

# GRACE CHURCH

## Commonly Asked Questions

1. What is the church's leadership structure? What is an elder-led church?
2. What is our mission statement?
3. What exactly is discipleship?
4. Why is Grace non-denominational?
5. Why don't we do an altar call?
6. What is the church's position on infant baptism?
7. Who can perform Baptism?
8. Why church membership?
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12. Is Grace a Pentecostal Church? What about speaking in tongues? Faith healing?
13. Does Grace Church have a position on Calvinism or Arminianism?
14. What are the church's positions on marriage, gender, and homosexuality?
15. What does the Bible say about abortion?
16. What is the role of women in leadership at Grace Church?
17. Why are there so many Bible versions, and which is the best?

### **1. What is the church's leadership structure? What is an elder-led church?**

God was very clear in His Word about how He wishes His church on earth to be organized and managed. First, Christ is the head of the church and its supreme authority (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18). Second, the local church is to be 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). Third, the church is to be governed by spiritual leadership consisting of two main offices—elders and deacons.

“Elders” were a leading body among the Israelites since the time of Moses. We find them making political decisions (2 Samuel 5:3; 2 Samuel 17:4, 15), advising the king in later history (1 Kings 20:7), and representing the people concerning spiritual matters (Exodus 7:17; 24:1, 9; Numbers 11:16, 24-25). The early Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, used the Greek word *presbuteros* for “elder.” This is the same Greek word used in the New Testament that is also translated “elder.”

Elders oversee church theology, spiritual care, philosophy, direction, vision, constitution, church plants, lead pastors, and the GCA school board. Deacons assist elders, pastors, and ministry coordinators in carrying out the mission of the church. Deacons provide logistical and material support so that the elders can focus on the Word of God and prayer. The Deacons are responsible for the annual church budget, the care of the facility, benevolence, ushering, and finances.

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### 2. What is our mission statement?

Helping each other know and follow Jesus in our homes, city, and world.

### 3. Grace talks a lot about discipleship. What exactly is discipleship?

By definition, a disciple is a follower, one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. A Christian disciple is a person who accepts and assists in the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in our hearts, to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christlike. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting to examine their thoughts, words and actions and compare them with the Word of God. This requires that we be in the Word daily—studying it, praying over it, and obeying it. In addition, we should always be ready to give testimony of the reason for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15) and to disciple others to walk in His way. According to Scripture, being a Christian disciple involves personal growth characterized by the following:

1. Putting Jesus first in all things (Mark 8:34-38). The disciple of Christ needs to be set apart from the world. Our focus should be on our Lord and pleasing Him in every area of our lives. We must put off self-centeredness and put on Christ-centeredness.
2. Following Jesus' teachings (John 8:31-32). We must be obedient children and doers of the Word. Obedience is the supreme test of faith in God (1 Samuel 28:18), and Jesus is the perfect example of obedience as He lived a life on earth of complete obedience to the Father even to the point of death (Philippians 2:6-8).
3. Fruitfulness (John 15:5-8). Our job is not producing fruit. Our job is to abide in Christ, and if we do, the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit, and this fruit is the result of our obedience. As we become more obedient to the Lord and learn to walk in His ways, our lives will change. The biggest change will take place in our hearts, and the overflow of this will be new conduct (thoughts, words and actions) representative of that change. The change we seek is done from the inside out, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It isn't something we can conjure up on our own.
4. Love for other disciples (John 13:34-35). We are told that love of other believers is the evidence of our being a member of God's family (1 John 3:10). Love is defined and elaborated on in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. These verses show us that love is not an emotion; it is action. We must be doing something and involved in the process. Furthermore, we are told to think more highly of others than of ourselves and to look out for their interests (Philippians 2:3-4). The next verse in Philippians (verse 5) really sums up what we are to do when it comes to everything in life: "our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." What a perfect example He is to us for everything we are to do in our Christian walk.
5. Evangelism - Making disciples of others (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to share our faith and tell nonbelievers about the wonderful changes Jesus Christ has made in our lives. No matter what our maturity level in the Christian life, we have something to offer. Too often, we believe the lie from Satan that we don't really know enough or haven't been a Christian long enough to make a

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difference. Not true! Some of the most enthusiastic representatives of the Christian life are new believers who have just discovered the awesome love of God. They may not know a lot of Bible verses or the "accepted" way of saying things, but they have experienced the love of the living God, and that is exactly what we are to share.

### 4. Why is Grace non-denominational?

A non-denominational church is any church that is not part of a larger denomination. A denomination is a church organization that exercises some sort of authority over the local churches that comprise it. Examples of denominations are Southern Baptist, Episcopal, Wesleyan, Methodist, etc. Non-denominational churches go by many different names and hold to a wide variety of beliefs.

A major consideration for being non-denominational is the freedom to direct the ministry and teaching of the local church without interference or control from without. When we look to the Bible, the evidence points to each church as self-governing and answerable directly to God Himself. In the book of Acts, where we read of the first missionary journeys and the establishment of many churches, there is no indication of a hierarchy of authority beyond the local elders of the church.

Often with denominations, there are certain historical practices and traditions which are required or prohibited. Grace desired the freedom to practice our spiritual formation in whatever way the Elders determined was directed by Scripture.

### 5. Why don't we do an altar call?

1. The altar call is simply and completely absent from the pages of the N.T.
2. The altar call is historically absent until the 19th century, and its use at that time was directly based upon bad theology and a man-centered, manipulative methodology.
3. The altar call very easily confuses the physical act of "coming forward" with the spiritual act of "coming to Christ." These two can happen simultaneously, but too often people believe that coming to Christ is going forward (and vice-versa).
4. The altar call can easily deceive people about the reality of their spiritual state and the biblical basis for assurance. The Bible never offers us assurance on the ground that we "went forward."
5. The altar call has a tendency to put the congregation's focus in the wrong place. After the Word is preached, members and visitors alike should be examining their own hearts. Everyone should be giving serious attention to how the message calls him or her to respond. But the altar call, ironically, tends to produce the opposite response. Instead of self-examination, it leads to audience-examination.
6. The altar call can mislead us to think that salvation (or any official response to God's Word) happens primarily on Sundays, only at the end of the service, and only "up front."
7. The altar call can confuse people regarding "sacred" things and "sacred" places, as the name "altar call" suggests.
8. The altar call is not sensitive to our cautious and relational age where most people come to faith over a period of time and often with the interaction of a good friend.

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9. The altar call is often seen as “the most important part of the service”, and this de-emphasizes the truly more important parts of corporate worship which God has prescribed (preaching, prayer, fellowship, singing).

10. If no one moves, one wonders, did the pastor fail? Or worse, did God take the day off?

### 6. What is the church’s position on infant baptism?

If requested, we do baptize infants. This practice at Grace is extremely rare. We treat infant baptism exactly like baby dedication except for the pouring of water on the child. Even if infants are dedicated to the Lord, when they grow up they will still have to make a personal decision to believe in Jesus in order to be saved. Baptism does not save a person. It does not matter if you were baptized by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling - if you have not first trusted in Christ for salvation, baptism (no matter the method) is meaningless and useless for salvation.

Christians who practice infant baptism do so because they understand infant baptism as the new covenant equivalent of circumcision. In this view, just as circumcision joined a Hebrew to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, so baptism joined a person to the New Covenant of salvation through Jesus Christ.

### 7. Who Can Perform Baptism?

The Bible gives no prescription for the requirements to perform a baptism. Contrary to some traditions, there seems to be no biblical reason to restrict the duty to men who have been ordained to vocational ministry. Therefore, we allow any believer, male or female, who has faithfully obeyed the ordinance of baptism and is in good standing with the church to perform the ordinance of baptism.

### 8. Why Church Membership?

Church membership is important because it helps define the elder's responsibilities. Hebrews 13:17 instructs, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.” Whom will an elder give an account for, except the members of their own church? They are not responsible for all the Christians in the world, only for those under their care. Likewise, they are not responsible for all the people in their community, only for believers under their leadership—their church members. Membership in a local church is a way of voluntarily placing oneself under the spiritual authority of spiritual leaders.

### 9. What does Grace expect from members?

- Attending church regularly.
- Reading your Bible and praying daily.
- Being part of a Kgroup.
- Talking and teaching your family about Jesus at home.
- Serving the church using your money, gifts and talents.
- Telling others about Jesus and helping them grow (discipleship).
- Attending the annual membership meeting to nominate/vote on leaders and budget.

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### 10. What can members expect from Grace?

- As shepherds and overseers of a local church, elders are entrusted with protecting, leading, equipping and caring for the corporate church body and her individual members.
- See Care Plan in back of notebook to understand how care is provided at Grace.
- Short-term Pastoral Discipleship Counseling
- Equipping you for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16).

### 11. Does Grace have Bylaws?

- Grace follows the *Book of Church Order*, which lays out standards and procedures covering the gamut of the church's life together. You can download this document at <https://gracechurchga.org/about-us/our-beliefs> (it's at the bottom of the page).

### 12. Is Grace a Pentecostal Church? What about speaking in tongues? Faith healing?

A major focus of Pentecostal churches is Holy Spirit baptism as evidenced by speaking in tongues. There are approximately 170 different denominations that identify themselves as Pentecostal and there is much diversity within these denominations.

While Grace Church agrees with some of the biblical stances of some Pentecostal churches, we would reject the teachings of the doctrine of a second baptism of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues and divine healing as an expected part of salvation.

Grace also rejects the teaching that God always wills to heal and that "blessed" equals "healthy." The Apostle Paul prayed three times for personal healing, yet the Lord chose not to heal him. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul states that God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul concludes, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Also, it is interesting to note that in 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul leaves Trophimus in Miletus because he was sick. Paul did not heal him.

Members of our church can be continuationist. Continuationism is the belief that all the spiritual gifts, including healings, tongues, and miracles, are still in operation today, just as they were in the days of the early church. A continuationist believes that the spiritual gifts have "continued" unabated since the Day of Pentecost and that today's church has access to all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible. While individual members may believe and practice these "sign gifts," we do not practice them collectively in our Sunday worship or Kgroup gatherings.

### 13. Does Grace Church have a position on Calvinism or Arminianism?

#### ACCORDING TO CALVINISM

Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

#### ACCORDING TO ARMINIANISM

Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond) - man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for

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everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be recipients of the gift of salvation.

### THE POSITION OF GRACE CHURCH

Grace Church has strived to strike a balance between extremes on controversial theological issues that have often caused division rather than unity in the body of Christ (remember the bullseye chart). While we welcome believers who disagree with us on non-essential issues to our fellowship, we do encourage a measure of doctrinal understanding and unity for those who desire to be teachers and leaders at Grace.

In no area of controversy is this approach more essential than in the long-simmering debate between Calvinists and Arminians. In the midst of this heated argument, it is easy to ignore or neglect the plain statements of the Bible or to believe that we have the ability to fully understand the ways of God (Romans 11:33-36).

We believe that God's grace is not the result of human effort or worthiness (Romans 3:24-28; 11:6), but is the response of God's mercy and love to those who will believe in His Son (Ephesians 2:4-10). God's grace gives to us what we do not deserve nor can earn by our performance (Romans 11:6).

We also recognize the paradox between the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. Scripture affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. People are responsible for what they do with the gospel—or with whatever light they have (Romans 2:19-20) so that punishment is just if they reject the light. And those who reject do so voluntarily.

We must accept both sides of the truth, though we may not understand how they correspond to one another. Our compartmentalizing minds want to put everything into a box, and yet the claims of Christian belief are not mutually exclusive. God, in His divine sovereignty, has given us responsibility. Since our sovereign God chose to grant us this privilege, it cannot be something that in any way diminishes his sovereignty. He circumscribes the limits of that responsibility such that we cannot violate His sovereign plan and His will, but that does not negate the responsibility that we enjoy. Paradox sits uncomfortably on our rational minds.

### UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

It is not easy to maintain the unity of the Spirit among us on these matters.

Romans 11:33 tells us God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways inscrutable. To say what God says in the Bible - no more and no less - is not always easy, comfortable, or completely understandable. But Scripture tells us that the wisdom from above will be loving and kind toward all, seeking the unity of the believers, not trying to find ways to divide and separate from one another. May God help us all to love each other, to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one another as Jesus Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32)!

In difficult doctrinal matters, may we have gracious attitudes and humble hearts, desiring most of all to please Him who has called us to serve Him in the body of Christ.

Discussion - YES! Disagreements - YES! Division - NO!

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### Resources:

Grace Community Church (John MacArthur): <https://www.gracechurch.org/about/distinctives/sovereignty-of-god>

Chuck Smith: [https://www.calvarychapelriverside.org/pdf\\_documents/Calvinism,%20Arminianism%20And%20The%20Word%20of%20God.pdf](https://www.calvarychapelriverside.org/pdf_documents/Calvinism,%20Arminianism%20And%20The%20Word%20of%20God.pdf)

### **14. What is the church's position on marriage, gender, and homosexuality?**

We believe that God wonderfully and immutable creates each person as male or female, and these distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:18-25).

Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one biological man and one biological woman who are married to each other (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4).

The New Testament forbids homosexual behavior. In I Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul writes, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God." The words in the list translated "men who practice homosexuality" refer in Greek literature to the passive and the active partners in male homosexual intercourse. The second of these two words is also listed in I Timothy 1:10, along with fornicators, slave traders, liars, and murderers, as "contrary to the sound teaching of the Gospel." The most lengthy treatment of homosexual activity comes in Romans 1:24-28. Liberal scholars have done acrobatics to try to explain away the clear sense of these verses. Some have said that Paul is only condemning the pagan practice of men's sexually exploiting young boys. But such an interpretation is obviously wrong since Paul says in verses 24 and 27 that these homosexual acts by men were committed "with one another," and in verse 26, he speaks of lesbian homosexual acts as well. So the Bible is very forthright and clear when it comes to homosexual behavior. It is contrary to God's design and is sin.

### **15. What does the Bible say about abortion?**

The Bible never specifically addresses the issue of abortion. However, there are numerous teachings in Scripture that make it abundantly clear what God's view of abortion is.

Jeremiah 1:5 tells us that God knows us before He forms us in the womb. Psalm 139:13-16 speaks of God's active role in our creation and formation in the womb. Exodus 21:22-25 prescribes the same penalty—death—for someone who causes the death of a baby in the womb as for someone who commits murder. This law and its punishment clearly indicate that God considers a baby in the

womb to be just as much a human being as a full-grown adult. For the Christian, abortion is not a matter of a woman's right to choose to have a baby. The baby is already present and living. Abortion is a matter of the life or death of a human being made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6).

What does the Bible say about abortion? Simply put, abortion is murder. It is the killing of a human being created in the image of God.

### **16. What is the role of women in leadership at Grace Church?**

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From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (Acts 1:12–14; 9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; leadership in the churches was entrusted to men.

Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side by side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Rom. 16; Phil. 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.

Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. However, without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God.

### **17. Why are there so many Bible versions, and which is the best?**

Answer: The fact that there are so many English Bible translations is both a blessing and a problem. It is a blessing in that the Word of God is available to anyone who needs it in an easy-to-understand, accurate translation. It is a problem in that the different translations can create controversy and problems in Bible studies, teaching situations, etc. The differences between the translations can also be a subject of great division within the church body.

It is probably wise to have access to at least two or three of the major translations NIV (New International Version), NAS (New American Standard), NKJV (New King James Version), ESV (English Standard Version), NLT (New Living Translation), for comparison's sake. If a verse or passage in one translation is a little confusing, it can be helpful to compare it side-by-side with another version. It is difficult to say which translation is the "best." "Best" would be determined by a combination of the translation method personally considered best and your interpretation of the textual data underlying your translation.

For example, the ESV and NAS attempted to take the underlying Hebrew and Greek words and translate them into the closest corresponding English words as possible (word for word), while the NIV and NLT attempted to take the original thought that was being presented in Greek and Hebrew and then express that thought in English (thought for thought). Many of the other translations attempt to "meet in the middle" between those two methods. Paraphrases such as The Message or The Living Bible can be used to gain a different perspective on the meaning of a verse, but they should not be used as a primary Bible translation.



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We use the English Standard Version (ESV) on Sundays. Kgroup leaders may choose to use other versions.

