

CONSTITUTION
SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH OF FREDERICK

Ratified March 2016

Order of Contents:

PREAMBLE

- I. NAME**
- II. THE RULE OF JESUS CHRIST**
- III. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**
- IV. STATEMENT OF FAITH**
- V. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**
- VI. CHURCH DISCIPLINE**
- VII. OFFICE OF ELDER**
- VIII. OFFICE OF DEACON**
- IX. CHURCH ASSOCIATION**
- X. FISCAL MATTERS**
- XI. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**

PREAMBLE

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite here in 2006 A.D. under the name Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick for the worship of God, the discipleship of His saints, and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and since He has sustained this work to the present day;

And whereas we, the members of Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick, under the guidance of His Word and His Spirit, have recognized the need to reconstitute ourselves to more closely conform to His will for the Church in this age and prepare ourselves for greater efforts in His name;

Now therefore we, the members of Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick, having organized ourselves in accord with the laws of the State of Maryland, adopt this constitution as our articles of governance, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of, and bring glory to, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Bible and articulated in the standards set forth in the statement of faith herein.

Article I - NAME AND INCORPORATION:

The name of this church is Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick.

For the purposes of compliance with the laws of the state, this church shall be established as a corporation organized and operated exclusively as a nonprofit, religious, educational, and charitable organization and shall also maintain legal bylaws.

The constitution of this church and the bylaws of this church shall exist in accord with one another and may not contradict one another. Furthermore, the bylaws list the governing body of the church as the “Board of Directors.” In this constitution, the term used for the governing body of the church is the “Board of Elders” (BOE). For the purpose of harmonization, the “Board of Directors” and the “Board of Elders” shall be one and the same entity.

Article II - THE RULE OF JESUS CHRIST:

The ruler of Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick is Jesus Christ.

God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come (Eph 1:20-21; Heb 1:3-4; 10:12-13; Phil 2:9-11).

The Father put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23).

He purchased the Church with his blood and it is his possession (Acts 20:28). He alone is the King and Head of the Church (1 Tim 1:16-17; Eph 5:23).

Therefore, Jesus Christ is the only head and supreme ruler of the Church Universal and every local church in existence, including Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick.

Article III – THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The mission of Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick is to build a community of gospel-centered people (Eph 2:19-22; Phil 1:7; Col 2:17-19).

More specifically, this church exists to make and preserve disciples of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God the Father (Matt 28:18-22; Rom 1:15-17; Phil 2:11; 1 Tim 4:16; Heb 3:13; 12:15).

Therefore, in fidelity to the Lord's own commands and the commands of His apostles, this church shall baptize, teach, and help His disciples trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and faithfully obey Him in the strength of His Spirit (Matt 28:18-22; Rom 8:13-15; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 3:13; 12:15); this church shall be a witness for Jesus Christ to the world and spread His gospel to the lost (Matt 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:9; 3:15); and this church shall do all this in order to love, worship, and give glory to Almighty God (Matt 22:36-40; Eph 3:20).

Article IV - STATEMENT OF FAITH:

Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick is committed to the statement of faith which is listed separately from this constitution as an appendix titled "Appendix A: Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick Statement of Faith."

This statement of faith may only be altered or amended by an 80% majority or greater vote of the Board of Elders (See Article VII). If there are not enough members of the Board of Elders to constitute such a voting majority, then a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders shall be required to alter or amend the statement of faith.

Article V - MEMBERSHIP

A. Overview

The Scripture explicitly and implicitly calls Christians to be united to each other in love and faith in an identifiable gathering of believers under specific pastoral oversight for mutual edification and care through the use of their gifts, for the engagement of orderly worship and celebration of the sacraments, for the purity of devotion to Christ, and for the preservation and redemption of the straying through church discipline (e.g., Matt 18:15-17; Eph 4:11; Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 12–14).

B. Qualifications

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must:

- make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, placing their sole trust in Christ alone through faith alone for the forgiveness of their sins and as the sole source of salvation for all of mankind;
- express a sincere intention to follow Jesus as their Lord;
- have been baptized or express a willingness to be baptized, in obedience to Jesus Christ;
- wholeheartedly believe in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible;
- agree to support the teachings of Scripture as they are expressed in this church's statement of faith and not teach against them; and
- consent to support and, if necessary, submit to the process of church discipline outlined herein.

C. Admission of Members

The Board of Elders (BOE) shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership through personal interview and examination. Upon approval of the BOE, a member candidate shall be publicly welcomed into the membership of this church.

D. Duties and Privileges of Membership

Each member, including elders and deacons, shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, to love and care for their fellow members as is consistent with God's Word, and to give of their gifts, time, and material resources as each has received from God.

More specifically:

- Members will seek to hold onto the Gospel of Jesus Christ and live in a manner worthy of its call on their lives.

- Members will seek to grow in their love for God through the use of the means of grace, such as prayer and the study of His Word.
- Members will encourage each other's growth as well as watch out for and admonish each other for sin.
- Members will seek to live with each other in love and seek reconciliation when offended.
- Members will seek to protect and promote sound doctrine.
- Members will seek to serve the church body according to their gifts.
- Members will not neglect fellowship with one another (Heb 10:25) and will strive to be faithful to participate in worship and fellowship gatherings and pray for the concerns of the church and its members.
- Members will participate when able in important church matters such as church discipline and will support and submit to the spiritual leadership of the Board of Elders (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 11:1) as they lead in a manner faithful to the duties of elders as defined by this constitution (see Article VII, second B) in accordance with the Word of God and as they themselves submit to Jesus Christ.
- Members will financially support the church as able and as led by the Word and Spirit of God.
- Members shall be entitled to serve in leadership roles in ministries of the church where qualified; non-members may serve in certain ministry roles with the approval of the elders.

E. Termination of Membership

- Any members wishing to resign their church membership may do so by submitting a written notice to the Board of Elders (BOE) stating their intention to resign from membership of the church. PLEASE NOTE: Though not required in order for the resignation of members in good standing to be accepted, the BOE will in general request that members communicate their reasons for resigning their membership.
- Upon receipt of such a notice by the BOE, any member in good standing shall be formally released from membership and will receive a formal letter of his or her release from membership upon request. Such members will then be removed from the church rolls.
- Membership may also be terminated by the church when a member fails to participate in the life of the church without biblical warrant for a period of not less than six months.
- Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline for sin (upon the judgment of the BOE or the relevant adjudicating body) as well as for divisive teaching and/or the explicit denial of

Biblical Christian beliefs including the faith as it is expressed in this church's statement of faith.

- The BOE reserves the right to decline recognition of a member's voluntary resignation if the member is in a state of unrepentant sin and/or in the process of church discipline; this may remain the case until any such relevant process of church discipline has been completed.

F. Associate Membership

Members of SGCF in good standing who have relocated for an extended period of time may become associate members. These members are not expected to regularly attend church gatherings. If these members are unable to find a healthy church to align with while away from SGCF, then communication and discipleship will be encouraged through the elders and through their relationships with other church members. Upon return to the area, the members will be expected to return to SGCF and fully participate or join another Bible believing church.

Article VI - CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

A. Overview

As a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 6) every member of this local church is called to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:27). This includes the pursuit of individual moral purity (Gal 5:22-23; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 4:25-32) and the promotion of corporate unity and doctrinal fidelity (Eph 4:3; Rom 16:17-18; 2 Tim 3:1-17; Titus 3:10-11).

Although in Christ every believer has been declared righteous, the Christian life is a process of gradual change, and we are still vulnerable to temptations from indwelling sin. When a member strays seriously and unrepentantly from the Lord, the members of this church shall be called on to lovingly and faithfully engage in church discipline in order to be used by God to restore the straying member.

B. Biblical Warrant

Matthew 16:13-20 and Matthew 18 establish both the authority and responsibility for church discipline within a local body of believers. In these passages, we are told the church is given the "keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" to loose and bind. We believe these words speak to delegated authority, passed down from God to His church, to declare the truths of God's word, call members to obedience, and render judgements based on Scripture where unrepentant sin persists; all in order to preserve His sheep and protect the Gospel.

In Matthew 18:15-20, the Lord Jesus provides specific guidelines for calling an unrepentant sinner back to fidelity to Himself. This process moves from confronting the person individually to involving more people as needed and ends with the Lord's command to "tell it to the church" in the case of unrepentant sin. The final consequence of excommunication from membership and from fellowship in the local church is intended to

restore the erring believer so that, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:5, his or her “spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

It should be noted that while every Christian will exhibit flaws and imperfections, and every relationship will include at times some measure of tension and disharmony, not all sins will fall into the category of requiring corporate church discipline. Therefore, the church and its leaders must take care to distinguish between what might be called “minor offenses” and those “chargeable offenses” which require church discipline. Generally speaking, chargeable offenses would include serious, outwardly observable (i.e. able to be witnessed) and unrepentant sins. Chargeable offenses may also include the teaching of divisive doctrine that contradicts essential historic orthodox Christian doctrine and/or this church’s statement of faith.

Finally, the entire process of church discipline as outlined herein shall be carried out and enforced in a spirit of Christian love, prayer, and compassion for the straying member (Matt 18:21-22; Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:22-26).

C. Purposes of Church Discipline

The Church is commanded to pursue loving, formal discipline of its members when they continue in verifiable and/or habitual, serious sin.

The purpose of church discipline is to:

exalt the glory of God through the reflection of His holy character

(e.g., Deut 5:11; 1 Kings 11:2; 2 Chron 19:2; Ezra 6:21; Neh 9:2; Isa 52:11; Ezek 36:20; Matt 5:16; John 15:8; 18:17, 25; Rom 2:24; 15:5-6; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1; Eph 1:4; 5:27; 1 Pet 2:12);

foster the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined

(e.g., Matt 18:10-17; Prov 15:5; 29:15; 1 Cor 4:14; Eph 6:4; 1 Tim 3:4-5; Heb 12:1-11; Ps 119:115; 141:5; Prov 17:10; 25:12; 27:5; Eccles 7:5; Matt 7:26-27; 18:15-17; Luke 17:3; Acts 2:40; 1 Cor 5:5; Gal 6:1-5; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim 1:20; Titus 1:13-14; James 1:22);

instruct Christians in righteousness and goodness through the example provided

(e.g., Prov 13:20; Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 5:11; 15:33; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14 [note this is written to the whole church, not just to leaders]; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 1:11; Heb 10:24-32);

protect the purity and unity of the church as a whole

(e.g., Acts 20:25-31; 1 Cor 5:6-7; 2 Cor 13:10; Eph 4:1-6; 5:27; Col 1:28; 2 John 10; Titus 1:10-11; Jude 24; Rev 21: 2); and

preserve the integrity of our corporate witness to non-Christians

(e.g., Prov 28:7; Matt 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:1-14; Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 3:7; 2 Pet 2:2; 1 John 3:10).

D. Agreement to Submit to Church Discipline.

Every member of this church consents to a willingness to support and, if necessary, submit to the process of church discipline outlined herein.

E. Process of Discipline.

In accordance with Matthew 18:15-18, should any member persist in serious sin, the process of discipline outlined in Scripture will be followed as manifested in the following steps:

1. Any member aware of the serious and unrepentant sin of another shall privately seek the sinning member's repentance by appealing privately to the sinning member in a spirit of prayer and gentleness and humility (Matt 18:15; Gal 6:1).

PLEASE NOTE: Significant reasons may at times preclude members from safely or wisely engaging in a private meeting with the accused sinner (e.g., the risk of safety or the young age of the accuser). At such times, other members, in consultation with uncharged members of the BOE, should be called in to help the accuser and the accused to an appropriate, safe, and redemptive confrontation.

2. If the sinning member does not repent after attempting private appeal, the person who brought the initial concern shall involve one or two others to establish the facts of the offense and further pursue the straying member (Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 12:14).

3. If the sinning member does not repent after the appeal from the group, then the situation should be brought before the BOE to investigate and care for the matter (1 Cor 6:1-6) as well as seek to discern whether it is time to "tell it to the church" (Matt 18:17).

4. If the sinner has not repented after these steps, the BOE shall tell the church membership about the situation in order that the members may call the sinning individual to repentance and pray for him or her (Matt 18:17).

5. Excommunication: It is hoped that the preliminary steps of discipline, as outlined above, will result in repentance. However, if there is no indication of repentance after these steps are taken, the unrepentant person's membership will be terminated. Such termination of membership will be decided by the BOE after due consideration and prayer. The reason for termination of membership will be communicated to the individual, and his or her removal shall be announced to church (Matt 18:17). Additionally, the continuation of normal Christian fellowship with the unrepentant sinner will be suspended by the members of this church in keeping with the commands of the Lord in Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

6. Removal or Transfer: If the BOE concludes that a member has left the church or requested removal from membership to avoid church discipline, the board will neither be bound to recognizing the membership as terminated nor granting that request until the disciplinary process has been concluded properly.

7. Restoration and Repentance: When the BOE, in consultation with the relevant parties, concludes that an individual who has been placed under church discipline demonstrates genuine repentance, he or she shall be restored into church membership as soon as possible. Such a restoration will be publicly proclaimed to the

entire church, and the body of Christ will be called to embrace the member's return with love towards the member and gratefulness to God for restoring the member to fellowship (2 Cor 2:5-11).

Article VII - ELDERS

A. Overview

One of the means by which Jesus Christ shepherds His people is through the gift of church government. Such government should express His faithful love and sacrificial service to the church in its God-given mission. The Office of Elder expresses this governing gift in the life of the local church as manifested in God's Word (Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:1-4; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; Heb 13:17).

We believe the New Testament uses three main terms to refer to the office of elder: elder, overseer, and shepherd with each term describing a different aspect of the office (e.g., Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7; see also Eph 4:11-14).

We believe men and women are of equal worth and dignity in God's sight as His image bearers (Gen 1:26; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11-12; 1 Pet 3:7). However, we affirm that the Scriptures—appealing to the transcendent nature of God's design in creation—reserve the office of elder in the church for qualified men and teach that the office of elder is not to be held by a woman (1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor 14:33-37; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7).

We believe the NT commends a plurality of elders to lead the local church and not an individual. In the NT, elders are always referred to in the plural when they are leading or making decisions. An elder is only referred to in the singular when the NT is describing the attributes and qualifications of the elder in abstraction.

Therefore, this church shall be governed exclusively by a plurality of male-only elders who satisfy the spiritual character and aptitudinal gifting qualifications for the office of elder as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

The elders of the church shall be known collectively as the Board of Elders (BOE)

Whenever possible, the number of elders on the BOE shall not be less than three men. If such a minimum number is not possible, all available elders shall select interim BOE members from among the male deacons or care group leaders (should there be an insufficient number of deacons). These members shall serve until additional elders can be identified and appointed to the BOE.

B. General Duties of Elders:

It is vital to clearly define the nature and scope of the authority and responsibility of the elders of a local church so that members understand how and to what they should submit and so that elders do not overreach their authority (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

The elders shall pastor the people and steward the ministries and resources of the church. Specifically, we believe the Scriptures give warrant to the following duties for the Board Of Elders (e.g., Acts 6; 11:27-30; 14:23; 15:4-23; 20:28-31; Eph 4:11-14, 5:25-29; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 4:2; Heb 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:2-3).

The Board of Elders Shall:

- diligently give themselves to the study of God's word and prayer for the sake of the church;
- watch their lives and doctrine carefully before the Lord so as to be fruitful and redemptive examples to the flock;
- ensure the regular and faithful proclamation of God's Word in the church so that the members may experience the nourishing and cherishing care of Christ;
- see to the purity and soundness of doctrine, including all necessary admonishing, rebuking, and correcting of error with all patience;
- protect the church from false doctrine and false teachers;
- see to the just, loving, and impartial administration of church discipline, including the excommunication and restoration of members, for the protection of God's glory, the purity of the church, and the redemption of those sinning;
- see to the maintenance of regular orderly and peaceful worship meetings which shall include worship, preaching, prayer, and the common edification of the members of the body through the gifts of its members;
- ensure the regular and scripturally faithful administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper;
- pastorally care for the church by lovingly and carefully shepherding members in their pursuit of, trust in, and faithfulness to Almighty God;
- ensure the faithful stewardship of the church's collective financial and material resources;
- oversee the wise development and healthy maintenance of ministry contexts for the equipping and the work of the saints in order to present them to God as mature in Christ;
- oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees;
- mobilize the church for the benevolent care of the poor, needy, and weak in its midst, and through such care, provide a local witness of mercy to those outside the church;
- see to the envisioning, equipping, and mobilization of the church for local evangelism and world

missions;

- foster mutually beneficial relationships with other churches and Christian organizations so that the church may be better equipped, experience stronger accountability, and bear greater fruit in its mission;
- ensure the adequate supply of faithful leadership through identifying, equipping, and installing elders and other needed leaders;
- take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members and present these to the membership for admittance into the church;
- select and evaluate all prospective candidates for church offices and any paid positions; and
- meet regularly for personal fellowship and prayer with one another to foster the spiritual unity of the BOE.

C. Specific Duties of Elders

In addition:

- Elders shall have the primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of all staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to other staff members.
- Elders shall have authority to establish staff, ministry, and advisory positions and/or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.
- Elders shall have the responsibility of producing reviews of all staff, including elders, annually. Such reviews may include evaluation of proper compensation and responsibilities for all staff, including elders.
- Elders shall have authority and responsibility to establish strategic short, mid, and long-term goals for the church.
- Elders shall call the entire membership of the church to meet no less than twice annually to discuss with the church the overall health of the church, the setting and progress of the goals of the church, the condition of the resources of the church, and any outstanding matters of discipline, as well as any other important matters.
- Elders shall, with the assistance of the Financial Advisory Committee, oversee the development of a church budget draft and communicate this draft budget publically to the church for review and discussion not less than 45 days before its adoption. Failure of the BOE to adopt a yearly budget will result in all funding levels remaining the same as the previous year's budget.

D. Voting on the Board of Elders

Unless otherwise specified in this constitution, the BOE shall resolve any decisions in accordance with the requirements of the bylaws of the church and any legal requirements of the State of Maryland for incorporated church entities with a “Board of Directors.” [In all cases of voting and meeting procedure, the “Board of Directors” of such bylaws shall be synonymous with the “Board of Elders” (BOE).]

Generally, this means that decisions will be resolved by a two-thirds majority vote. A voting quorum will be reached when a majority of the BOE is in attendance and all bylaw meeting and voting procedures are followed.

Unless otherwise specified in this constitution, other voting and meeting procedural specifics shall be in accord with the bylaws and policies elsewhere delineated.

E. Structure of the Board of Elders

The BOE shall elect a board chairman, a board secretary, and a board treasurer every two years from within its own membership whose duties will be specific by the BOE.

Per the principle of plurality, each elder within the BOE has equal voting authority.

The BOE may assign specific pastoral and oversight responsibilities to specific elders according to the needs of the church and the gifts and capacities of the members of the BOE.

The members of the BOE may be paid and non-paid members, but elders will not be differentiated in authority based upon compensational status.

When prudently possible, and unless declined by the elder in question, the BOE will seek to provide compensation to the members of the BOE in accordance with biblical guidance (1 Cor 9:8-14; 1 Tim 5:17; Gal 6:6).

F. Board of Elder Meetings

The BOE shall meet at least once a month for prayer and discussion concerning church oversight and pastoral matters. All elders must be notified of such meetings with at least three days’ notice.

Any elder may call special meetings provided a simple majority agree and provided all elders are given at least three days’ notice.

No member of the BOE can be refused attendance at any official and/or quorum-present BOE meetings he wishes to attend unless such an elder has previously been suspended from the BOE by a two-thirds majority vote.

G. Process for the Selection and Appointment of Elders

The church shall identify and recognize gifted, qualified, and willing men to serve in the role of elder, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on selection and appointment noted below. Prospective elders are to meet the biblical standards for eldership before they may be appointed to the BOE (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7). Such men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders (Eph 4:11).

The nomination of a candidate for the Office of Elder can be brought before the Board of Elders (BOE) by any member of the church at any time, provided the candidate himself formally affirms such a nomination in writing.

Upon nomination of an elder candidate, the following steps shall be followed:

1. The BOE shall have no more than 60 days to carefully and prayerfully process an initial examination of the candidate's fitness for the Office of Elder according to biblical qualifications.
2. Should no prohibitive cause be found for suspending the process during this initial examination, the BOE shall have no more than 90 days to lead an evaluation of the candidate's character based on information from the candidate's fellow members, family, friends, and co-workers.
3. The BOE shall evaluate the candidate's biblical knowledge and teaching aptitude via various means including an objective examination, as well as a demonstration of the candidate's ability to effectively teach and defend sound doctrine before the church. This evaluation shall not exceed 60 days past the completion of Step 2.
4. If the above steps are satisfactorily completed the BOE shall present the candidate to the whole church for their evaluation over a period of no less than 60 days and no more than 120 days. During this period the church will have time and opportunity to interview the candidate and evaluate the candidate's qualifications and biblical teaching ability. The church will also have opportunity to communicate to the BOE any concerns about the candidate at this time.
5. The BOE shall investigate any potentially disqualifying concerns about the candidate brought before them by the church. This must be done either during the 120 day maximum church evaluation period or within 30 days after that period closes.
6. The BOE shall seek explicit recorded affirmation from the church no more than 30 days after the close of the formal evaluation period (Step 5). Members shall be asked to deliver to the BOE an affirmation, denial, or abstention of deciding on the candidate. Members shall be asked to present some explanation for whatever decision rendered. The BOE shall not affirm a nominee without a recorded response (i.e. whether affirmation, denial, or abstention) from a minimum 51% (simple majority) of the church membership.
7. The BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses regarding the candidate before the candidate is appointed as elder.

8. The BOE shall have the authority and responsibility of making the final decision on whether a candidate shall be an elder and must publicly announce this decision to the church with explanation.
9. Upon appointment to the BOE, a new elder shall be publicly installed through the laying on of hands of the BOE and the prayer and blessing of the entire church.

H. Discipline of Elders

When any member of the church observes that an elder may no longer meet the biblical qualifications or may have sinned in a way that biblically calls for discipline, the local church is responsible to discipline the elder and/or potentially discharge him from the eldership. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:17-21.

Initial Steps

A person may bring a charge to any member or members of the BOE concerning any other elder(s).

If those who hear the charge believe the nature of the charge is such that the accuser should first pursue a Matthew 18:15-20 process (“go to him in private”) with the accused elder, then this should be suggested to the accuser. If, however, the accuser requests that the charge be officially investigated regardless of whether or not the accuser follows this guidance, then the issue shall be formally entertained.

If it can be reasonably ascertained that the charge is potentially serious and may be potentially corroborated by others, then the BOE shall be notified by the elder(s) who heard the initial charge from the accuser and shall form an Adjudication Board (AB).

Adjudication Board (AB) Composition

The Adjudication Board (AB) shall be comprised of the remaining uncharged elders and an equal number of male deacons whom the uncharged members of the BOE must select. The AB shall be of sufficient number to reach a two-thirds majority in the event of a vote. If necessary, more male deacons shall be added to the AB in order to reach a two-thirds majority in the event of a vote.

PLEASE NOTE: If no (or an insufficient number of) male deacons have been officially installed, then the AB will include a sufficient number of male care group leaders in good standing with the church to serve in the same capacity in which the deacons would have served.

If multiple elders are charged, then the remaining uncharged elders shall form the AB with enough deacons or care group leaders in good standing to potentially reach a two-thirds majority vote.

If all the elders are charged with sin or with failing to meet biblical qualification for office, then the deacons or care group leadership must appoint no less than three of their own rank to comprise the AB (or a number great

enough to potentially reach a two-thirds majority vote).

The AB has the right to obtain counsel doing all they can to give proper respect to confidential matters. The AB may use church resources in accordance with any relevant church budget and policy allowances.

Process for adjudicating charges

- The AB shall have the authority to conduct an investigation into the matter, including the calling of witnesses so that “every fact may be established” by testimony (Duet 19:15; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 12:14).
- The AB shall conduct this investigation for no more than 60 days, at which time it will present its findings to the BOE.
- The members of the BOE must render a final decision no more than 30 days after receiving the report of the AB.
- If the non-elder members of the AB disagree with the BOE’s decision concerning the sinning elder(s), they shall have the right to call the church together and release their findings to the entire church at their discretion regardless of the BOE’s wishes.
- Any elder judged guilty of serious sin by the BOE shall be publicly rebuked before the church (1 Tim 5:17-21), and any judgment rendered in terms of his elder status shall be made known to the church at such time. If the charged elder has not or will not repent of his sin, he will be subject to the remaining principles of discipline for every member per Matthew 18 (see Article VI Church Discipline).
- At the time of any public rebuke of a repentant elder, the AB shall also present general recommendations for any necessary care for the elder to aid in his return to spiritual health; the AB shall be responsible for delivering a progress report to the church on any follow-up care for the elder within six months.

Dismissal of Elder via the Adjudication Board Process

An elder shall be dismissed from his duties in the case of one of the following circumstances:

- During the Adjudication Board process, the elder in question voluntarily submits a written resignation no less than 30 days before its effective date. If such an elder is in a process of adjudication or church discipline, this resignation will not end this process, unless mutually agreed upon by the resigning elder, the BOE, and/or the AB.
- He is dismissed with a two-thirds vote of the BOE upon grounds of disqualification for the office of elder based on his failure to meet the standards of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Compromised Plurality

If the number of elders dismissed prohibits a plurality of the BOE from being reached, then the remaining uncharged elders, in consultation with the AB, shall develop a plan to resume plurality as soon as possible and present such a plan to the church within 30 days of the loss of plurality.

Charges Against Entire BOE

In the event that all the elders have been charged with sin and the AB believes the entire BOE is disqualified from the office of elder, then the AB shall call the entire church together to meet, and the AB shall announce its findings to the entire church.

If the BOE declines resignation, they shall explain their reasons before the church.

If the entire BOE resigns, the AB shall temporarily assume governance of the church until a plurality of eldership can once again be established through the “Elder Selection and Appointment” process described herein. In the selection and appointment process for new elders, the AB shall constitute an acting “Board of Elders” to oversee the task. In such a situation, the AB shall also engage the help of other healthy local churches to counsel and assist them in this process.

I. General Resignation or Termination of an Elder

Any elder may resign his office by voluntarily submitting a written resignation no less than 30 days before its effective date. He must specify his reason in such a letter. In such case, the church will be informed no less than 15 days before the effective date of the resignation.

In cases not involving sin, a member of the BOE deemed unfit for office may be terminated from his office by a two-thirds majority vote of the remaining BOE with no less than 30 days’ notice. In such case, the BOE will inform the church no less than seven days before the effective date of the elder’s termination.

NOTE: The inability of the church to financially compensate an elder shall not in itself be grounds for disqualification or dismissal from the office of elder. If an elder is dismissed from paid employment strictly due to finances, such an elder shall still serve as an elder if he so wishes and is able to do so without compensation.

In cases of sin or ethical failure, an elder member of the BOE may be asked to resign or be terminated from his office immediately and without prior notice by a two-thirds majority vote of the remaining BOE. In such case, the BOE will inform the church of the elder’s removal from office no less than seven days before the effective date of the elder’s termination.

Any elder terminated from office may be provided severance salary and compensation (including all benefits) after his termination date is effective according to the board’s discretion and the Financial Advisory Board’s consultation. The BOE will also be responsible to develop a plan to assist with the spiritual and physical needs of the terminated elder and his family, if needed, and will be responsible to affirm such to the church.

If an elder believes his termination is in error or is a case of sin against him, he may appeal for a “wrongful termination” trial to an Adjudication Board (AB) who will proceed along the steps outlined in this constitution for any elder adjudication process. In such case, he will be suspended with compensation while his case is under review.

In cases where the AB concludes that the elder in question was wrongfully dismissed and remains qualified for office per biblical standards, the AB will appeal the BOE to reinstate the elder. If the BOE declines, the AB retains the right to release their findings to the entire church.

ARTICLE VIII: DEACONS

A. Overview

The church and its ministries will have important and ongoing needs that the BOE (Board of Elders) are unable to manage alone or participate in directly (Acts 6:1-7). An additional leadership role, the Office of Deacon, is explicitly commended in the Bible (I Tim 3:8-13) to support the church with additional leadership that is tested, mature, and spirit-filled.

Therefore, the church shall recognize, in accordance with all constitutional provisions herein, men who are willing to give of themselves in service to the church and who possess particular gifts of service and maturity of character. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons.

PLEASE NOTE: Because of the significant biblical ambiguity and historical disagreement concerning women deacons, and the inability of the PSG to fully resolve this issue, further work needs to be done on gender and deacons. For the time being, deacons shall be men. However, from the date of the affirmation of this constitution, the elders of church shall have no more than 12 months to resolve the issue conclusively concerning the practice at SGCF. Within those 12 months, the elders will report their conclusion to the church body. If a conclusion is reached in favor of female deacons, the constitutional amendment process shall be enacted to amend the constitution to reflect that decision.

B. Responsibilities of Deacons

Deacons fulfill the responsibilities delegated or prescribed to them by the elders as are necessary to perform their appointed service. Deacons function under the authority of the Board of Elders and, as such, under the oversight of the BOE.

Deacons shall assist the BOE in the care of the temporal needs of members and assist with financial and administrative oversight of the church. They shall lead, encourage, and equip others in the church who are able to help them in the fulfillment of diaconate objectives.

The deacons may establish and maintain committees for ministry, such as a Financial Advisory Committee

(FAC), as well as receive and hold leadership responsibilities in those committees. The deacons may be called upon by the BOE to lead other boards or committees necessary for the maintenance and health of the church.

Male deacons shall serve on the Adjudication Board in the event of formal charges brought by church members against members of the BOE according to the guidelines explained in Article VII under the section concerning the Discipline of Elders.

C. Additional duties

The deacons shall meet collectively at least once a year to discuss needs, set goals, and consider strategies to better serve the church.

Each deacon's performance shall be reviewed at least once every two years by the BOE. At that time, the deacon in consultation with the BOE shall consider in which ways he may continue to serve the church.

D. Deacon Chairman

The deacons will elect for themselves annually, a chairman, who will:

- call deacon meetings as needed and see that minutes are kept;
- call and lead any special deacon meetings in cases of significant church conflict, care, need, or crisis (e.g., church-wide emergency, deacon involvement in Adjudication Board or Mediation Team);
- see that the deacons are strategically led when all deacons are required;
- see that the deacons are equipped for their service and are being cared for by the BOE;
- lead the deacons in reporting at least annually to the BOE on the work, health, objectives, and needs of the deacons; and
- lead the deacons in reporting to the church annually on the work, health, objectives, and needs of the deacons.

E. Process for the Selection and Appointment of Deacons

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in the role of deacon, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on selection and appointment noted below. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and be set apart as deacons.

The nomination of a candidate for the office of deacon may be brought before the Board of Elders (BOE) by any member of the church at any time, provided the candidate himself formally affirms such a nomination in writing.

Upon nomination, the following steps shall be followed:

1. The BOE shall carefully and prayerfully ensure an initial examination is conducted in order to examine the candidate's fitness for the office of deacon according to biblical qualifications.
2. Should no prohibitive cause be found for suspending the process during this initial examination, the BOE will lead an evaluation of the candidate's character based on information from the candidate's fellow members, family, friends, and co-workers.
3. The BOE shall present the candidate to the whole church for their evaluation over a period of not less than 60 days. The church will have time and opportunity to interview the candidate
4. The BOE shall seek explicit, recorded affirmation of the candidate from the church. Members shall be asked to deliver to the BOE an affirmation, denial, or abstention of deciding on the candidate. Members shall be asked to present some explanation for any decision rendered. The affirmation period will last for the full 60-day period.
5. The BOE shall investigate any potentially disqualifying concerns about the candidate brought before them by the church. This must be done during the 60-day church evaluation period or within 30 days thereafter.
6. The BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses regarding the candidate before the candidate is appointed as a deacon.
7. The BOE shall have the authority and responsibility of making the final decision on whether a candidate shall be a deacon and must publicly announce this decision to the church with explanation.
8. Upon appointment to the BOE, the new deacon shall be publicly installed through the laying on of hands of the BOE and the prayer and blessing of the entire church.

F. Dismissal of Deacons

Deacons may resign their office at any time by submitting a written resignation with stated reasons. This letter must have an effective date not less than 30 days from the submission of the letter.

Deacons may be dismissed from office for reasons of disqualification as determined through evaluation by the BOE or through the normal process of church discipline for all members. In cases of sin or ethical failure, a deacon may be asked to resign or be terminated from his office immediately and without prior notice by a two-thirds majority vote of the BOE.

If a deacon believes his termination is due to error on the part of the BOE, he may appeal for review by the BOE.

If a deacon believes his removal is a case of willful sin against him, he may bring a charge against the BOE via the Adjudication Board process outlined herein (see Article VII). During the Adjudication Board process, he will be suspended from office while his case is under review. If this process ends with a judgment in his favor, the AB will appeal for his reinstatement to office should he desire, as well as appropriate judgement on the BOE.

If the BOE refuses to readmit the deacon in spite of the AB's appeal, the non-elder AB members retain the right to call a church meeting and release their findings.

ARTICLE IX: CHURCH ASSOCIATION

A. Overview

Scripture does not endorse an isolated local church but envisions all local churches as part of and interacting with the larger body of Christ. Therefore, our church shall cooperate and partner with other churches in our service to the Lord for the demonstration of our unity in Jesus Christ and for the salvation of the lost.

Partnerships may be expressed through *short-term informal cooperation* with churches both in and outside of our area, as well as through *long-term formal affiliation* in which we serve and are served by other churches that share our faith and mission. These partnerships may provide opportunities for service and witness, envisioning and equipping, and voluntary accountability and care.

B. Informal Cooperation

This church may voluntarily cooperate with other churches or organizations to accomplish its mission at the discretion of the Board of Elders (BOE).

C. Formal Affiliation

This church may also formally affiliate with church networks or denominations to accomplish its mission at the discretion of the BOE, provided the affirmation of the church is sought.

D. Affiliation Process

Any *formal affiliation* with other churches will include the following process before it may be effectuated:

9. No less than 60 days before the effective affiliation date, the BOE will publicly present before the gathered church the reasons for affiliation with the specific proposed group, including an explanation of all benefits

and responsibilities included in affiliating with the specific group.

10. The BOE shall provide at least one additional public context for members to ask questions and deliver comments concerning the proposed affiliation at least 30 days prior to the affiliation's effective date.
11. The BOE shall seek explicit recorded affirmation from the church on the proposed affiliation. Members shall be asked to deliver to the BOE an affirmation, denial, or abstention on the proposed affiliation with explanation. The BOE shall not move forward with the proposed affiliation without a recorded response (i.e. whether affirmation, denial, or abstention) from a minimum 51% (simple majority) of the church membership.
12. The BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses regarding the affiliation candidate before the effective date of affiliation, as well as a summary of comments.
13. The BOE shall have the authority and responsibility of making the final decision on affiliation and must publicly announce this decision to the church with explanation.

E. Termination of Affiliation

This church may dissolve formal ties with church networks or denominations at the discretion of the Board of Elders (BOE) provided the affirmation of the church is sought.

Any dissolution of formal affiliation with other churches will include the following process before it may be effectuated:

14. No less than 60 days before the effective ending date of the affiliation, the BOE will publicly present before the gathered church the warrant for the dissolution of affiliation.
15. The BOE shall provide at least one additional public context for members to ask questions and deliver comments concerning the proposed termination of affiliation at least 30 days prior to the effective date.
16. The BOE shall seek explicit recorded affirmation from the church. Members shall be asked to deliver to the BOE an affirmation, denial, or abstention on the proposed termination of affiliation along with explanation. The BOE shall not move forward with the proposed termination of affiliation without a recorded response from a minimum 51% of the church membership.
17. The BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses regarding the potential termination of affiliation, as well as a summary of comments, before its effective date.
18. The BOE shall have the authority and responsibility of making the final decision on termination of affiliation and must publicly announce this decision to the church with explanation.

ARTICLE X: FISCAL MATTERS

A. Overview

The Board of Elders (BOE) will conduct its affairs with integrity in the sight of God and man and will maintain prudent and responsible control and accountability over all funds it receives and spends.

B. Annual Budget

The BOE shall adhere to the following steps in regard to the annual budget:

19. After consultation with the church and the FAC (see below), the BOE will vote on a final budget draft before the fiscal year begins. Should a budget not be approved prior to the start of the new fiscal year, expenditures will continue at the prior year's level until the new budget is approved.
20. With the assistance of the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC), the BOE will present to the church annually a budget draft (with a detail level defined by the FAC) for the upcoming fiscal year, at least 45 days prior to implementation.
21. The BOE will provide one additional context for budget discussion with church members during this 45-day period.
22. The BOE will seek affirmation from the membership concerning the budget and will provide a general summary of feedback on the members' response before the budget is implemented, as well as make accessible any changes to the budget draft before the date of budget implementation.
23. The BOE shall publicly present to the church a progress report on the budget no later than seven months after the beginning of the fiscal year or the effective date of the implementation of the church budget.

C. Other Responsibilities

- The BOE will seek affirmation for any new single non-fixed or new budget item that exceeds 20% of the overall annual church budget. In such a case, the BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses, as well as a summary of comments regarding the budget item before the budget item's effective inclusion in the budget. The BOE will explain its final decision on such an increase with explanation to the church.
- The BOE shall make a currently operating budget available to church members upon request at any time.

B. Financial Advisory Committee

Purpose:

The FAC will provide assistance and counsel to the Board of Elders in accordance with the BOE's responsibilities delineated above and the FAC's duties delineated below.

Composition:

The FAC will be comprised of no fewer than three non-staff members of the church.

Qualifications:

The FAC will be comprised of members of the church who are not employees of the church and who possess significant business, management, and/or financial knowledge and proven character as followers of Christ.

Chairman:

The FAC will have a chairman appointed by the BOE who shall hold the office of deacon.

Selection:

Candidates will be appointed to the FAC by a two-thirds vote of the BOE.

Term:

Each FAC member will serve a term of two years, after which the term of service may be renewed. FAC members may resign at any time but are asked to give 30 days' notice to the BOE.

The BOE may remove an FAC member by a two-thirds majority vote.

Duties:

- The FAC will monitor the financial affairs of the church, review monthly financial statements of the church, and provide counsel to the BOE as needed.
- The FAC will make recommendations to the BOE regarding the purchase or sale of property, the borrowing of money, the issuance of substantial gifts, and the establishment of special offerings or funds.
- The FAC shall make compensation recommendations for all paid staff and elders to the BOE.
- The FAC will review the annual church budget to ensure it is consistent with the approved ministry strategies, goals, and objectives of the church.

- In conjunction with the BOE, the FAC will prepare the annual budget for presentation and affirmation by the congregation. Specifically, the FAC will determine the transparency and detail level of the budget to be reported to the church
- The FAC will recommend to the BOE additions and removals of members to the FAC.
- The FAC will report to the church at least annually via the chairman on the progress of the financial health of the church and recommendations going forward

Meetings:

The FAC will meet as necessary to carry out its assigned duties no less than three times per fiscal year.

The FAC may be invited to participate in BOE meetings as needed.

ARTICLE X: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments to the Constitution.

The church may amend this constitution after a two-thirds vote of approval by the Board of Elders and subsequent affirmation by the congregation as described in the process below:

24. Any member of the church may propose a potential amendment to the BOE for consideration.
25. Any proposed amendment must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the BOE.
26. Before adoption, any BOE approved amendment to the constitution must be presented before the church for affirmation no less than 60 days in advance in order to give the church time to review the proposed amendment.
27. During the 60-day review period, the BOE will provide at least one church meeting context to discuss the amendment with members.
28. The BOE shall seek explicit recorded affirmation from the church for any proposed amendments. Members shall be asked to affirm, deny, or abstain from comment on the amendment. The BOE shall not move an amendment forward without a response (whether affirmation, denial, or abstention) from a minimum of 51% of the church membership.
29. The BOE shall publicly disclose to the church the number of affirmations, denials, and abstention responses regarding the amendment before the amendment is approved.
30. The BOE shall have the authority and responsibility of making the final decision on whether an amendment shall be approved.

Appendix A:

Eight Key Terms

(in an order correlated with issues in this constitution)

Bylaws: The bylaws are the governing documents that were created at this church's founding in 2006. They are required by law for non-profit organizations, are registered with the State of Maryland, and are legally binding. The bylaws provide basic rules and regulations for who leads an organization and how it is to be run and how decisions are made. The bylaws are on our website under the "polity" tab of our "resource" section here: <http://www.sgcof.com/polity/>

Board of Directors (BOD): In the legally binding bylaws mentioned above, this is the legal term used for the leaders of our church. In our life as a church, "Board of Directors" has been synonymous with the "Leadership Team" (Chris, Fred, Greg, Albert, and Andrew). In the new constitution, the leaders of the church collectively are to be called the "Board of Elders" to more reflect biblical terminology.

Elder: An elder is a term the Bible often uses to describe the governing officer who serves a church. The constitution expresses the view that this term is synonymous and essentially the same as other words the Bible uses to describe the leaders of a church such as pastor, overseer, or leader. (See Acts 20:17-28; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Eph 4:11-14; 1 Pet 5:1-4; Titus 1:5; Heb 13:17.)

Board of Elders (BOE): In the constitution, this is the term for the governing body that serves the church. The BOE is the group of elders who collectively govern the church together. In our history and currently, the Leadership Team essentially functions as would the Board of Elders of a church.

Quorum: This term refers to the minimum percentage or fraction (e.g., "51%" or "majority") of a larger group that is necessary to process a valid vote on the BOE or for the church to give feedback in constitutional matters. For example, in order for an elder candidate to have validly gone through the elder affirmation process, 51% of the congregation—regardless of whether they affirm or reject a candidate—must participate by giving their feedback. A quorum does not refer to the vote percentage or tally but to the percentage or fraction of a group that is actually participating by giving their vote or feedback on a matter—regardless of what that vote or feedback is.

Adjudication Board (AB): The AB is the group of men made up of elders and deacons (or CG Leaders if deacons are not available) who will investigate charges against an elder and give their recommendation to the Board of Elders. In the event of the resignation of the entire BOE, the AB would become the temporary leadership body of the church until a new Board of Elders can be established through the constitutional process.

CG Leaders: CG Leaders are members of our church who have been carefully appointed by the pastors to serve small groups of members. At this transitional time, male CG Leaders provide a temporary pool for Adjudication Board members in the event charges are brought against an elder.

Financial Advisory Board (FAC): The FAC is a church committee made up of lay members who serve the church by evaluating the budgeting and management of financial resources, as well as advise the Board of Elders on budget and financial issues.

Appendix B:

Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick Statement of Faith

The Scriptures

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

God is triune

There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. In the unity of the godhead there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-existent, co-equal, co-eternal. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity. One God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the foundation of Christian faith and life.

God the Father

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his Word and for his glory, he freely and supernaturally created the world from nothing. Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love him, and in his unfathomable grace gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for mankind's redemption. He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory.

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He was perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was always with God and is God. Through him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the word of his power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having shed his blood and died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross. By his death in our place, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of 40 days appeared to more than 500 witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his

people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of his body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel he persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit a person is led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth, and dwells within the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son, who in turn came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshiped as God the Third Person of the Trinity.

Man

God made man—male and female—in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his Maker, yet responsible to him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.

The gospel

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel, his resurrection is the power of the gospel, and his ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases his holy wrath. It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals his amazing grace. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches, and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross.

Man's response to the gospel

Man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory. It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, he cannot become his disciple.

Man's inheritance through the gospel

Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin in repentance and looking to Christ and his substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes his child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.

Sanctification

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word, and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end, which is most certain.

Empowered by the Spirit

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well. Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

The Church

God by his Word and Spirit creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body. By the same Word and Spirit, he guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve him by faithfully doing his will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in all the world for a testimony. The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel. When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church, in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God, and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow. Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church, but in keeping with God's created design they are not permitted "to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12 ESV). Leadership in the church is male. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in his service in relation to one another and to the world.

Sacraments of the Church

Water baptism is intended only for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

The Consummation

The Consummation of all things includes the visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the Consummation, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever. Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.