of Christ, to the order of the church, and to the exercise of discipline. First, it can make no laws binding the conscience; but may frame symbols of faith, bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, within or without the church, and decide cases of conscience. Secondly, it has power to establish rules for the government, discipline, worship and extension of the church, which must be agreeable to the doctrines relating thereto contained in the Scriptures and in the Book of Church Order. Thirdly, it possesses the right to require obedience to the laws of Christ. Hence, it admits those qualified to membership and to their respective offices, and it excludes the disobedient and disorderly from such offices or from church privileges. The highest censure to which its authority extends is to cut off the contumacious and impenitent from the congregation of believers. Moreover, it possesses all the administrative authority necessary to give effect to these powers. (see chapters 17-21)

Chapter 6

The Deacon

1. It is the duty of the Deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty to develop an annual budget which shall be approved by the Session and the congregation; also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and buildings belonging to the congregation (see 14.3). Total annual unbudgeted expenditures shall not exceed 10% of the total budget unless approved by the Session. In the discharge of their duties the Deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. If it is impossible for any reason to secure Deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the Session.
2. To the office of Deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.
3. The Deacons shall be organized as a board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The board shall elect a moderator and a clerk from their number and a treasurer to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the church. It shall meet separately at least once a quarter, and whenever requested by the Session. The quorum shall be majority of the members.

The board shall keep a record of its proceedings, and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its minutes to the Session regularly, and at other times upon request of the Session.

The Session and the board of Deacons shall meet together at least once a year to confer on matters of common interest.

4. Deacons shall serve for a term of 3 years. At the end of any term, the deacon may be re-elected to an immediate successive term as an active member of the board. Inactive deacons retain their ordination.

Chapter 7

Election, Ordination and Installation of Ruling Elders and Deacons

1. The church shall elect persons to the offices of Ruling Elder and Deacon in the following manner: The Session shall call a congregational meeting at least four weeks prior to the appointed time. During the first two weeks following the notice the congregation by written and signed nomination may submit names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective officer should be an active male member who meets the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and Chapters 3 and 6 of the Book of Church Order. Each prospective officer shall be examined by the Session on his Christian experience, his knowledge of doctrine, government, and discipline contained in Scripture, the duties of the discipline contained in Scripture, the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and his willingness to give assent to the questions required in chapter 7.3. The Session may also require training classes. The Session shall examine those nominated and then report to the congregation on election day those eligible for election. If any nominee is ineligible or unwilling to serve, such shall be reported privately to the nominator. The number of officers to be elected shall be determined by the congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation. If one fourth of the persons entitled to vote shall at any time request the Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing additional officers, it shall be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on the above procedure.
2. The congregational meeting shall otherwise be held in accordance with Chapter 13. A two-thirds majority vote of those present is required for election. There shall be no floor nominations.
3. The installation of a newly elected officer shall be as follows: the day having arrived, and the Session being convened in the presence of the congregation, a sermon shall be preached after which the Pastor shall state in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office of Ruling Elder, or Deacon, together with the character proper to be sustained and the duties to be fulfilled. Having done this, he shall propose to the candidate, in the presence of the church the following questions, namely:
 1. "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"
 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Statement of Faith of this Church and the Holy Scriptures: and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this statement or of the Holy Scriptures, you will, on your own initiative, make known to the Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination?"
 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church as set forth in the Book of Church Order?"
 4. Do you accept the office of Ruling Elder (or Deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?"
 5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?"
 6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?"

The Ruling Elder or Deacon elect having answered in the affirmative, the Pastor shall address to the members of the church the following question:

“Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as Ruling Elder (or Deacon), and do you promise to yield him all the honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Book of Church Order, entitles him?”

The members of the church having answered this question in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the Pastor shall declare the candidate duly elected. If the candidate has not been previously ordained to the office, the Pastor shall proceed to set apart the candidate in accordance with Chapter 8.

4. Ordination of the offices of Ruling Elder or Deacon is perpetual. Such offices cannot be laid aside at pleasure; nor can any person be removed from either office except according to procedures of church discipline; yet a Ruling Elder or Deacon may have reasons which he deems valid for being release from the active duties of his office. In such a case the Session after careful consideration of the matter, may, if it thinks proper, accept his resignation and relieve him from active service.

The Ruling Elder or Deacon may become unacceptable in his official capacity to the church. In such a case the church may take the initiative by a two-thirds majority vote at a regularly called congregational meeting, and request the Session to relieve him from active service without censure. The Session, after conference with the Ruling Elder or Deacon, and after careful consideration, may use its discretion as to dissolving the official relationship. The Session shall report its action to the congregation (see chapter 19.5).

Chapter 8

Doctrine of Ordination

1. Those who have been called to office in the Church are to be inducted by ordination of the Session.
2. Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship.
3. As every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no man shall be ordained unless it be the performance of a definite work.

Chapter 9

The Election and Installation of Pastors

1. The church should be under the pastoral oversight of a Senior Pastor, and when the church has no senior pastor it should seek to secure one without delay. The church shall proceed to elect a senior pastor in the following manner: The Session shall call a congregational meeting to elect a pulpit committee which may be composed of members from the congregation at large or the Session, as designated by the congregation (see chapter 11). All nominations from the pulpit committee are subject to the advice and consent of the Session. Only the pulpit committee may nominate for the election of a pastor. Any nominee shall meet the qualifications of Chapter 3.

1. When advised by the committee that they have a nominee, the Session shall order a congregational meeting to convene. In every case a three-fourths majority of all the voters present shall be required to elect.
2. The call must include financial arrangements (such as salary, vacation, insurance, retirement, etc.) and assurance that the work will afford the liberty to proclaim and practice fully and freely the whole counsel of God, as contained in the Scriptures.

3. Form of call: The terms of the call shall be approved by the congregation in the following or like form: Grace Church, being on sufficient grounds well satisfied of the ministerial qualifications of you, _____ and having good hopes from our knowledge of your labors that your ministrations in the Gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, do earnestly call you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation, promising you, in the discharge of your duty, all proper support, encouragement and obedience in the Lord. That you may be free from worldly cares and avocations, we hereby promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of \$ _____ a year in regular monthly (or quarterly) payments, and other benefits, such as manse, retirement, insurance, vacations, moving expenses, etc., during the time of your being and continuing the regular pastor of this church. In testimony whereof we have respectively subscribed our names this _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord _____.
4. If the terms of the original call are rejected, then subsequent changes must be approved by the congregation in a meeting.
5. The pastor shall be installed in the manner specified by the Session.

Chapter 10

The Dissolution of the Pastoral Relation

1. When the Pastor shall tender the resignation of his pastoral charge to his Session, it should inquire why it should not accept the resignation. If reasons for retaining the pastor be deemed insufficient, his resignation shall be accepted, and the pastoral relation dissolved. If the church desires to be relieved of its pastor, the Session shall request his resignation. But whether the Pastor or the church initiate proceedings for a dissolution of the relation, it must be effectuated by a meeting of the congregation called and conducted in the same manner as the call of a Pastor.

Chapter 11

Committees

1. The church shall have such committees as determined by the Session. The Session shall set the purposes and guidelines of each committee. The members of all committees shall be chosen by the Session, except for the building committees and pulpit committees the members of which shall be chosen by the congregation with recommendations from the Session. The pastor shall be an ex-officio member of all committees. If the church is without a pastor, each committee shall have a ruling elder as ex-officio member.
2. Each committee may effectuate its decisions, subject, however, to the oversight of the Session and in the case of building or pulpit committees, where appropriate, the approval of the congregation; provided, however, that all decisions and actions be within the budget of the committee, be within the guidelines of the committee, be in accordance with the Statement of Faith, and be done in a Christian-like manner.
3. Each committee shall have a moderator and a clerk. The clerk shall keep written minutes for the guidance of the committee and for review by the Session when requested. Elder members shall report the actions of their committees to the Session at its regular meetings; deacon members shall likewise report to the diaconate.

Chapter 12

Church Staff

1. The pastoral staff consists of the senior pastor and any number of assistant pastors. The senior pastor is chosen in accordance with the provisions of chapter 9.

2. Assistant pastors are chosen as follows: The Session shall direct the senior pastor to search for a suitable candidate who is submitted to the Session for its approval. If so approved by the Session, the candidate shall then be called by a vote of the congregation.
3. Any assistant pastor may be dismissed if such is approved by the Session and then by a vote of the congregation.
4. All non-pastoral staff are chosen as follows: The Session shall direct the senior pastor (or someone designated by him) to search for a suitable person who shall be then submitted to the Session for its approval.
5. Any non-pastoral staff member may be dismissed by the senior pastor after he has given notice thereof to the Session.
6. Assistant pastors and all other staff members are accountable to the senior pastor in the performance of their duties as described in their respective job descriptions.

Chapter 13

Congregational Meetings

1. The congregation consists of all the members of the church, and they only are entitled to vote but only if at least 18 years of age.
2. Whenever it may seem for the best interests of the church that a congregational meeting should be held, the Session shall call such meeting and give public notice at a regular morning worship service of at least one week. No business shall be transacted at such meeting except what is stated in the notice. The Session shall always call a congregational meeting when requested in writing to do so by one fourth of the members of the church. The meeting shall be held at the regular place of worship.
3. The quorum of the congregational meeting shall consist of one fourth of the resident members. Only those present at a meeting shall be allowed to vote. Motions may be approved by a simple majority except as otherwise provided by the Book of Church Order.
4. The pastor shall be Moderator of congregational meetings by virtue of his office. If it should be impracticable or inexpedient for him to reside, or if there is no pastor, the Session shall appoint one of their number to call the meeting to order and to preside.
5. A Clerk of the Session shall be to keep correct minutes of the proceedings and all business transacted and preserve these minutes in a permanent form, after they have been attested by the Moderator and the Clerk. He shall also send a copy of these minutes to the Session.

Chapter 14

The Corporation and Church Property

1. The Book of Church Order shall also be the bylaws of the corporation. All the members of the church shall be members of the corporation. The directors of the corporation shall be the teaching and ruling elders as elected from time to time by the congregation. The Session shall elect from it members a corporation president and secretary who shall have only such authority as is granted to them by the Session and the Book of Church Order. Their terms shall be one year, but may be re-elected for any number of successive terms. Should the Session fail to hold any such election, then those currently holding such offices shall continue until their successors be elected.

2. All funds collected for the support and expense of the church and for the benevolent purposes of the church shall be controlled and disbursed by the Session and the Board of Deacons as their relative authorities may from time to time be established and defined by the Session. Various committees may be grant authority over funds in accordance with Chapter 11.2.
3. The corporation of the church shall have sole title to its property, real, personal, or mixed, tangible or intangible, and shall be sole owner of any equity it may have in any real estate. The officers of the corporation shall have the authority to buy any real property or sell or mortgage any real property of the corporation only after such actions have been specifically approved by a duly constituted meeting of the members of the corporation (congregational meeting). The Session or the Diaconate have the authority to acquire or dispose of any other property by their own action or as they may so delegate to committees or individuals.

Chapter 15

Amendments

1. Amendments to the Book of Church Order may be made only in the following manner: 1) Approval of the proposed amendment by the Session.
2) Approval by the three-fourths of the congregation in a duly called meeting.
2. Amendments to the Statement of Faith may be made only by the Session.

Chapter 16

Ordinances of the Church

1. We believe there are only two ordinances for the church. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper.
2. We believe there exists scriptural support for both infant baptism and believer baptism and will recognize either as valid (Romans 14:22)
3. Infant baptism sees the ordinance as a sign of the covenant with God similar to circumcision of the Old Testament. It is therefore applied to those born into a household with believing parents as well as to adult converts. On reaching an accountable age those baptized as infants must personally trust Christ for their salvation. Believer baptism sees the ordinance as a public testimony of personal faith in Christ. Baptism symbolizes their identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
1. Baptism is a public ordinance to be practiced within the assembly of believers under the supervision of the Session (see chapter 3.5-6). Baptism should not be unnecessarily delayed.
2. Baptism is properly applied by sprinkling, pouring or immersing. Ordinances of the Lord's Supper
3. The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the night that He was betrayed and is to be observed in His church unto the end to the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death. The two elements, bread and wine, symbolize the Lord's body and blood.
4. The Lord's Supper should be observed frequently during the assembly of believers under the supervision of the Session. (see chapter 3.5-6) All those who profess Christ as Lord and Savior and are in good standing in any evangelical church are invited to participate in the ordinance.

Chapter 17

Discipline – Its Nature, Subjects and Ends

1. Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. (Hebrews 13:17; I Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15) The term has two senses: the one referring to the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and control which the church maintains over its members and its officers; the other a restricted and technical sense, signifying process of censure.
2. All members of the Church are subject to its discipline and entitled to the benefits thereof. (1 Timothy 5:21) (see chapter 1.5-6)
3. The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its proper usage discipline maintains: a) the glory of God, b) the purity of His Church, c) the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners. Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7); therefore, it demands a self-examination under Scripture (2 Corinthians 7:1). Its ends, so far as it involves judicial action, are the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church, and the spiritual good of offenders themselves.
4. The power which Christ had given the Church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the Church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No member of the Church should be allowed to stray from the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, Teaching elders must: a) instruct the officers in discipline, b) instruct the Congregation in discipline, c) jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and Session.
5. Holy Scriptures is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's will. Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures and must be followed. They are: (a) instruction in the Word, (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), (b) individuals' responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:16), (c) if the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16), (d) if rejection persists, then the Church must act through the Session to apply censure (Matthew 18:17) (see chapter 20.1).
6. By seeking and obtaining membership in the Church, each member recognizes that God is the ultimate spiritual authority in his life. Such authority is exercised through the Church leaders and/or members acting consistently with the Scripture. Each member expressly relinquishes any and all rights to resort to legal remedies available in the civil courts of the State of Georgia and of the United States against the Church, its leaders or other members. This is in recognition of the specific prohibition against Christians seeking to resolve disputes in civil courts. (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

Chapter 18

Offenses

1. An offense is anything in the doctrines or practice of a church member professing faith in Christ which is contrary to the Word of God. Nothing ought to be considered by any Session as an offense, or admitted as a matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture.
2. Offenses are either personal or general, private or public; but all of them being sins against God, are therefore grounds of discipline.

3. Personal offenses are violations of Scripture being of wrongs or injuries to particular individuals. General offenses are heresies or immoralities not affecting particular individuals.
4. Private offenses are those which are known only to a few persons. Public offenses are those which are notorious.

Chapter 19

Church Censures

1. The censures which may be applied by the Session are admonition, suspension, excommunication, and deposition. When lower censure fails to reclaim the delinquent, it may become the duty of the Session to proceed to the application of a higher censure (1 Timothy 5:20).
 2. Admonition is the formal reproof of an offender by the Session, warning him of his guilt and danger, and exhorting him to be more circumspect and watchful in the future.
 3. Suspension, with respect to church members, is their temporary exclusion from participating in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Suspension, with respect to Church officers, is their temporary exclusion from the active duty of their office and from participating in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It may be either definite or indefinite as to its duration. Definite suspension is administered when the credibility of the church, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it, even though he may have given satisfaction to the Session. Indefinite suspension is to be maintained until he exhibits signs of repentance, or until by his conduct, the necessity of the highest censure be made manifest.
 4. Excommunication is the removal of an offender from the fellowship of the church and the rights and privileges of membership but not necessarily the love and concern of the Church (Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15). This censure is to be inflicted only on account of gross crime or heresy and when the offender shows himself incorrigible. The design of this censure is to operate on the offender as a means of reclaiming him, to deliver the Church from the scandal of his offense, and by the example of his discipline to cause all to fear sin and its consequences (1 Timothy 5:20)
1. Deposition is the removal of an officer from his office, and may or may not be accompanied with the application of other censure (see chapter 7.4)
 2. When any member or officer of the church shall be found guilty of an offense the Session functioning as the church court shall proceed with all tenderness and shall deal with its offending brother in the spirit of meekness, the members considering themselves lest they also be tempted (Galatians 6:1). Church censures and the modes of administering them should be suited to nature of the offenses. For private offenses censure should be administered in the presence of the court alone, or in private by one or more members of the court. In the case of public offenses, the degree of censure and mode of administering it shall be within the discretion of the court.

Chapter 20

The Process of Censure

1. It is the duty of the Church Session to exercise care over those subject to their authority. It shall with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character following the principles of Matthew 18:15-16 and Galatians 6:1. (See chapter 17.5). This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports shall ask an investigation. If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of

the party involved and there is no repentance and restoration, the Session acting as the church court shall begin the process of censure (Matthew 18:17) (see chapter 17.5).

2. The original and only parties in a case of process are the accuser and the accused. The accuser is always Grace Church whose honor and purity are to be maintained (2 Corinthians 7:1)
 3. When the offense is personal, an injured person shall not become a voluntary prosecutor, without having tried the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender required by Christ (Matthew 18:15-16) (see chapter 17.5).
The Session, however, may prosecute personal offenses when the interests of the church seem to demand it.
 4. When the offense is general, the case may be conducted by a prosecutor appointed by the Session.
 5. Great caution ought to be exercised in receiving accusations from any person who is known to indulge a malignant spirit towards the accused; who is not of good character; who is himself under censure or process; who is deeply interested in any respect in the conviction of the accused; or who is known to be litigious, rash or highly imprudent.
 6. Every voluntary prosecutor shall be previously warned, that if he fails to show probable cause of the charges, he may himself be censured as a slanderer of the brethren (Deut. 19:16-19)
 7. When a member of the Session is under process, he shall not be allowed to sit in judgment of his own case.
1. It is incumbent on every member of a court engaged in a trial of offenders, to bear in mind the inspired injunction:
“If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit or meekness, considering thyself lest though also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).
 2. When a charge is laid before the Session, it shall be reduced to writing, and nothing shall be done at the first meeting of the court, unless by consent of parties, except (1) to appoint a prosecutor, (2) to order the indictment drawn and a copy, along with names of witnesses then known to support it, served on the accused, and (3) to cite all parties and their witnesses to appear and be heard at another meeting which shall not be sooner than ten days after such citation. In drawing the indictment, the times, places and circumstances should, if possible, be particularly stated, that the accused may have an opportunity to make his defense. Every indictment shall begin: “In the name of Grace Church,” and shall conclude, “against the peace, unity and purity of the Church, and the honor and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head thereof.”
 3. When an accused person shall refuse to obey a citation, he shall be sited a second time. This second citation shall be accompanied with a notice that if he does not appear at the time appointed, or that if he appear and refuse to plead, he shall be dealt with for his contumacy, as provided in Chapter 20.12. The time allotted for his appearance on the second citation shall be left to the discretion of the court, provided that it allow a reasonable time for compliance with the citation.
 4. When an accused person, having been twice duly cited, shall refuse to appear before the Session, or appearing, shall refuse to plead, the court shall enter upon its records that fact together with the nature of the offense charged, and he shall be suspended from sealing ordinances for his contumacy. The censure may be made public, should this be deemed expedient by the Session, and shall in no case be removed until the offender has not only repented of his contumacy, but has given satisfaction in relation to the charges against him. If the charge be one of gross crime or heresy, and the accused persist in his contumacy, the court may proceed to apply the highest censure.

5. If the accused appears in court, the charges shall be read to him, and he shall be called upon to say whether he be guilty or not. If he confesses, the court may deal with him according to its discretion. If he pleads not guilty, the trial shall proceed.
6. In order that the trial may be fair and impartial, the witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused, or at least after he shall have received due citation to attend. Witnesses may be cross examined by both parties, and any questions asked must be relevant and material to the issue.
7. When a court proceeds to the trial of a case, the following order shall be observed; (1) The Moderator shall charge the court. (2) The indictment shall be read, and the answer of the accused heard. (3) The witnesses for the prosecutor and then the accused and his witnesses shall be examined. (4) Closing argument: first, the prosecutor, then the accused, and the prosecutor shall close. (5) The roll shall be called, and the Session members may express their opinion in the case. (6) The vote shall be taken, the verdict announced and judgment entered on the records.
8. Either party may, for cause, challenge the right of any Session member to sit in the trial of the case, which question shall be decided by the other members of the court. If the prosecutor is a member of the Session, he shall not be allowed to sit in judgment of the case.
9. Pending the trial of a case, any member of the court who shall express his opinion of its merits to either party, or to any person not a member of the court; or who shall absent himself from any sitting without the permission of the court or satisfactory reasons rendered, shall be thereby disqualified from taking part in the subsequent proceedings.
1. The parties shall be allowed copies of the whole proceedings at their own expense if they demand them. Minutes of the trial shall be kept by the Clerk, which shall exhibit the charges, the answer, a summary of the testimony, and all such acts, orders and decisions of the court relating to the case, and also the judgment.
2. An accused person may represent himself, or if he desires it, be represented before the court by a member of the church. A member of the Session so selected shall not be allowed to sit in judgment in the case.
3. Either party has the right to challenge a witness whom he believes to be incompetent, and the court shall examine and decide upon his competency. It belongs to the court to judge the degree of credibility to be attached to all evidence.
4. The testimony of more than one witness shall be necessary in order to establish any offense; yet if, in addition to the testimony of one witness, corroborative evidence be provided, the offense may be considered to be established (1 Timothy 5:19 ; Matthew 18:16; Deut. 19:15-19)
5. At the request of either party, the witnesses may be sequestered; but a member of the court who is a witness may remain.

Chapter 21

The Removal of Censure

1. After the censure of suspension or deposition has been applied to any person, it is proper that the rulers of the Church should frequently converse with him as well as pray with him and for him, that it would please God to give him repentance.
2. When the court shall be satisfied as to the reality of the repentance of a suspended offender, he shall be allowed to profess his repentance, either in the presence of the court alone or publicly, and be restored

to full privileges of the Church, and to his office, if such be the judgment of the court, which restoration shall be declared to the penitent, after which there shall be prayer and thanksgiving.

3. When an excommunicated person shall be so affected with his state as to be brought to repentance, and to desire to be readmitted to the communion of the Church, the Session, having obtained sufficient evidence of his sincere penitence, shall proceed to restore him. This may be done by profession of repentance in the presence of the Session, or of the congregation as seems best to the Session. The restoration shall be declared to him, after which there shall be prayer and thanksgiving.
4. The restoration of a deposed officer shall be done in accordance with 21.3. When a Ruling Elder or Deacon has been absolved from the censure of deposition, he cannot be allowed to resume the active exercise of his office in the church without reelection by the people.

Regarding the major doctrines of the Bible, we elders of Grace Church believe and teach the following:

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the sixty-six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Word of God is an objective revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

The Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12, 2 Peter 1:20-21).

God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16).

Although there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

GOD

There is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; 1 Corinthians 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons--Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)--each equally deserving worship and obedience.

God the Father

God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:10; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation with the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11; Colossians 1:17; Daniel 4:35). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as his own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

God the Son

Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

God the Father created according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2).

In the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-Man (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9).

Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 1:1, 14; Colossians 2:9).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35) and God incarnate (John 1:1, 14). The purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Psalm 2:7-9; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

In the incarnation the second person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God, assumed the place of a Son, and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Philippians 2:5-8).

Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Roman 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24).

On the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; and he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Romans 3:25, 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

Our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead. He has ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates and intercedes for us as our Advocate and High Priest (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that He accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Romans 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23): believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10); living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46); and the unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15).

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of divine personality and deity including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternity (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 10:15-17).

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7).

The work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 2:22).

The Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).

The Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher, who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God's revelation, the Bible. Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 John 2:20, 27).

The Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18). God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today; speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were never intended to be characteristic of the lives of believers (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:1-4).

MAN

Man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).

God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship forever, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).

By Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 John 1:8).

Because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

SALVATION

Salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Regeneration

Regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works will be its proper evidence and fruit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12b; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

Election

Election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

Sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

The unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).

Election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Romans 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Justification

Justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20, 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Sanctification

Every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and is therefore identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2).

There is also by the work of the Holy Spirit a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the Will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17,19; Romans 6:1-22, 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 5:23).

In this respect, every saved person is involved in a daily conflict--the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh--but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

Security

All the redeemed once saved are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24).

It is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Romans 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Galatians 5:13, 25-26; Titus 2:11-14).

Separation

Separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness will increase (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us and because our glorious God is so worthy of

our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. Separation from all religious apostasy, and from worldly and sinful practices, is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).

Believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2). The Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12) and is a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

THE CHURCH

All who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

The formation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The church is a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11-3:6).

The establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and the members of this one spiritual body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

The one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers)(Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). These leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17)(Book of Church Order chapters 2-6).

We believe in the importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2), mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:5-14), as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15-22, Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16)(Book of Church Order chapters 17-21).

The local church is autonomous, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). It is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4)(Book of Church Order chapters 1 & 14).

The purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

All saints are called to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12). The church should cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

There were two kinds of gifts given the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New

Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:12; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those nonrevelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8). No one possesses the gift of healing today but God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

Two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). As a community church, we acknowledge that there are different interpretations of Scripture regarding baptism and its modes, and in liberty we recognize and practice both believer baptism and infant baptism (Romans 14:19,22) (Book of Church Order chapter 16). The rite of baptism does not guarantee salvation nor automatically convey the inward blessings that it signifies (Romans 10:8-10).

The Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). Although the elements of Communion are only symbolic of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His People (1 Corinthians 10:16). All those who profess Christ as Lord and Savior and are in good standing in any evangelical church are invited to participate in the ordinance.

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