

**SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH**  
*of* L O U I S V I L L E  
*est 2012*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## MAIN SESSIONS

Session 1   Exploring Membership at Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville.....	3
Session 2   Our Doctrine: The Core Beliefs of Our Church.....	16
Session 3   Our Priorities: The Values that Shape Our Church.....	32
Session 4   Our Community: The Commitments We Make to Each Other.....	45

## APPENDICES

Beliefs.....	62
Sovereign Grace Churches Statement of Faith.....	65
Membership Covenant.....	78
Commitment to Peacemaking.....	80
Commitment to Biblical Counseling.....	83
Commitments on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.....	85
Commitment to Complementarity.....	87
Commitment to Church Discipline.....	94

# SESSION ONE

## Exploring Membership at Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville

### I. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS CLASS?

Our membership class is designed to introduce you to Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville (SGCL). We want to provide you with a clear and informative overview of this church, seeking to answer important questions like, "What does it look like to follow Christ at SGCL?" "What does this church believe?" "What can I hope to experience when I become a member of SGCL?"

Discovering what church God wants us in is an important matter. To help you in that decision, this course will cover the following areas:

- A. **The Local Church: What it is and why membership matters.**
- B. **Our Doctrine: The core beliefs of our church.**
- C. **Our Priorities: The values that shape our church.**
- D. **Our Community: The commitments we make to each other.**

Ultimately, we want to encourage you in your relationship with Jesus Christ. A critical part of that relationship is finding your place in His body, the church. Participation in a local church is never meant to be a mere obligation. It is a joyful privilege in which we glorify God through fruitful service in the context of meaningful relationships with other believers. Therefore, we want to give you all the information you need to help you determine if God is leading you to become a part of this church. We are excited to see what God will teach you and how He will lead you through this membership class.

## II. WHAT IS THE CHURCH & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

When it comes to the Christian life, the question of the church's importance is perhaps one that is too often overlooked. The idea of "church" is often just assumed: churches persist, church members regularly (or not so regularly) attend, and things proceed on course.

But how often do we stop and think, "Why is the church so important? What is the purpose of the church?" The answer to such questions will provide us both direction for how churches should build and encouragement to be faithful as we play our part in the body of Christ.

In this session, we will explore the "big picture" of God's purpose in the church *at large*, the critical role that the *local* church plays in God's purposes, and the importance of formal membership in the local church. In so doing, we will hopefully see more clearly the glorious purposes God has for His church and the unspeakable privilege our participation in this journey truly is.

- A. God's intentions for the church span from the beginning of creation until its consummation, as he works out his eternal purpose to dwell among a people he has made his own.**
1. Genesis 1-2 lay the foundations for the rest of human history. In the beginning, God's creative activity reached its pinnacle with the creation of man who, created in God's image, was made to enjoy unhindered fellowship with his Creator (Gen 1:26-28; 2:7, 15-17; 3:8)
    - Of all the blessings Adam enjoyed in the garden—safety, provision, human companionship—the greatest was divine companionship.
    - Even after man sinned and lost the privilege of intimate fellowship with God (Gen 3:24), God pledged to vanquish the evil that had spoiled his creation, thus restoring mankind to his rightful place in creation in fellowship with God (Gen 3:15).
  2. God gave specific expression to his promise by revealing himself to Abraham and calling Abraham to himself.

- God's promised blessings to Abraham including making of him "a great nation" (Gen 12:2). God pledged himself to Abraham and his offspring, promising to be their God and to make them his people.

*"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."  
(Genesis 17:7)*

3. After Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, God delivered them and forged them into a nation—the nation of Israel—among whom he would dwell, and who would represent him in the earth.

*"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Exodus 19:4-6)*

4. Despite receiving many blessings from God (his presence in the tabernacle and temple, possession of the promised land, and the glories of Solomon's reign), Israel's rebellion and idolatry finally brought judgment upon the nation. Nonetheless, God did not abandon his people, but remained faithful to his covenant promises.

- During the exile, God pledged to restore the nation to the land and renew the hearts of his people.

*"Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name . . . And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name . . . And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within*

*you...You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 36:22-28).*

- After the return from exile and the partial fulfillments of his promises, God promised to act again to dwell personally with his people.

*“Behold, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek, will suddenly come into His temple.” (Malachi 3:1)*

5. In the incarnation, God revealed himself most fully and dwelt among his people in the most personal way possible through his son, Jesus Christ.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)*

6. After Jesus’ ascension to the Father’s right hand and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the church—in union with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit—now becomes the divine sanctuary on earth where God dwells.

*“Do you not know that you [pl.; i.e., the church] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)*

7. When Christ returns, God’s people will once again dwell with him and experience unhindered fellowship in his presence. God’s eternal purpose to dwell among a people he has made his own finds its consummation in the New Jerusalem.

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor*

*pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*  
(Revelation 21:1-4)

**B. At this stage in salvation-history, the people of God exist as *the church*—joined to Christ by faith and indwelt by the Spirit.**

1. The church exists as the people of God, belonging to him and representing him on the earth.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* (1 Peter 2:9-10)

2. The church is the unique dwelling place of God on earth.

*“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”* (2 Corinthians 6:16)

3. The church is the Body of Christ: deriving its life from him, vitally united to him, and finding its identity in him. As a result, members of Christ's body are intimately related to each other as well.

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

**C. The exclusive role of the church. The church is God's chosen means for carrying out His purposes until He returns. He has ordained no other organization or structure for this purpose.**

*“. . . I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*  
(Matthew 16:18)

*“ . . . if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15, NIV)*

### III. WHY SHOULD I JOIN A LOCAL CHURCH?

Why go to all this trouble to learn about this church?  
Does it really matter if I actually join a church?  
Am I not already a member of “*the church*”?  
Isn't my personal relationship with Jesus what really matters?

Such questions are common, and not altogether surprising given our individualistic culture and natural tendency towards independence. However, such questions also reveal a misunderstanding about the church and God's purposes in and through the church.

Scripture makes it clear:

**God's specific purposes for His people are accomplished as individuals join themselves to and participate in local churches. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this tangibly through membership in a specific local church.**

#### A. Church membership is biblical.

1. Theologically, Christian conversion implies *incorporation*: incorporation into the Body of Christ—the church. Conversion by definition creates community.

*“...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:5)*

2. Membership—the recognition of a clearly defined community of people—was the clear practice of the early church.



*“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”* [Converts were “added” to a specific group of fellow believers that was numerically defined.] (Acts 2:47)

*“None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.”* [Believers were a discernible group of people to which other believers “joined” themselves.] (Acts 5:13)

*“If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?”* [“The whole church” implies a totality comprising specified individuals.] (1 Corinthians 14:23)

3. An identifiable membership is the necessary condition for pastoral care.

*“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”* [Pastors are responsible to care for an identifiable group of people, and they will give an account for those committed to their care.] (Acts 20:28)

*“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband . . .”* [a specified “widows’ list” indicates that the church had responsibility for a specified membership] (1 Timothy 5:9)

4. Membership is the necessary context for the sacraments.

- The sacraments given by Christ to the church—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—are “signs and seals” of the covenant of grace, pointing to Christ and his benefits, and confirming his promises to us. As “marks of the church,” they are only to be received by those who have trusted in Christ and are continuing in fellowship with him and his people.
- Rightly administering the sacraments requires an awareness of the spiritual condition of those who are participating. This requires

identifiable, committed relationships between believers which is expressed through church membership.

---

*These outward signs mark out a visible fellowship; they structure Christ's church as a community with membership. Baptism requires a decision about admission to the community. The Supper, a sign of continuing fellowship, implies the exclusion of those who have turned away from the Lord....the sacraments testify that the church must have organized form as well as organic life. (Edmund Clowney)*

---

5. Membership is the assumed context for church discipline.

- Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5 both describe situations in which believers are to confront other believers who are persisting in a sinful way of life. This can only refer to a situation in which Christians are joined together in an identifiable membership that is committed to live a godly lifestyle distinct from the world. Moreover, the final stage of church discipline ("excommunication") involves the removal of an unrepentant person from formal membership in a visible, organized group (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 9-13; cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 3:10-11).

6. Committed members are the primary source for the regular funding of gospel ministry.

- Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and equipping.

*"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)*

*"Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the*

*altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14)*

7. The commitment represented by membership is the clear implication of Biblical metaphors describing the church.
  - The primary NT metaphors for the church—body (1 Cor. 12:27), temple (Eph. 2:21), household (1 Tim. 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28)—have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals *joined together* into a single, identifiable entity.

---

*God has given us four pictures of the church, not one. This is not just to emphasize and prove the point by repetition, but also to say four different things about what it means to be a member of a church. To be a stone in his temple means to belong to a worshipping community. To be a part of a body means to belong to a living, functioning, serving, witnessing community. To be a sheep in the flock means belonging to a community dependent on him for food, protection, and direction. To be a member of a family is to belong to a community bound by a common fatherhood. Put together you have the main functions of an individual Christian. Evidently, we are meant to fulfill these not on our own but together in the church. Now can you see the answer to the question why you should join a church? (Eric Lane)*

---

## **B. Church membership identifies us with Christ and His people.**

*“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38)*

*“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19)*

## **C. Church membership is vital to our spiritual health and growth.**

1. Without being joined together with other believers, we will lack the strength and nourishment that each member—including ourselves—is to supply to the whole body.

*“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)*

*“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” [We need other believers to help us in our fight with sin.] (Hebrews 3:12-13)*

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” [We each have a role to play in encouraging other believers.] (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

#### **D. Church membership enables us to use our spiritual gifts for the good of others.**

1. The Holy Spirit has given every Christian spiritual gifts that are to be used in service of the church and its mission. The ordering of believers within the church to deploy their diversity of gifts for the good of the body is by divine design.

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)*

*“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (1 Corinthians 12:18)*

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

**E. Church membership enables us to be spiritually nourished through the preaching and teaching of God's word.**

1. God calls pastors to care for and equip his people, and the primary way they do this is through the teaching of God's word.

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” (Ephesians 4:11-14)*

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 3:16-4:2)*

---

*We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the Church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors....Many are led either by pride, dislike or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. This is like blotting out the face of God which shines upon us in teaching. (John Calvin)*

---

- F. Church membership enables us more fully to glorify God: the church as a distinct and separate people proclaims the gospel, cares for its own, and through its life and witness displays the character of the One who saved us.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

1. All Christians have the privilege and responsibility to be a vital member of a specific local church

---

*I know there are some who say, “Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.” Now, why not? “Because I can be a Christian without it.” Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So, you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do. (Charles Spurgeon)*

---

#### IV. WHY SHOULD I JOIN *THIS* CHURCH?

We don't automatically assume that you *should*! However, we're grateful to God that you are interested in exploring this, and we want to do all we can to help you make an informed decision as to whether God would have you join us at SGCL. Over the next three sessions we'll

be surveying specific beliefs and practices of this church, along with exploring what membership at SGCL should entail.

Although we do hope that you will find in SGCL a church home where you can thrive, our primary concern is not that you become a part of *this* church, but that you become a part of *some* church. It is our desire that you develop a Biblical, enthusiastic conviction about the importance of active involvement in the local church, and with this conviction find a church home where you can worship God, grow in your relationship with Him, and serve in ways that glorify Him. If that church home proves to be SGCL, then it will be our joy to serve with you. In any event, we count your presence here a privilege, and look forward to serving you as you consider membership at SGCL.

# SESSION TWO

## Our Doctrine: The Core Beliefs of Our Church

There are certain characteristics all true churches share in common. At the same time, individual churches may be faithful to the gospel while differing from each other in theological emphases and ministry priorities. Some churches may be distinguished by their denominational affiliation: there are Baptists and Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Lutherans. Other churches distinguish themselves by their ministry priorities: some may emphasize international missions while others highlight discipleship. Some may place a premium on family ministry while others may make church planting their top priority. With so many fruitful, faithful churches in Louisville, what makes Sovereign Grace Church distinct?

This lesson highlights theological priorities deliberately emphasized by the pastors of Sovereign Grace Church. Many of these priorities we share with other churches; in some cases it is the way we put them into practice that will distinguish us from other churches. It is important to note that we derive no sense of superiority in the list that follows: these emphases simply express our understanding of biblical teaching and priorities. When other churches decide to highlight other priorities while remaining faithful to the gospel, we can thank God for them and commend them to other Christians with a clear conscience.

Taking the broadest view possible, we are *evangelical*, by which we basically mean two things: (1) we believe that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant word and is therefore our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine, and (2) we believe that people are separated from God, and they need to be saved by responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Beyond this, the list below summarizes some of our main theological priorities. We desire Sovereign Grace Church to be:

1. Gospel-centered
2. Reformed in soteriology
3. Baptist
4. Continuationist
5. Complementarian



## I. GOSPEL-CENTERED

### A. The gospel is the center of the Christian faith.

1. Unlike other religions, Christianity at its core isn't about morality, philosophy, or self-fulfillment. Rather, it's about news—good news. The greatest news that the world has ever heard. In fact, the word "gospel" literally means "good news," and it is this news that the apostle Paul called a matter "of first importance":

*"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..." (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)*

2. The gospel announces all that God has done in Jesus Christ to save us. It is the good news of Christ's incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The gospel is therefore *objective*; it is a matter of history. It is what Christ did for us; no matter how we feel, the ground of our salvation never changes.

### B. The gospel is the organizing theme of Scripture.

1. The Bible is not a mixed bag of books and ideas only loosely related to each other. The Bible tells a story: the story of a God and His relationship to His creation in general, and to humanity in particular. At the center of this story stands Jesus Christ and his saving work on our behalf.

*"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me." (John 5:39)*

*"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" (Luke 24:44)*

2. As it unfolds the story of redemption, the Bible illuminates for us the nature of God—sovereign, holy, and loving—and the nature of mankind as well— isolated from God, corrupted by sin, and subject to His righteous wrath. It also reveals the grace of God—acting to restore all things back to Himself through His Son—and how we can find forgiveness and be restored to a relationship with God—through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

### C. The gospel is the exclusive message for the salvation of sinners.

1. Every person stands guilty before God and separated from God because of sin.

*“as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:1-12, 23)*

2. Christ came to be our substitute: perfectly obeying God’s law in his life, and satisfying God’s justice through his death on the cross.

*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)*

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-26)*

---

*How then could God express simultaneously his holiness in judgment and his love in pardon?  
Only by providing a divine substitute for the sinner, so that the substitute would receive the  
judgment and the sinner the pardon. (John Stott)*

---

3. It is only through trusting in Christ and his work (faith) and turning from our sins (repentance) that we can be saved.

*"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)*

#### **D. The gospel is the governing reality for the life of believers.**

1. Our need for the gospel doesn't end once we are saved:
  - The gospel *remains* the basis for our acceptance before God (Ephesians 2:8-9)
  - The gospel *reminds* us that God is at work in us to change us (Philippians 2:12-13)
  - The gospel *assures* us that God will complete his work in us (Philippians 1:6)
2. At Sovereign Grace Church, our goal is to keep the gospel at the heart of all that we do. It will be the substance of our proclamation, the source of our motivation, and the fuel for our adoration. We will do all we can to ensure that our zeal for the gospel is never eclipsed by any other doctrine, teaching, or practice. Our commitment to you is that, with all our might, we will endeavor to "keep the main thing, the main thing."

## II. REFORMED SOTERIOLOGY

While all genuine Christians believe that one can only be saved through the gospel, sincere believers differ on their understanding of God's part and man's part in that saving act. At SGCL, we understand salvation (the study of which is called "soteriology") from the historic Reformed perspective, which places the emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.

### A. What makes our response to the gospel possible?

The gospel is good news because sin and judgment are such bad news. Sin is not only what we do, but who we are: apart from God, we are sinners *by nature*. So if we're truly "dead" in our sins (Eph. 2:1) and powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing: **God acts, so that we can act.**

#### 1. Chosen in eternity past:

- God's actions begin in eternity past when He chose us and determined that He would save us. This is often referred to as "election."

*"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1:4-6, NIV)*

#### 2. Effectively called:

- God's choosing of us eventually results in His calling us and drawing us to Himself.
- God's drawing us to Himself is often called "effective calling": God's work of inviting and drawing sinners to Himself by His Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.

- While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the “divine summons” of God makes possible the response it requires.

*“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)*

*“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” (John 6:44)*

### 3. Regenerated (“born again”) by the Spirit:

- When God calls us, He then changes our heart so that we can freely respond. This change is called “regeneration.”
- In regeneration, God acts to change our inner nature and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are then able to believe the gospel and repent of our sin.

*“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.” (Colossians 2:13)*

### 4. Conversion is therefore a supernatural work:

1. Given what Scripture teaches about sin, it is not surprising that God must do a supernatural work in our hearts before we can be truly converted. Such an understanding of our conversion is important for our spiritual health.

---

*Scripture is clear in teaching that we are not all journeying toward God—some having found Him, others still seeking. Instead, Scripture presents us as needing to have our hearts replaced, our minds transformed, our spirits given life. We can do none of this for ourselves. The change each human needs, regardless of how we may outwardly appear, is so radical, so near our roots, that only God can bring it about. We need God to convert us. (Mark Dever)*

*I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. (Charles Spurgeon)*

---

## B. Why does it matter?

We hold to a Reformed soteriology because we believe it represents the clear teaching of Scripture. However, these doctrines have important practical effects on our lives.

1. They bring glory to God by eliminating all human boasting in salvation.

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”  
(Ephesians 2:8-9)*

2. They cause us to marvel at our salvation and produce adoring, God-centered worship.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **to the praise of his***

*glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved...to the praise of His glory...to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:3-6, 12, 14)*

3. They make us secure in the unchanging purposes of God.

*“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:28-32)*

4. They fuel evangelism, giving me confidence that God will indeed save his people, while removing from me the pressure to argue people into the kingdom.

*“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” (Acts 18:9-10)*

*“Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10)*

### III. BAPTISTIC

Jesus commanded his followers to observe two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Some churches differ on the meaning and nature of baptism. At SGCL, we practice “believers’ baptism”; in other words, we believe that baptism is only appropriate for those who give a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

- A. **All those who respond to the gospel with repentance and faith are also to obey the command to be baptized.**

*“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)*

- B. **Baptism is therefore an obedient response of someone saved by grace.** In baptism, we identify with the Lord who has saved us. Baptism cannot contribute to or bring about salvation. Baptism doesn't save us—Jesus saves us through faith.

*“when they believed...they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:12)*

- C. **Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work which has already taken place.** Therefore, only those who have believed the gospel and repented from their sins should be baptized. For this reason, we do not baptize infants.

- D. **Water baptism is a sign and symbol of the believer's union with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection.**

*“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too we may live a new life.” (Romans 6:4)*

1. We practice baptism by immersion which, in addition to being the likely practice of the New Testament church, vividly illustrates the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

- E. **Baptism is a landmark moment in a believer's life, clearly marking one's identification with Christ and entrance into His body, the church.** It is therefore our wonderful privilege as a church to celebrate these times together. We set aside specific times for the baptism of new believers (or those who haven't yet been baptized), enabling us to rejoice together and to welcome new believers into the life of the church.



## IV. CONTINUATIONIST

The Christian life was never meant to be lived out in our own strength. Just as the Holy Spirit transforms our heart in salvation, He also empowers believers for the Christian living, witness, and service. To say we're "continuationist" means that we believe in the present-day work of the Holy Spirit in the many ways that the Spirit is described and manifested in Scripture.

### A. The Broad Work of the Spirit.

Belief in the continuation of the Spirit's powerful work sometimes narrows to a focus on the *spectacular*. However, the Bible portrays the Spirit's work in broad, comprehensive terms as the Christian's source of life and empowerment from first to last. Here are some of the main ways we can expect the Spirit's work in our midst.

#### 1. Regeneration

- The Christian life begins by the supernatural work of the Spirit. There is no greater miracle than that of regeneration.

---

*Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. (Wayne Grudem)*

---

*"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)*

*"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom*

*of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8)*

## 2. Progressive Sanctification

- The same Spirit that gives us new life continues to transform us that we might become more like Christ.

---

*Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and life Christ in our actual lives. (Wayne Grudem)*

---

*"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16)*

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)*

## 3. Illumination

- Illumination is the Holy Spirit's enabling of Christians generally to understand and to apply the truth of God's Word.

*"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18)*

*"...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his*

*glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe..." (Ephesians 1:18-19)*

#### 4. Spiritual gifts

- Spiritual gifts are means by which the Holy Spirit empowers and enables us to serve God and his people.

*"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." (1 Corinthians 14:1)*

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

- All spiritual gifts, from the spectacular to the seemingly mundane, are *supernatural*—they are equally from God, equally empowered by the Spirit, and vital for the edification of the church.

#### 5. Glorifying Christ

- The most important work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal, illuminate, and exalt the work of Jesus Christ.

*"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." (John 15:26)*

*"He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14-15)*

- By opening blind eyes to see the glory of Christ, by transforming hard hearts to turn from sin and trust in his cross-work, and by uniting us to Christ in his death and resurrection, the Spirit makes fellowship with Christ and the Father an *experienced reality*.

## B. God's Active Presence for All of Life.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit isn't simply a doctrine to be acknowledged, but a way of life to be pursued. In short, this doctrine implies a *life of dependence*. Although we may differ on some details about the Spirit's work, we believe we will be able to serve fruitfully together if we share a few central values:

- A recognition of our need for ongoing empowerment by the Spirit in our lives.
- A conviction that Christians are to seek to be continually filled by the Spirit.
- A belief in the continuity of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, and an earnest desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.

*"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18)*

*"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..." (1 Corinthians 14:1)*

*"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:7-8a)*

## V. COMPLEMENTARIAN

“Complementarian” is a sort of theological shorthand for view that the Bible teaches that God created men and women equal in personhood, value, and dignity, but different in certain roles and functions in both the home and the church. This view arises out of a careful reading of Genesis 1-2, especially:

### A. Equality in personhood, value, and dignity.

1. Adam and Eve were both made in the image of God and thus share equally in value and dignity.

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* (Genesis 1:27)

*“‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit.’”* (Acts 2:17-18)

2. Because of this fundamental equality, there should be no sense of superiority or inferiority, or resentment, or competition between men and women; both are deserving of mutual respect and honor.

*“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”* (Ephesians 5:25-28)

*“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”* (1 Peter 3:7)

### B. Men and women are different in their (equally valuable) roles and functions.

1. Adam was made first, and Eve was made from man and given to him as a helper.

*“The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:20-25)*

2. The New Testament applies the foundational teaching of Genesis 1-3 to differing roles in the home and church, concluding that leadership (which must be exercised in light of the truth of our equal value before God) in both is male.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:22-25)*

*“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” (1 Timothy 2:12-14; see also 1 Corinthians 11:2-12; 14:33-36; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)*

3. Too often, the debate over women and leadership in the church rages over what women can't do. The range of service in the church that is reserved for men is actually quite narrow. There are numerous and vital ways for both women and men to use their gifts in the church.

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in*

*order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

## SESSION THREE

### Our Priorities: The Values that Shape our Church

Visit different churches and you'll invariably find different emphases. This isn't wrong—we all have different parts to play in the body of Christ. However, Christ didn't leave his church without instructions. Here are two of the main ones:

**The Great Commandment** (Matt 22:35-40): *"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"*

**The Great Commission** (Matt 28:18-20): *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"*

These instructions suggest three key dimensions of the church's life: a *vertical* dimension (loving and worshipping God), an *internal* dimension (loving and nurturing each other as followers of Christ), and an *external* dimension (bringing the gospel to those who don't know Christ).

While all true churches seek to be faithful to these different aspects of Christ's commands, no two churches will pursue them in exactly the same way. At SGCL, we have identified a few main priorities to help us be faithful to Christ's call. These priorities shape our life together and give rise to the kinds of activities we pursue individually and as a church. Understanding these values will give you a good sense of the kind of church we're seeking to build, by God's grace, at SGCL.



## I. APPLYING THE GOSPEL

Although we say this often, “applying the gospel” is no mere slogan. It’s a thumbnail summary of what it means to “observe all that [Jesus] commanded,” in light of his person, teaching, and work.

- A. **This seeks to honor Jesus’ claims that all of Scripture points in some way to him** (Luke 24:44; John 5:39).
- B. **This follows the NT’s practice of rooting the Christian life in all its dimensions to Christ’s person and work** (e.g., 1 Cor 6:18-20; 2 Cor 8: 7, 9; Gal 2:14; Phil 2:5-11; Eph 4:32; 5:25-33; Col 3:12-13; Heb 12:1-6; 1 Pet 2:13-25, et al.).

*“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.”*  
(Philemon 1:27)

- C. **We desire SGCL to be a community that views all of the Christian life—our beliefs, values, and obedience—through the lens of Christ’s person and work.** This involves making real connections between the gospel and the thinking and behavior that make up our daily lives. Such connections help ensure that our lives are biblically informed, grace motivated, and Christ exalting.

## II. EXPOSITORY PREACHING

This priority speaks of a *value*, an *activity*, and an *effect*:

- A. **God has ordained that his word be the saving and sanctifying instrument of his people.**

*“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”* (Romans 10:14, 17)

*“Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.”* (John 17:17)

**B. God has ordained preaching as the unique means by which his word is brought effectively to his church.**

1. Throughout salvation-history, God has chosen to transmit his word to his people through commissioned servants.

---

*God's standard way of securing and maintaining His person-to-person communication with us His human creatures is through the agency of persons whom He sends to us as His messengers...Such were the prophets and apostles, and such supremely was Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son...That is the succession in which preachers today are called to stand. (J. I. Packer)*

---

2. Scripture testifies to the necessity of preaching in both pattern and precept.

- Matt. 10: 6-7
- Mark 3:14; 13:10
- Luke 24:45-49
- Acts 2:42; 5:42; 6:2-4;10:42; 19:8-10; 20:7
- Rom. 10:14-17
- 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 9:16
- 2 Corinthians 2:16-17
- Philemon 1:12-18
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13
- 1 Timothy 4:13
- 2 Timothy 4:2-5
- Titus 1:3, 9

3. Everywhere we see the church in the NT, we see the regular teaching and preaching of God's word.

**C. Expository preaching, that is, preaching that explains and applies Scripture in its biblical context, enables God's word to shape our lives individually and as a church.**

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." (2 Tim 3:16-4:2)*

### III. EVERY MEMBER SERVING

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the primary reasons God saves us is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve Him with joy.

*"...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Hebrews 9:14)*

#### A. Servanthood is modeled by Jesus' example.

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8)*

#### B. Servanthood is mandated by Jesus' call.

*"But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)*

#### C. Service in the church is empowered by the Spirit of God.

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

#### D. Equipping members for service is the call of pastors.

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

## IV. INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Just as the Christian life isn't to be passive, neither is it to be *isolated*. Because the Holy Spirit at conversion joins us to Christ's body, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don't simply hold the same beliefs or attend the same service or share the same interests—we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. Biblically speaking, our fellowship is not merely “socializing”—it is sharing together our common life in Christ.

---

*We should not think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercise of private devotions. Fellowship is one of the great words of the New Testament: it denotes something that is vital to a Christian's spiritual health, and central to the Church's true life.....The church will flourish and Christians will be strong only when there is fellowship. (J. I. Packer)*

---

Because of the importance of relationships in the body of Christ (and our sinful tendencies to be independent, casual, or selfish in relating to others!), we need to be intentional in pursuing them. Here are two key aspects of relationships that are genuinely biblical:

#### A. Discipling.

1. This word has many connotations, but by it we mean simply *people helping each other understand and apply God's word to their lives to become more like Christ.*
2. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, the mandate of “making disciples” (v. 19a) is characterized by “baptizing” (i.e., making converts through

evangelism—v. 19b) and “teaching [people] to observe all that [Jesus] commanded” (v. 20).

3. Within the church, the most fundamental way we do this is through relationships, fueled by the word of God, that encourage us, exhort us, and strengthen us in our walk with Christ.

*“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)*

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16)*

## B. Caring

1. As “members one of another” (Rom 12:5), we have a responsibility to care for one another. The Bible describes our fellowship in concrete terms as actions we do with or for “one another.” Here is just a sampling:

- Love one another with brother affection (Romans 12:10a)
- Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10b)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Comfort one another (2 Corinthians 13:11)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2)

- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Worship God together (Ephesians 5:18-20)
- Pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18)
- Carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11a)
- Build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11b)
- Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)

*"But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians 12:24-26)*

In short, we need each other, and so we must give ourselves to purposeful involvement in each others' lives, for the strength of the body, the witness of the gospel, and the glory of God.

*"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

*"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)*

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

## V. FAITHFULLY EVANGELISTIC

We desire to cultivate a church culture where every member understands and embraces the biblical responsibility and privilege of sharing the gospel with others.

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

*“But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...” (1 Peter 3:15-16)*

### A. The content of our evangelism: the gospel.

1. We aren't merely calling others to live a moral life, or asking them simply to “believe in God” or “go to church,” much less trying to convince them that Christians are “nice people.” Salvation comes only through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf.
2. We want to equip every member to verbally share the good news of the gospel with others.

### B. The context of our evangelism.

#### 1. Personal

- We encourage each of our members to bear witness to Jesus Christ and share the gospel (a) in the network of relationships he provides for us, and (b) in contexts where we have particular opportunity or for which we have a particular burden.

#### 2. Corporate

- The New Testament presents unity in the church body as a primary witness to the supernatural power of the gospel. Various SGCL contexts provide

opportunities to introduce people to what is perhaps the most powerful witness to the truth of the gospel: the community of our local church.

## VI. PRAYING TOGETHER

We desire the life and ministry of our church—individually and corporately—to be dependent upon and fueled by prayer.

### A. Prayer is at the heart of our *existence*.

1. Prayer lies at the very heart of God’s eternal plan to have a people for himself—a people who know him and who are known by him.
2. So prayer is not simply something Christians do; it’s an expression of who we are: children of a heavenly Father who live delighting in and depending upon him.

*Matthew 6:5, 6, 7: “And when you pray . . . but when you pray . . . and when you pray . . .”*

*Matthew 6:9: “Pray, then, like this: “Our Father in heaven . . .”*”

*1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.”*

### B. Prayer is at the heart of our *ministry*.

*Acts 2: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

*Ephesians 3:14-19: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*



Colossians 4:2: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

### C. Prayer is at the heart of our mission.

Matthew 9:37-38: "Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Colossians 4:3-4: "At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison - that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

## VII. EXPERIENCING GOD'S PRESENCE

A vibrant experience of the Holy Spirit is not meant to be the domain of a narrow brand of Christian; the Spirit is God's empowering presence for the entirety of the life of the Christian and the church.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." John 14:16-18

---

*The Spirit's major role in Paul's view of things lies with his being the absolutely essential constituent of the whole of Christian life, from beginning to end. The Spirit thus empowers ethical life in all of its dimensions—personal, corporate, and in the world. Believers in Christ, who for Paul are "Spirit people" first and foremost, are variously described as living by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit...the Spirit conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God. The Spirit is therefore the empowering presence of God for living the life of God in the present. (Gordon Fee)*

---

- A. The Bible doesn't just tell us things to *believe* about the Spirit—it exhorts to a posture of heart concerning the Spirit's work.

*"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..." 1 Corinthians 14:1*

*"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." James 4:6-8*

**B. This posture has both personal and corporate implications: we experience the Spirit's empowering work as we passionately seek God and dependently serve God.**

1. Pursue God's active presence personally.

- Approach God daily with an attitude of dependence, gratefulness, and hunger.
- Recognize your need to be filled with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

*"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit..." Ephesians 5:18*

*"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." Acts 4:31*

- Serve others diligently.

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." 1 Peter 4:10*

- The Spirit's empowering work aims at our personal sanctification, mutual edification, and evangelistic witness. To pursue godliness, serve others, and share Christ with non-believers is to pursue the Spirit's work our lives.

2. Expect to experience God's presence when we gather.

- While individual believers have the privilege of experiencing God’s presence, this is especially true of the gathered church. The glorious reality of new covenant worship is worship *in the presence of God*.

*“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*  
Hebrews 12:22-24

- When we gather, we seek to experience his presence by:
  - Attending to God as he addresses us through his word
  - Responding to him in grateful adoration
  - Seeking to love, serve, and encourage each other with our gifts

## VIII. PARTNERING IN THE BROADER MISSION

While we have a specific mission as a church, we are also part of the Sovereign Grace family of churches. Sovereign Grace is a union of over 60 churches in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, and the U.K. We also have functional partnerships with churches in 15 other countries.

As churches, we partner together and with Sovereign Grace Ministries in a number of ways:

- Church planting locally and internationally
- Pastoral training via the Sovereign Grace Pastors College
- Short-term missions

- Music materials for the local church
  
- Conferences

Although we're still in our infancy as a church, we are grateful for the privilege we have to participate in a broader mission through Sovereign Grace. We look forward to exploring more ways in which we can directly contribute to the Great Commission as a local church.

## SESSION FOUR

### Our Community: The Commitments We Make to Each Other

We have explored the beliefs and values that shape our life as a local church. But God intends for our doctrine and practice to emerge from within a church framework that is consistent with Scripture's teaching. In other words, our beliefs about God (theology) shape the way we think about our local church (ecclesiology). The local church by necessity involves structures, roles, and responsibilities designed to display God's glory and strengthen every member.

The Bible is not ambiguous about the shape and function of the church. A healthy local church gives careful consideration to the Bible's teaching to determine how it is governed, why it gathers, and what the relationships and responsibilities of members are to one another. In this lesson, we will explore the Bible's teaching on the responsibilities of pastoral leadership and membership in the local church.

#### I. HOW IS THE CHURCH GOVERNED?

- A. **Elder-Governed Church:** It is our view that Scripture teaches that elders are to lead, direct and manage the affairs of the church and that such leadership and care are a God-given means of grace to the church. (Romans 12:8; Acts 20:17-38; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:7-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5) Elders are to be chosen for ministry by elders and must meet the clear requirements found in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). A wise eldership will seek the affirmation of the congregation regarding the fitness of future elders.
  
- B. **Vitally Involved Members:** While the elders bear the responsibility to lead, generally speaking there is no fundamental distinction among believers in Christ's body. Under the new covenant, there is no mediating class of leaders between God and his people (Jeremiah 31:31-34), but all Christians—elder and congregation alike—have equal access to God through Christ (Galatians 3:28), are "priests" of God (1 Peter 2:9), possess the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 1:22), receive illumination from the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16), and all other spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3ff.).
  1. The health of the local church depends upon all its members, whether they are in leadership or not. The members' faithful participation, willing submission, mutual love,

godly example, and ongoing exercise of spiritual gifts and wise counsel provide strength and stability in a local church (Exodus 18:24, Proverbs 12:15, 19:20).

- C. **Our Broader Partnership:** While our church's governance preserves the integrity of the local church, we recognize that a healthy church is not isolated from accountability, nor is it self-sufficient to carry out the Great Commission. We believe that an interdependence with like-minded churches is the biblically prescribed means for fulfilling the Great Commission. *"Such cooperation is necessary for the protection of doctrinal fidelity and standards of holiness, the direction of a common mission, and the disposal of common funds"* in our shared mission. Therefore, from our inception we have been joined together in formal partnership with the churches of Sovereign Grace. We share:

1. A Global Mission:

Sovereign Grace churches partner together and through a ministry arm, Sovereign Grace Ministries, we aim to care for pastors, strengthen believers, and to help grow strong churches. These include:

- Church planting locally and internationally
- Pastoral training via Sovereign Grace Pastors College
- Short-term missions
- Music materials for the local church
- Conferences

Individual churches, such as Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, participate in church planting efforts by helping to identify and raise up leaders, contributing resources, and sending teams of people to new locations for the purpose of planting.

2. A Doctrinal Unity:

Each of the Sovereign Grace churches subscribe to the Sovereign Grace Ministries Statement of Faith (see Appendix). The doctrinal emphases we hold are shared by all Sovereign Grace Churches (see Session II).

### 3. An Extra-local Accountability:

While we are not congregational, we do *not* believe that the authority a local eldership exercises over its congregation is absolute, without further appeal or recourse.

Therefore, the elders of local churches are accountable for their life and doctrine, not only to their own local congregations, but also in part to the broader ecclesiastical body of elders in Sovereign Grace.

Our extra-local accountability is primarily expressed in partnership with a regional group of Sovereign Grace churches in our geographic area. Together, we cooperate on mission strategy, mutual care, and accountability. Specifically, a group of elders drawn from the churches in our region approve church plants, handle any necessary judicial functions, and participate with local elders in the ordination process.

Broader partnership and accountability is expressed through the entire body of Sovereign Grace churches. Each church appoints 1-2 elders to serve on a national council of elders. This representative group handles issues of national significance for our churches, such as proposed amendments to the Statement of Faith or Book of Church Order, or nominations to the Sovereign Grace Leadership Team (which functions as a ministry arm of our family of churches, under the accountability of our elders).

## II. THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PASTOR

In the early stages of the church, leaders recognized the importance of maintaining Biblical priorities in their labors (see Acts 6:1-4). The Scriptures outline what the job description of a pastor should be.

### A. Lead the church.

According to Scripture, elders are called by God and accountable to God to lead the local church. The Bible describes this in various ways:

*“Let the elders who **rule well** be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”* (1 Timothy 5:17)

*“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, **exercising oversight...**”* (1 Peter 5:2)

*“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:...the one who **leads**, with zeal;”* (Romans 12:6, 8)

### B. Nourish the church.

God has ordained His word as the primary instrument for the strengthening of His church, and He charges pastors with the task of feeding the church with His word. Indeed, the health and future of the church depends upon its leaders faithfully transmitting sound doctrine and Biblical practice to others.

*“In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”* (1 Timothy 4:6, NASB)

*“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”* (2 Timothy 4:1-2)



### C. Equip the church.

The pastor is to be an equipper, training the church so that each member may be positioned for maximum fruitfulness in his or her life. One sign of effective pastoral ministry is the extent to which people are equipped to then serve others. In a healthy local church, leaders **train**—people **minister**!

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...” (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

*“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)*

### D. Shepherd the church.

As shepherds of God’s people, pastors are called to protect the church from the dangers it faces, such as false teaching, the allurements of the world, and the ravaging effects of sin. Pastors protect the church in a variety of ways:

1. Teaching sound doctrine to strengthen the church in its faith and life.

*“In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” (1 Timothy 4:6)*

2. Discerning errors and temptations offered by the culture, to protect the church from erroneous doctrine or practice.

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” (Acts 20:28-31)*

3. Modeling, encouraging, and protecting Biblical standards of godliness. This includes, when necessary, the administering of church discipline in cases of unrepentant believers in a Biblical and redemptive manner.

*"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)*

---

*"A shepherd's oversight of the flock expresses itself broadly in two ways. First, the shepherds provide truthful, positive direction and leadership to the flock. Second, they watch for spiritual dangers such as sin, false teaching, and false teachers, including Satan's assaults against the church." (John MacArthur, Jr.)*

*"Pastoral care is the loving concern of Christ for his flock which he shows them by providing under-shepherds whose duty it is to equip the saints to minister care to each other." (John Piper)*

---

## **E. Serve the church.**

Although pastors are responsible to lead the church, they are to do so as servants. Following the example of Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), leaders are to posture themselves as servants and expend themselves for the glory of God and the good of others.

*"...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)*

*"...not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)*

#### F. Be an example to the church.

Pastors are, of course, sinners and sheep, just like every other member of the church. However, pastors are called to be an example to the flock—not a sinless example or a perfect example, but a faithful one.

*“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)*

*“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)*

### III. THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

The New Testament is clear that each Christian is allotted by God to a specific local church and its eldership (1 Pet. 5:2-3). This divine assignment is designed to produce a community that brings glory to God and a powerful gospel-witness to the world. The Bible holds out particular responsibilities for Christians which, when fulfilled, strengthen the church’s health and witness.

Therefore, as Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, there are certain expectations of members, which are simply expressions of a biblical commitment to a particular local church. We expect that any member who is pursuing their relationship with God and believes that God has called them to this church will faithfully fulfill these priorities:

#### A. Give attention to your relationship with God.

The Bible describes our relationship with God as a communion made possible by the substitutionary sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus. Through God’s justifying and adopting grace, we are declared righteous before God as his sons and daughters. Therefore, we have the daily privilege, whether privately or corporately, to commune with our Father and experience the power and comfort of his Spirit through the Word and prayer. As we abide in the love of God, walking in the grace of the gospel and obedience to his Word, our faith is strengthened and we’re promised a life of fruitfulness.

*"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." (Jude 20-21)*

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)*

*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4)*

## **B. Cultivate love for the members of your local church.**

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)*

Jesus could have said, they will know we are Christians by how we love *the world*. But he didn't. Instead he drew, in effect, a circle around the disciples and said, "By the love you show one another, the world will know that you belong to me." As a local church demonstrates Christ-like love amongst its members, a compelling evangelistic witness emerges. Love that celebrates another's joy and grieves another's suffering, and is marked by holiness, faithfulness, forgiveness and encouragement "adorns the gospel"--shining brightly in a world committed to self-love.

## **C. Faithfully Participate in the Sunday Meetings.**

*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:23-25)*

The life of the church isn't limited to a meeting, but there's no more significant aspect of our life together than our gatherings on Sundays. It is in this weekly context that the church body comes together to encourage each other as we:

- Hear the Word read and preached
- Declare our dependence and trust in God through prayer
- Sing the truths of God's Word in response to his grace
- Participate in the sacraments
- Edify one another through the gifts of the Spirit
- Contribute to the ministry of the church

This is the pattern we see throughout the New Testament.

*"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)*

*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:23-25)*

#### **D. Support the church financially.**

Stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. All that we have comes from God and an authentic relationship with Christ *will find expression* in the faithful use of our resources for His purposes and the needs of others.

1. *The substance of stewardship.* Throughout salvation history, God has called His people to support His work through giving.
  - In the Old Testament, God's people were to give a tithe, or the first tenth, of their income to God. This practice predated the giving of the Law (Genesis

14:20; Genesis 28:22) and was later formalized in the Law of Moses for the maintenance of the temple and provision for the priests and Levites who served there (Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-24).

- The Old Testament practice of tithing embodies many principles carried forth into the New Testament: consistent giving, giving to support the worship and mission of God's people, giving to support those called to minister to God's people, and giving to care for the oppressed.
- In the New Testament, what it means to obey God's law is broadened and intensified due to the transforming work of the Spirit in light of Christ's work on the cross (for example, hatred is likened to murder—Matthew 5:21-22; lust is likened to adultery—Matthew 5:27-28). In the same way, our consistent giving is not merely to be thought of as "paying our dues," but should flow from the giving of our entire selves to God. It is a reminder of God's ownership of us.

2. *The work of stewardship.* Giving to support the work of the church remains an expectation of believers.

- Supporting individuals:

*"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." (Acts 4:34-35)*

- Giving to support the church's leaders so they can devote their time and energies to serving the church:

*"Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:13-14. See also 1 Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6; Exodus 23:19; 1 Corinthians 16:2)*

- Giving to support the extension of the gospel:

*“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.” (Philippians 4:15-16)*

- The practice of tithing embodies important biblical guidelines and provides a helpful starting point for regular giving to the church. Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and training. We desire the members of the church to rejoice in the privilege of sharing in God’s work here at Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville.
3. *The heart of stewardship.* What we actually do with our money reveals where our heart truly is (Matthew 6:21). In addition to commands to give, Scripture also addresses our motives and attitudes towards giving:
- Giving is to be generous, not stingy. (2 Corinthians 9:6)
  - Giving is to be enthusiastic, not grudging. (2 Corinthians 9:7)
  - Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard. (2 Corinthians 9:7; Acts 11:29)
  - Giving is to be discreet, not showy. (Matthew 6:1-4)
  - Giving is to be with faith, not anxiety. (Malachi 3:10)

#### **E. Follow the church’s pastoral leadership.**

To our individualistic culture, the Bible’s commands concerning leaders might seem antiquated or, perhaps, authoritative. Neither is the case. And, as with all the Bible’s commands, proper understanding and faith-filled obedience will result in blessing for ourselves and for the church as a whole. What should our attitude be characterized by?

1. A faith-filled submission.

*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17)*

Fundamentally, submission is an attitude: *a disposition to affirm and support the leadership of the church, and to increase its effectiveness through joyful and faith-filled participation.* Submission does not mean passivity or blind obedience. Rather, submission is an expression of faith towards God—that He has appointed leaders for us and He will use them for our good. It recognizes the critical role that leadership plays in bringing about God’s purposes in the church and in the lives of believers.

2. A ministry of prayer for your pastors and church.

Pastors view their ministry as a profound privilege but are very aware of their need for God’s grace. Your pastors are “jars of clay” who are familiar with weakness and temptation, and yet are called to provide wise leadership, sound teaching and pastoral care that can only come from God. We join with Paul, the apostle, and appeal that you pray for all the saints of SGCL and specifically for the pastors.

*“To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...” (Ephesians 6:18-19)*

3. A God-honoring appreciation.

*“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)*

The Biblical concept of honor exhorts us to recognize God’s provision through another person, to cultivate gratitude for this provision, and rightfully to appreciate and acknowledge those who have served and benefited us. In so doing, we are actually giving glory to God for His goodness to us through other people.

An unfortunate confusion exists between exalting leaders and honoring leaders in the body of Christ. Exalting leaders is idolatry and is totally unacceptable. Honoring leaders, however, is Biblical and should be the regular attitude and practice of every Christian.



## F. Pursue God-honoring relationships.

God's Word charges us to "be imitators of God as beloved children." (Ephesians 5.1) So we want to reflect his holiness in our lives, personally and corporately, in our speech and conduct.

*"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4.29-32)*

*"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." (Ephesians 5:3-8)*

## G. Receiving New Members and Pursuing Straying Members.

While we believe the elders bear final responsibility for matters related to receiving members and placing members outside of the church (excommunication), we believe each member of a church should carry a sense of responsibility for affirming those who are added and those who are straying in unrepentant sin.

### 1. Affirming New Members

Before accepting new members, the pastors will present them to the church as candidates for membership, allowing a limited time for members to privately ask a pastor questions about a prospective member if there is concern that he/she is not a believer, is living in unrepentant sin, or has not left a former church in good standing.

### 2. Pursuing members who stray:

God's holy love is expressed as the church faithfully pursues unrepentant church members. Scripture makes clear that our pursuit and correction of those who stray is always to be marked by love for the individual and a commitment to God's glory. If the straying individual refuses to repent of their sin, the church is responsible to walk out the redemptive process of discipline. (see Appendix: Commitment to Church Discipline)

## H. Participate in Evangelistic and Discipling Relationships.

The structures of fellowship within our church are both formal and informal. They are designed to help facilitate evangelism, as well as cultivate mature care and discipling relationships between members.

### 1. Evangelism: The beginning of Discipleship

#### a. Defining the Mission of the Church:

"The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples in churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus Christ now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father."

"The responsibility of the church in the new age is the same as its responsibility in every age. It is to testify that this world is lost in sin; that the span of human life—no, all the length of human history—is an infinitesimal island in the awful depths of eternity; that there is a mysterious holy, living God, Creator of all, Upholder of all, infinitely beyond all; that he has revealed himself through Jesus Christ the Lord; that there is no other salvation, for individuals or for nations, save this, but that this salvation is full and free, and that whoever possesses it has for himself and for all others to whom he may be the instrument of bringing it a treasure compared with which all the kingdoms of the earth—no, all the wonders of the starry heavens—are as the dust of the street.

An unpopular message it is—an impractical message, we are told. But it is the message of the Church. Neglect it, and you will have destruction; heed it, and you will have life."

b. Cultivating A Culture of Evangelism:

"I appreciate personal evangelism, and we need to be equipped for it. But since I believe in the church as the engine of evangelism, we need to develop cultures of evangelism in our local churches, too. We want whole churches that speak of Jesus."

2. Mutual Discipling

a. Growth in Grace

*"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity."* (2 Peter 3:18)

Christians are called to "grow in the grace of God." This command is designed to center us on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The grace in Christ trains "us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age." (Titus 2:11)

Together in the local church, we can encourage one another towards an ever-maturing experience of Christlikeness. Such maturity powerfully reflects Christ and includes traits like:

- Hunger: Desiring more of God's Word
- Perspective: Interpreting Life through a Biblical lens
- Affection: An Increasing Love for God and His Ways
- Security: An Increasing Rest in God's Gospel Love
- Anticipation: An Increasing Heavenly Mindedness

## b. Giving and Receiving Grace

“We’re all in need of grace. There’s no one you know who doesn’t need more of it. And God has so composed His church that when we’re together in a larger corporate gathering or in a small group or even in casual conversation, we can both receive grace and communicate grace through the exchange of edifying and appropriate words...Through each and every interaction, however casual, however brief, I want to impart grace through my words, for that’s God’s purpose in granting us this gift of speech.”

Conclusion: We want to glorify God by becoming mature, gospel-centered disciples who increasingly reflect Christ’s glory in our lives and community (Col. 1.28). We do this by sharing Christ with the lost (discipleship begins at conversion) and discipling one another as the Lord adds to our church (Matt. 28.18-20). We want gospel-informed, gospel-motivated fellowship because, we want to be a *gospel-centered community on mission with God*.

## IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR CHURCH COVENANT

### A. Why Have A Church Covenant?

1. Just as a statement of faith summarizes what we believe the Bible teaches, a church’s covenant gives expression to how we commit to live together.
2. In a world that embraces individualism and expresses suspicion about authority and commitment and holiness, the grace of God shines brightly through Christians who gladly bind themselves to God and other believers in the context of the local church.

### B. How will a church covenant function at Sovereign Grace Church?

This document will function as a commitment between each of us as members. It is a statement that we agree to be held accountable by this particular body of believers, this local representation of Christ’s church. Likewise, we agree to hold others in the church accountable. To hold accountable simply means to “take responsibility for.” A church covenant void of this responsibility is a worthless document. The love we have for one another shows the world we are disciples of Jesus Christ. This covenant reminds us, pushes us, calls us to live out by grace

that which we believe by grace. We both want to *know* (our statement of faith) and *do* (church covenant).

# Beliefs

---

There are certain beliefs all true churches share in common.

At the same time, individual churches may be faithful to the gospel while differing from each other in theological emphases and ministry priorities. Complete agreement with our emphases is not required for the sake of membership, but it should be known that SGCL will preach, teach and counsel in accordance with these theological convictions. Please read the Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville's "Statement of Faith" in the Appendix and address any questions, comments, or concerns with a pastor. The list below summarizes some of our main theological priorities.

We desire Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville to be:

1. Gospel-centered
2. Reformed in soteriology
3. Baptist
4. Continuationist
5. Complementarian

We ask all members to adhere to SGCL's "Beliefs" and not to actively oppose or be divisive over the teaching of the larger "Statement of Faith" and SGCL's theological priorities, which are stated above and clarified in "Session 2." Any disagreements affecting your faith to participate, support and follow should be brought to the pastors for discussion.

**The Bible** is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error. It is the supreme and final authority for all matters of Christian life and belief.

There is one true and living **God**, who eternally exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are equal in every divine perfection and who execute distinct but harmonious offices in all the work of the Godhead.

**Man**, male and female, was created by God in His own image, but through sin incurred physical and spiritual death. As a result, all people are separated from God because of their sin and are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.

**The Gospel** is the good news of God's saving actions towards sinners through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God, took on human nature, lived a sinless life, and died a substitutionary death for sinners. On the third day he rose from the grave victorious over sin and death. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his people and rules as Lord over all.

**Salvation** is a free gift that comes only by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Anyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Jesus Christ and His death on their behalf is justified before God—declared to be righteous in his sight, apart from any work or virtue on their part—and receives forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

**The Holy Spirit** manifests God's presence and activity in the world. He applies the gospel to sinners, giving them the new birth. He works progressively to transform genuine believers more and more into the image of Christ. His work is carried on in our hearts through such appointed means as the study of Scripture, prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers. The Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service and gives gifts for the building up of the body of Christ, the church.

**The universal church** is composed of all genuine followers of Christ in all ages. It exists to worship, serve, and glorify God and proclaim his gospel of grace throughout the world. All members of the universal church are to be vitally committed members of **a local church**, where they receive pastoral care and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service.

**Jesus Christ's return** to earth will occur personally, visibly, and suddenly. He will establish His kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost—the saved to endless joy, living and reigning with Christ, and the lost to endless punishment away from the benevolent presence of God.



# Sovereign Grace Churches

## Statement of Faith

---

### SCRIPTURES

#### God and Revelation

Our eternal, transcendent, all-glorious God, who forever exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is by his very nature a communicative being. He both creates and governs through his words and has graciously revealed himself to humanity in order to commune with us. He has revealed himself through creation and providence in ways plain to all people, leaving no one without a testimony of himself. He also revealed himself through specific words, that we might come to a fuller knowledge of his character and will, learning what is necessary for salvation and life. Through the medium of human language, which is suitable and adequate for communication with those who bear his image, God has preserved in Holy Scripture the only authoritative and complete revelation for all humanity.

#### The Origin of Scripture

All of Scripture is breathed out by God, being accurately delivered through various human authors by the inspiration and sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit. We therefore receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as the perfect, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. With the fullness of revelation given in Christ and his completed redemptive work, no new normative revelation will or need be given until Christ returns. In its original manuscripts, the whole of Scripture (and all its parts) is inerrant—without error in all it affirms. Because there is one divine author behind all of Scripture, we are able to arrive confidently at a harmonious, doctrinally unified understanding of the whole. Furthermore, God in his loving providence has determined to preserve his Word as pure and trustworthy throughout history, just as he guided the early church in discerning and identifying the canon of Scripture he inspired.

#### The Attributes of Scripture

Believers live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father's love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living. The Word of God is clear, and everything we need in order to know, love, and fellowship with God can be plainly understood

through ordinary means, without appeal to any human authority. Although not all Scripture is equally plain, when its intended meaning is misunderstood, the fault lies not in the clarity of God's communication but in the recipient. Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life. The Scriptures must not be added to or taken away from, and all creeds, confessions, teachings, and prophecies are to be tested by the final authority of God's Word.

## **The Reception of Scripture**

We come to know that the Bible is God's Word through Scripture's own self-attesting authority and by the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness through the Word in our hearts. As the Scriptures are preached and read, the Spirit delights to illuminate our minds so that we understand, cherish, and obey his Word. God's intended meaning is revealed through the intentions of the inspired human authors, rendering the truth of God's Word a fixed, historical reality. Therefore, the Bible is to be prayerfully interpreted according to its context and original intent, with due regard to the progressive nature of revelation and the collective interpretation of believers through the ages. Ultimately, Scripture interprets Scripture, and the meaning of each text must be understood in light of the whole. As we devote ourselves to God's Word, we commune with God himself and are fortified in faith, sanctified from sin, strengthened in weakness, and sustained in suffering by his unchanging revelation in Scripture.

## **THE TRIUNE GOD**

### **The Nature of God**

There is only one true and living God, who is infinite in being, power, and perfections. God is eternal, independent, and self-sufficient, having life in himself with no need for anyone or anything. He is spirit, transcendent and invisible, with no limitations or imperfections, immutable, and everywhere present with the fullness of his being. His knowledge is exhaustive, including all things actual and possible, so that nothing—past, present, or future—is hidden from his sight. God is not divided into parts, but his whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely holy, loving, wise, just, good, merciful, gracious, and truthful. Our God is the infinite fountain of being who created all things, and all things exist by him and for him. He is supremely powerful to perform all his holy and perfect will, ruling over his creation with total dominion, righteousness, wisdom, and love. In his transcendence, God is incomprehensible in his being and actions, yet he reveals himself such that we can know him truly and personally.

### **The Holy Trinity**

The one true God eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—infinately excellent and all-glorious. Each person is fully God, sharing the same deity, attributes, and essential nature, yet there is but one God. Each person is distinct, yet God is not by this distinction divided into three parts,

natures, or gods. The Father has always existed as Father, the unbegotten fountain of all life. The Son has always existed as Son, eternally begotten of the Father, uncreated and without beginning, of one essence with the Father. The Holy Spirit has always existed as Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of one essence with them. The Godhead thus exists in a perfect unity, indivisible as to nature and substance, yet inseparably distinguished as persons who enjoy a fullness of fellowship and love.

### **The Relations and Actions of the Trinity**

The persons of the Trinity, being one in nature, are also inseparably united in their external works, such that to deal with one person is to deal with the Trinity as a whole. Yet within this unity there are distinctions in the way the divine persons relate to each other and to creation, although there is no difference in essence or attributes. Within the Godhead, the ordered relations among the persons are eternal yet without any inequality. In the works of creation, providence, and redemption, the persons fulfill roles consistent with their eternal relations: the Father originates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit completes. Nevertheless, the three, thus distinct, are neither divided nor mixed, are of one and the same essence, are equal from all eternity, and are worthy to be worshipped as the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES**

### **God Ordains All Things for His Glory**

From all eternity, God sovereignly ordained all that exists and all that occurs in his creation, in order to display the fullness of his glory. God's plans are efficacious, always coming to pass, and they are universal, encompassing all the affairs of nature, history, and individual lives. These decrees are an exercise of his free, unchangeable, wise, and holy will. Yet God, in his foreordination, is not the author of sin, nor do his decrees negate the will of his creatures, who act with the power of willing choice in accord with their nature. His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with his creatures' moral accountability such that God never condemns a person unjustly. Therefore, all persons are responsible for their actions, which have real and eternal consequences.

### **God's Grace in Election**

God in his great love, before the foundation of the world, chose those whom he would save in Christ Jesus. God's election is entirely gracious and not at all conditioned upon foreseen faith, obedience, perseverance, or any merit in those whom God has chosen. His decision to set his saving love on the elect is based entirely on his sovereign will and good pleasure. The number of God's elect is fixed for eternity, and no one who has been chosen by God will be lost. In the mystery of his will, God passes over the non-elect, withholding his mercy and punishing them for their sins as a display of his holy justice and wrath.

As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has he foreordained all the means necessary to carry out his saving purposes. Those whom he has predestined are redeemed by Christ, effectually called to faith by his Spirit, justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by God's power to the end. God does all of this in order to demonstrate his mercy to the praise of his glorious grace.

Although attended with mystery, the doctrine of election should not produce speculation, introspection, apathy, or pride but rather humility, gratitude, assurance, evangelistic passion, and eternal praise for the undeserved grace of God in Christ.

## **CREATION, PROVIDENCE, AND MAN**

### **God Creates and Rules All Things**

In the beginning, the triune God freely created out of nothing the universe and everything in it by the word of his power, all for his own pleasure and the display of his glory. God declared the entirety of his creation to be very good, and even in its fallen state it tells of his greatness and is to be delighted in and stewarded for his glory. As supreme Creator, God is separate from and transcendent over all he has made. As sovereign Lord, he is present with his creation to sustain all things, govern all creatures, and direct all circumstances in accord with his holy and loving will. In everything God supremely acts for his glory and for the good of his people in Christ, granting us great comfort and unshakable hope in God's love, wisdom, and faithfulness to us in this life and in eternity.

### **Man's Creation in God's Image**

God created man, male and female, in his own image as the crown of creation and the object of his special care. God directly created Adam from the dust of the earth, and Eve from Adam's side, as the parents of the entire human race. They were created to know and glorify their Maker by trusting in his goodness and obeying his word. God gave them dominion over all creation, to fill, subdue, and steward the earth as his representatives. All human beings are likewise made in the image of God. Despite the effects of the fall on sinful humanity, all people remain God's image bearers, capable of fellowship with him and possessing intrinsic dignity and value at every stage of life from conception to death. Redemption in Christ progressively restores fallen men and women to their true humanity as they are conformed to the image of Christ.

### **Man as Male and Female**

Men and women are both made in the image of God and are equal before him in dignity and worth. Gender, designated by God through our biological sex, is therefore neither incidental to our identity nor fluid in its definition, but is essential to our identity as male and female. Although the fall distorts and damages God's design for gender and its expression, these remain part of the beauty of God's created order. Men and women reflect and represent God in distinct and complementary ways, and

these differences are to be honored and celebrated in all dimensions of life. To deny or seek to remove these differences is to distort a fundamental way in which we glorify God as male and female.

## **Marriage, Sexuality, and Singleness**

Biblical manhood and womanhood enrich human flourishing in all its dimensions. God instituted marriage as the union of one man and one woman who complement each other in a one-flesh union that ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. This remains the only normative pattern of sexual relations for humanity. Husbands are to exercise headship sacrificially and with humility, and wives are to serve as helpers to their husbands, willingly supporting and submitting to their leadership. Together these complementary roles bring joy and blessing to each other and display the beauty of God's purposes to the world. Single men and women are no less able to enjoy and honor God and no less important to his purposes. They also are to give expression to God's image in distinct and complementary ways, flourishing as his image bearers and bringing him glory in their singleness.

## **MAN'S SIN AND ITS EFFECTS**

### **The Origin of Sin**

God originally created man innocent and righteous, without stain or corruption. In this state, Adam and Eve enjoyed a fullness of life in communion with God, delighting in him and his righteous will yet capable of transgressing. Despite these privileges, they were led astray by Satan and willfully sinned against their Creator by doing what he had forbidden. In their rebellion they doubted his character, rejected his authority, and disobeyed his word. Man's trespass of God's command brought enmity with God and the curse of death. Because God had established Adam as the representative head of the human race, his sin was imputed to all his descendants, bringing guilt, condemnation, and death to humanity. Therefore, we are all by nature corrupt and inclined to evil from conception.

### **The Effects of Sin**

From the inherited corruption of humanity arise all the sins that we commit. All people are now by nature enemies of God, living under the power of Satan, subject to the curse of the law, and deserving of eternal punishment. Moreover, the whole nature of man has been corrupted by the fall, and no part of man is untainted by sin. Although fallen people remain in the image of God and manifest the virtues of common grace, they are incapable of pleasing God, meriting his favor, or freeing themselves from their bondage to sin. Their hearts are hardened, their understanding is darkened, their consciences are corrupted, their spiritual sight is blinded, and their deeds are evil. Therefore, all people are dead in sin and without hope apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.

The curse of the fall corrupted not only mankind but the entire created order, subjecting the world to futility, decay, and death. Both the cursed creation and moral evil produce calamity, suffering, hostility, and injustice in the world. The groaning of the created order reminds us of our fallenness and causes us to long for the redemption of all things under Christ.

## **THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **Incarnation and Two Natures**

In the fullness of time God the Father sent his eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world as Jesus the Christ. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, taking on himself a fully human nature with all its attributes and frailties, yet without sin. In this union, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in the one person of the divine Son without confusion, mixture, or change. Our Redeemer acted in and through both his human and divine natures, in ways appropriate to each, with both natures being preserved and neither diminished by the other. Yet both his human and divine natures are united and find expression in the one person of the eternal Son. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is fully God and fully man, able to be our all-sufficient savior and the only mediator between God and man.

### **Earthly Life and Ministry**

As God's incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God, fulfilling God's saving purposes and all Old Testament prophecies about the One to come: he is the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant, and God's appointed Messiah. As such he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and lived a sinless life in complete obedience to his Father. Jesus entered into full human existence, enduring the common infirmities, temptations, and sufferings of mankind. He perfectly revealed the character of God, taught with divine authority and utter truthfulness, extended God's love and compassion, and demonstrated his lordship through the working of miracles and the exercise of divine prerogatives.

### **Death, Resurrection, and Reign**

Having fully obeyed his Father in life, our Savior was also obedient unto death. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dying a substitutionary death for the sins of his people. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead on the third day, vindicating his identity and saving work as God's Messiah and guaranteeing the defeat of death, our future resurrection, and the glorification of our physical bodies. Forty days later Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, where he is now enthroned at the right hand of God, reigning over all things, and interceding for his people as their Great High Priest. One day he will return to judge all people and angels, putting all his enemies under his feet and dwelling with his people forever.

## THE SAVING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

### The Humiliation of Christ in His Saving Work

In the entirety of his life and death, Jesus Christ humbled himself to serve as our mediator in obedience to his Father's saving purposes. As the second Adam, his sinless life of wholehearted obedience to God's law obtained the gift of perfect righteousness and eternal life for all of God's elect. In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people, Christ offered himself by the Spirit as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God's law by paying the full penalty for their sins. On the cross, Christ bore our sins, took our punishment, propitiated God's wrath against us, vindicated God's righteousness, and purchased our redemption in order that we might be reconciled to God and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.

### The Efficacy of Christ's Saving Work

God the Father was pleased to accept Christ's sacrifice as a complete atonement for sin, raising him to new life and vindicating his identity and work as the Messiah. For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness requires no further sacrifice for sin, nor is there any human achievement or merit to be added to Christ's accomplishment. The atoning work of Christ is wholly efficacious, securing the full salvation of all the elect by purchasing the forgiveness of sins, the gifts of faith and repentance, eternal life, and every other blessing that comes to God's people. As the sole and sufficient atonement for sin, Christ's saving work is to be proclaimed to all people without exception as the only means of reconciliation with God. There is no other mediator between God and man than our Savior, Jesus Christ, and he will receive with redeeming love all who come to him in faith.

### The Exaltation of Christ in His Saving Work

The exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, ascension, and reign reveals the full glory of his mediatorial work. Raised by the power of God, Christ triumphed over sin, death, and Satan, and, as the firstfruits of the new creation, gives eternal life to all who are united to him by faith. Having ascended to the Father's right hand, Christ pours out the Spirit on his people and intercedes on their behalf as a Great High Priest, constantly advocating their cause and granting them access into God's presence. As the exalted Lord, Christ reigns with all authority as universal king and head of his church, governing the affairs of men and nations and empowering his people to be victorious over sin and Satan. The consummation of Christ's saving work will occur when he returns to judge the world in righteousness, deliver the kingdom to his Father, and receive eternal worship as King of kings and Lord of lords.

## **THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **The Person of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. He is equal in deity, attributes, and nature with the Father and the Son, and with them is to be worshipped and glorified. The Spirit manifests God's active presence in the world, giving life in God's creation and new creation. Existing forever with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the agent of all blessing to God's creatures and makes possible communion with him.

### **The Work of the Spirit Prior to Christ's Coming**

The eternal Spirit was present at the beginning of God's creation, carrying out the creative word of God and giving life to all things. In God's work under the old covenant, the Spirit was present with God's people to consecrate, deliver, guide, and grant saving faith in the promises of God. He empowered prophets to reveal God's Word, appointed elders to render judgment, raised up judges to bring deliverance, anointed priests and kings as his representatives, and inspired the record of old covenant revelation. Through all the institutions and offices of the Old Testament, the Spirit's work pointed to the ultimate revelation of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

### **The Work of the Spirit in Christ and the New Covenant**

The Spirit's work in the new covenant centers on Christ and the church. It is by the Spirit that Jesus Christ was conceived and born of a virgin, anointed to fulfill his earthly ministry, empowered to offer his life as a sacrifice, and raised in resurrection power. After Christ ascended to the Father's right hand, the promised Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and ushered in the new era of the Spirit's fullness, indwelling believers and empowering them for life and service. The Spirit glorifies Christ and bears witness to him, convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He inspired the record of new covenant revelation and makes it effective in people's hearts through the gift of regeneration. He illuminates God's Word to his people, assures them of God's love, comforts them with his presence, intercedes on their behalf, and sanctifies them in conformity to the image of Christ. The Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ, the seal of our salvation, the firstfruits of our redemption, and the guarantee of our inheritance.

## **THE GOSPEL AND THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **The Gospel**

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity. Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or



achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God's saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ. This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, providing hope for the lost and abiding comfort and strength for the believer. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

### **Effectual Calling, Regeneration, and Conversion**

God commands the gospel to be proclaimed to all people everywhere, but all people are spiritually dead and unable to respond to this saving news. Therefore, God graciously and effectually calls to himself those he chose to save in Christ. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect and brings them into a living union with Christ, bestowing new spiritual life, opening their eyes to see God's glory in Christ, and enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. With a renewed heart and mind, we receive Christ and rely fully on him for salvation, turning from our sinful, self-seeking way of life to love and follow Christ in joyful obedience. Only those who respond to the gospel in this way will be saved, yet even this response is a gift of God's merciful grace, ensuring that he alone receives the glory for our salvation.

### **Justification and Adoption**

In their union with Christ, believers freely receive all the benefits of the gospel. Those whom God effectually calls to himself, he justifies in Christ, forgiving all of their sins and declaring them righteous and acceptable in his sight. This declaration is judicial, addressing not our nature but our status with regard to God's law; it is definitive, being neither gradually gained nor able to be lost; and it is gracious, a free gift of God's righteousness based on nothing worked in us or by us, but received freely by faith. The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, whose life of perfect obedience is imputed to us and whose substitutionary death on our behalf completely satisfies the demands of God's justice toward our sins. Those whom God justifies, he adopts into his family, granting them the full status, rights, and privileges of beloved sons. As God's children, we receive his name, enjoy access into his presence, experience his care and discipline, and eagerly await the glorious inheritance he promises his own.

### **Sanctification, Perseverance, and Glorification**

As the all-sufficient Savior, Christ also sanctifies his people, cleansing them from the impurity of sin and setting them apart for God and his service. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit breaks their bondage to sin and Satan and raises them to new life, enabling believers to put sin to death and grow in likeness to Christ. Sanctification is therefore both a definitive act of God and a progressive work of the Spirit. Believers must persevere in faith and obedience in order to be saved. Yet this perseverance is also a gift of God in Christ, who preserves his own and keeps them safe forever. The ultimate goal of

sanctification is our full conformity to Christ's image, which will finally come when believers are raised physically with Christ in glory, freed from sin and exulting in the presence of God forever.

## **THE EMPOWERING MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT**

### **The Filling of the Spirit**

When Christ ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, ushering in a greater experience of God's presence and power among his people. The Spirit transforms hearts by the miracle of regeneration and indwells all believers in abundant, new covenant measure. The Spirit also desires to fill God's people continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. To be filled with the Spirit is to be more fully under his influence, more aware of his presence, and more effective in his service. All Christians, therefore, must continually seek to be filled with the Spirit by living and praying in such a way that invites the Spirit's work among us, actively longing for God to accomplish his gracious purposes in us and through us. The filling of the Spirit brings to God's people a deeper knowledge of Christ, an increased desire for holiness, a stronger commitment to unity and love, a greater fruitfulness in ministry, and a deeper gratitude for our salvation.

### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

Christ loves the church, his body, and provides for its health and growth through the Holy Spirit. In addition to giving new life, the Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts on every believer. Spiritual gifts are those abilities and expressions of God's power given by his grace for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church. The variety of these gifts—some permanent and some occasional, some more natural and some more remarkable—reflects the diversity of the members of Christ's body and demonstrates our need for one another. The gifts are not to be exercised with apprehension, pride, or disorder, but with faith, love, and order, and always in submission to the authority of Scripture as the final revelation of God. With the exception of those among the apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation, the full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns.

## **LIFE IN CHRIST**

### **Growing in Christ**

All believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, are progressively transformed into his image. Although the ruling power of sin in our lives has been broken, remnants of corruption remain in our hearts that we will fight throughout our lives. This lifelong process of growth takes place as the Spirit empowers us to abide in Christ and strive for holiness in every area of life. Resting in Christ's finished

work never renders our effort unnecessary but rather enables the joyful pursuit of loving and pleasing God. Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes. Although such actions are not the ground of our salvation, they demonstrate the authenticity of our salvation and are a means by which God keeps us faithful to the end. Among the many public and private means of grace, the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship are primary instruments of our sanctification, fostering communion with God and training us together to glorify him, love others, and testify to Christ in the world.

## **Waiting for Christ**

Living the Christian life involves longing and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although believers are new creations in Christ and presently enjoy the blessings of his resurrection power, their sanctification remains partial and incomplete in this life. Furthermore, they continue to live in mortal bodies in a creation subject to futility, opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Word of God assures us that we are his beloved children, yet such an assurance does not remove the reality of suffering, sorrow, and persecution in this present age. The gospel enables us to rejoice in the midst of tribulations, assured that his purposes are working for our good even in circumstances we do not understand. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, we endure in faith and abound in hope, confident that a day is fast approaching when sin and sorrow will be no more.

## **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

### **The Universal Church**

The universal church is the true, worshipping community of God's people, composed of all the elect from all time. Throughout salvation history, God by his Word and Spirit has been calling sinful people out of the whole human race to create a new redeemed humanity, whom Christ purchased with his blood. With the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, God's people were reconstituted as his new covenant church, in continuity with the old covenant people of God but now brought to fulfillment by the work of Christ. All of God's people are united in one body—with Christ as the supreme, sustaining, and life-giving head—and set apart for God's own possession and purposes.

### **The Local Church**

As an expression of Christ's universal church, the local church is the focal point of God's plan to mature his people and save sinners. Therefore, all Christians are to join themselves as committed members to a specific local church. A true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of church discipline. Even true churches are imperfect: they often contain a mixture of unbelievers hidden among the true flock and are vulnerable to theological error and moral failure. Yet Christ is unwavering in his commitment to build his church and will surely bring it to maturity.

Christ has given the offices of elder and deacon to the church. Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord. Deacons provide for the various needs of the church through acts of service. God gives these and other people as gifts to serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. In keeping with God's created design Scripture reserves the office of elder for men, yet men and women alike belong to a royal priesthood in which each member is gifted by God to play a vital role in the life and mission of the church.

## **The Sacraments of the Church**

The sacraments are precious means of grace that signify the benefits of the gospel, confirm its promises to the believer, and visibly distinguish the church from the world. The Lord Jesus instituted two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, for faithful observance by the church until his return. Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeatable sacrament for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ. Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved.

In the Lord's Supper, the gathered church eats bread, signifying Christ's body given for his people, and drinks the cup of the Lord, signifying his blood shed for our sins. As we observe this sacrament with faith and sober self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, commune with him and receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the Lord's triumphant return.

## **The Purpose and Mission of the Church**

As the body of Christ, the church exists to worship God, to edify and mature his people, and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world. Governed by Scripture, the church gathers for the teaching of the Word, prayer, the sacraments, congregational singing, fellowship, and mutual edification through the exercise of spiritual gifts. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the Spirit. The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. We do this by proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works. There will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build, guide, and preserve his church to the end of the age. When Christ returns, he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a people for his own possession, and he will dwell with them forever.

## **THE LAST THINGS**

### **Death and the Intermediate State**

Death entered God's good creation as a result of Adam's sin, and now all people are subject to God's curse of death. Yet believers have no need to fear, because Christ has conquered death and delivered us from its dominion. Although our bodies return to dust for a time, death for the Christian has become a doorway to paradise, where our souls enter immediately into God's presence to behold and enjoy our Savior and to rest from our labors. In company with all the spirits of the righteous made perfect, we will await the redemption of our bodies and our full and final salvation. The souls of the unredeemed, however, are cast immediately into hades to experience torment as they await final judgment for their sins.

### **Christ's Return and the Resurrection**

At the appointed time known only to God, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power and glory as Judge and King to whom every knee will bow. Christ's personal, physical, and visible return is the blessed hope of all who trust in him. At the end of the age the just and the unjust will be raised as their souls are reunited to their bodies: the just to a resurrection of life, the unjust to a resurrection of judgment. When the dead in Christ are raised, their perishable bodies will be redeemed and made like Christ's imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body. Those in Christ who are alive shall likewise be changed, and thus will all God's glorified people forever bear the image of their Savior.

### **Judgment and the Consummation**

On the last day all people will appear before Christ, who is the judge of all. Those who suppressed God's truth in unrighteousness and did not obey the gospel of Christ will suffer the righteous wrath of God and be justly cast into the hell of fire with the devil and his angels. There they will experience eternal, conscious punishment according to their sins. Those saved by Christ, whose names are written in the book of life, will be welcomed into the joy of their master and richly rewarded for every good work done in his name. God's glorified people will inherit the kingdom from which all sin, sorrow, suffering, and death will be banished. Christ as king will set all of creation free from its bondage to corruption, making new the heavens and the earth and establishing his eternal rule in his consummated kingdom. Surrounded by unimaginable beauty, we will enjoy unhindered communion with our triune God, beholding him, serving him, worshipping him, and reigning with him forever and ever. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

# Membership Covenant

---

Having been brought by God's sovereign grace to repent and believe in the good news of Jesus Christ and his saving work, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, we do now, relying on His grace, solemnly and joyfully affirm our covenant with each other.

We will pray and labor to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, devoted to the glory of God, resting in the gospel of his Son, and dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit.  
To that end,

We will not forsake assembling together, but will faithfully attend our corporate worship, treasuring our church's weekly opportunity to sing, pray, and receive the whole counsel of God's Word. We will defend and maintain a gospel-centered ministry by upholding and attending to biblical preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a local church: we will pray for and serve one another, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other, and reject all opportunities to speak or hear gossip or slander. We will instead seek to encourage one another and build each other up in the faith.

We will rejoice with those who rejoice and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek to proclaim and adorn the gospel of Christ before our family, friends, and neighbors and faithfully transfer the gospel to future generations.

We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of our local church, to the care of our members, and to the spread of the gospel locally and to all nations.

We will, if we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the teaching of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

# Commitment to Peacemaking

---

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).*

Our church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to himself through the sacrifice of his only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us his wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

## **Personal Peacemaking**

Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).

We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).

We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).

We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.

We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7; James 4:11-12).

If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).



When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so humbly, realizing that we're vulnerable to the same temptations (Gal 6:1b), as well as graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1a).

When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32), seeing it as an expression of another's care for us and a potential aid in our growth in godliness.

When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others' interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

### **Assisted Peacemaking**

When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3).

If our dispute is with a church leader, we will not indiscriminately spread it to others in the church, but we will look to other pastors for assistance, recognizing not only that each pastor is accountable to the other pastors, but the entire pastoral team is accountable to other pastors in Sovereign Grace Churches (1 Timothy 5:19-21).

When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).

If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).

When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Church Discipline. We will obey God's command not to go into the civil court over frivolous or ordinary matters with others in the church (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If we have a dispute with others in the church we will pursue the steps given above, and if warranted, pursue other means of recourse provided for among Sovereign Grace Churches. If the dispute is of a legal nature (e.g., a criminal matter), we recognize that it may be appropriate or necessary to involve legal authorities (Rom. 13:1-5).

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know his infinite love and peace.

# Commitment to Biblical Counseling

---

*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)*

---

All Christians struggle with situations that go beyond personal wisdom or ability. This can include life decisions, serious choices, significant trials, or sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are faced with such decisions or challenges, or are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God's Word calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and when needed from church leaders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counsel and oversight (see Prov. 11:14, 15:22; Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages its members to involve others, including our pastors, in such circumstances: seeking counsel, soliciting prayer, pursuing wisdom, confessing sin, etc.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

God calls our pastors, leaders and lay-counselors to set an example for us "in speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity"(1 Tim. 4:12). Therefore, we expect them to treat counselees with every respect and courtesy, and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Eph. 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the pastoral team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent our leaders from being placed in situations that might compromise their pastoral commitments, we, the members and attenders of this church, agree that we will not try to compel them to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge any confidential information they receive through pastoral counseling or ministry (Prov. 11:13, 25:9).

There are occasions when our leaders do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times we expect our leaders to give first priority to people who have formally

joined the church (Gal. 6:10), and to serve those who only attend the church by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

## Confidentiality

---

*A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret. (Proverbs 1:13)*

---

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and attenders are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others.

In particular, our leaders will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling. The elders, because they share the responsibility for the affairs of the church, may counsel with each other about how to care for the church as well as specific individuals. This is particularly necessary when:

- a pastor is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other pastors in our church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14);
- the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
- a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20);
- leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

# Commitments on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

---

Marriage is a gift from God, designed to bring him glory and reflect the gospel. God intended marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between a man and a woman. Divorce is a sad fact in our society and in the church at large. While God has, from the beginning, intended that marriage be life long and glorify God by reflecting the relationship of Christ and His church, there are times when our Lord permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse.

We believe the only two conditions under which the Bible allows this are:

- When a spouse commits sins that involve sexual contact with another person
- When an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage.

It is important to note that God *permits* divorce in such cases. Divorce is not required, nor will the church encourage a spouse to divorce when he or she has faith for the marriage to be restored – even when the situations listed above exist.

For the church to condone a divorce in these cases, the spouse must submit the facts of his or her marital situation to the pastors to determine before God in Scripture what He would permit. If a spouse who is a member of the church should seek a divorce from another member due to abandonment, he or she must first wait for the church to follow its practice of church discipline to the end. A conclusion that the sinning spouse is to be treated as an unbeliever must occur before divorce may become an option.

Separated spouses awaiting a pending divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court declares the divorce final and legally recognized. They should conduct themselves in the church as married persons.

If a divorced person becomes a member of the church, he or she must understand that remarriage will only be condoned by the church when the circumstances surrounding the divorce fall under the

conditions listed above. If circumstances of the divorce do not conform to what Scripture deems acceptable, the divorced person should consider before God whether he or she should seek reconciliation with their former spouse. He or she should seek to confess to God and to his or her former spouse any sins committed in the seeking of the divorce that did not comply with the teaching of Scripture. He or she must recognize that apart from these conditions, remarriage is not an option.

# Commitment to Complementarity

---

## *The 10 Affirmations of the Danvers Statement*

In December 1987, the newly formed Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) met in Danvers, Massachusetts, to compose the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. As a church we agree with the following statement, believing that the Bible's teaching on manhood and womanhood are part of God's good purposes for his people and reflect his glory.

Based on our understanding of biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Genesis 2:18, 21-24; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9; 1 Timothy 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Genesis 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Genesis 3:1-7, 12, 16).
  - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
  - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity, which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18;

Galatians 3:28). Both the Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Genesis 2:18; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:11-15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
  - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7).
  - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 1 Timothy 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission – domestic, religious, or civil – ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Daniel 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Peter 3:1-2).
8. In both men and women, a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Timothy 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Rather, biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Corinthians 12:7-21).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.



## *The 14 Articles of the Nashville Statement*

In August 2017, CBMW met in Nashville Tennessee to compose the Nashville Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. As a church we agree with the following statement, believing that the Bible's teaching on manhood and womanhood are part of God's good purposes for his people and reflect his glory.

### *Preamble*

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God's design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God's beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual's autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God's good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of shortsighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonor God.

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?

We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it—particularly as male and female. Christian Scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is Creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad-hearted thanksgiving, heart-felt praise, and total allegiance. This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our Creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself. And we cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God's design for his creation and his way of salvation serve to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good. God's good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure. He is for us and not against us. Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ's church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

### ***Article 1***

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

### ***Article 2***

WE AFFIRM that God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

### ***Article 3***

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

### ***Article 4***

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

### ***Article 5***

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

### ***Article 6***

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about "eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb." With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.

WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

### ***Article 7***

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

### ***Article 8***

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.

WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

### ***Article 9***

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality— a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.

WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.

### ***Article 10***

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.

WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

### ***Article 11***

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.

WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image- bearers as male and female.

### ***Article 12***

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

### ***Article 13***

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self- conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God's revealed will.

#### *Article 14*

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure.

WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

# Commitment to Church Discipline

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.  
(Hebrews 10:24)*

---

## A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect his character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Ephesians 3:10-11). He loves his church so much that he sent his Son to die for her (Ephesians 5:25). His ultimate purpose for his church is to present her as a gift to his Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Revelation 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Ephesians 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners, saved by grace, who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Philippians 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Hebrews 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Hebrews 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Psalms 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Revelation 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. It is a biblical means of facilitating growth, change, fruitfulness, and where needed, restoration. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group

fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On occasion God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back into obedience and faith. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

*If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matthew 18:12-13).*

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Peter 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and correct their errors so they can play a piece properly. We applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship. And we admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

## **B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal**

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks him in prayer, and draws on his grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness. But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Galatians 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Proverbs 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matthew 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a pastor. If even these efforts fail to bring brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

## **C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church**

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an unrepentant offender, who has refused informal discipline (Matthew 18:15), is engaging in egregious behavior that is likely to harm others or to lead them into sin or to cause division or disruption (e.g., actively promoting heresy, undermining elders, threatening or preying on others, etc.), our leaders may accelerate the formal disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church by removing the offender from church membership and barring them from fellowship. (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding



the Lord's Supper, removal from ministry responsibility, withdrawal of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removal from membership (Matthew 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Matthew 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior. This step may include close friends, a small group, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matthew 18:17, 1 Timothy 5:20).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may, with the congregation's knowledge, formally remove him or her from membership and its privileges, in particular, the Lord's Supper. At this point the church is instructed by God's Word to no longer treat him as a fellow Christian but as an unbeliever (Matthew 18:17). This means we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him, remind him of God's holiness and mercy, and call him to repent and put his faith in Christ (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20) .

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Genesis 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from membership or accountability if discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to join ourselves to another local church where the gospel is preached, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not go into effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matthew 18:12-14; Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they will inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matthew 18:12-14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together as a church and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matthew 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:12-14).

People who have been excluded from membership in another church will not be allowed to partake of the sacraments in our church, to become members, or to participate in the regular fellowship of our church until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:10-11).