


DISCOVER



Grace Bible Church

Membership

Ready to know Grace Bible Church better?

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BEGINNING THE JOURNEY: THE GOSPEL

Christianity is about news—good news—the greatest news the world has ever heard. In fact, the word “gospel” literally means “good news” and it is this news that stands at the center of the Christian faith, which should be the informing core of the Christian life. It is what the Apostle Paul called a matter “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Our journey will begin by seeking to discover why the gospel is such good news.

I. Man's Dilemma Before God

No one can gain an understanding of the gospel without first recognizing his own rebellion against a perfect, holy God and the severe consequences justly deserved as a result. In short, we must understand some very serious “bad news” before we can adequately appreciate the “good news.” There are two key elements to the dilemma we all face: our sinfulness and God’s holiness.

A. Man's Sinfulness

1. What is sin? Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.¹

a. Not just actions, but attitudes.

Matthew 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

b. Not just acting wrongly, but also failing to act.

James 4:17: “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

c. Not just actions and attitudes, but our nature—who we are at the core of our being.

Genesis 6:5: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

“A sin consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God.” — J.C. Ryle

2. Sin's true nature: Defining sin in relationship to God reveals its true nature: sin is essentially rebellion against God.

a. Sin is the willful and selfish rejection of God’s rule while choosing to live independently of Him.

b. Sin is always fundamentally and primarily against God.

Psalms 51:4: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

3. Sin's universality: All people are sinners and stand guilty before God.

a. Adam’s sin brought sin and death to all men. All people sin because all are by nature sinners.

Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...”

¹ This definition is taken from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 490.

b. All people confirm this through their actions: all are sinners.

Romans 3:22-23: "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

4. Sin's pervasiveness: Man's sinfulness extends to every part of his being; nothing in him has been unaffected by sin.

a. Sin's corrupting effects have touched every part of his being: mind, will, emotions, and body.

Romans 3:10-12: "...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."

b. This means that man in his sinful state apart from God is incapable of pleasing or obeying God. Even seemingly "good" works are tainted by sin.

Romans 8:7-8: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; in deed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

c. Not only are we therefore enslaved to sin, but we are completely responsible before God for our sin.

Romans 14:12: "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

*Sin's corrupting effects
have touched every part
of man's being: mind, will,
emotions, and body.*

B. God's Holiness and Wrath

The other facet of mankind's grave dilemma is the character of God. Indeed, man's sinful plight can't be fully grasped until it is viewed through the lens of God's infinite purity and holiness.

1. The Bible portrays God as holy. This idea has two main components:

a. God is transcendent: He is infinitely higher than man—separate, different—He is wholly other than us.

Isaiah 46:9: "...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me!"

b. God is morally perfect and infinitely pure—untainted by evil desire, motive, thought, word, or deed.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4: "...ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."

Isaiah 6:1-5: And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

2. Because God is holy, He intensely hates all sin. God's wrath is His holy just response to sin; it's His personal, active, righteous anger towards every evil thing.

a. Some think that the idea of wrath is unjust or unbecoming to a God of love. This is largely because we underestimate both the extent and the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. Not only is God perfectly justified in His wrath, but without it, His very character would be compromised.

Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

3. In light of God's holiness, sin has grave and inevitable consequences:

a. A broken relationship with God.

Isaiah 59:2: "but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."

b. Enslavement to sin and Satan. Sin places us under the dominion of sin and Satan, unable to break free from their control.

Ephesians 2:1-3: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

c. Consequences in life. All the sorrow, pain, suffering, sweat, tears, strife, sickness, and death we experience was not part of God's original good creation. They resulted from the entrance of sin into the world.

d. Eternal punishment. The ultimate, final, and irrevocable punishment for all who die in sinful rebellion against God is separation in hell from God's glorious presence.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10: "In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed."

*All the sorrow, pain,
suffering, sweat, tears,
strife, sickness, and death
we experience was not
part of God's original good
creation.*

II. God's Answer to Man's Dilemma: The Gospel

How can we be saved from our sins and the righteous wrath of God? The answer is the gospel: the "good news" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Motivated by love, God took upon Himself the full measure of divine wrath so that we might be the recipients of His infinite mercy.

"The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history." —Jerry Bridges

A. The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy.

1. Jesus' birth

a. Jesus is fully God, yet he was born into this world as a man, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin named Mary. Jesus is therefore both fully God and fully man.

John 1:1, 14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

Matthew 1:20-21: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

See also Hebrews 2:17; Philippians 2:5-8.

2. Jesus' perfect, sinless life

a. Even though Jesus was subject to all the temptations to which we are all subject, he never once sinned in any way.

Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

3. Jesus' death on the cross

a. At the heart of Christ's life and ministry stands the cross. All his life had been preparatory for and led to that moment. At the cross, Christ provided the ground of our salvation—the basis upon which God saves us.

b. Jesus' death was substitutionary in nature. He died on our behalf receiving the legal penalty for our sins and satisfying God's wrath towards us.

Isaiah 53:4-6: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

c. Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, God no longer holds us responsible to pay for our sin. All of our sins are forgiven: past, present, and future.

Colossians 2:13-14: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

*At the cross, Christ provided the ground of our salvation—
the basis upon which God saves us.*

d. Not only are our sins forgiven, but we are also "justified"—that is, we are declared righteous by God.

- Justification is a legal term: it speaks of a "right standing" before Holy God.
- God considers our sins as forgiven *and* Christ's righteousness as belonging to us.
- This declaration from God, is a once-for-all, permanent event in our lives, that *nothing* can change.

4. Jesus' resurrection from the dead

a. The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus' death was an acceptable and effective sacrifice on our behalf. Death is the penalty for sin, and Jesus' conquest over death in the resurrection shows that sin has also been overcome.

Romans 4:25: "...who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

1 Corinthians 15:17: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

5. Jesus' ascension and return

a. The ascension marks the beginning of Jesus' reign. He now has all rule and authority. He reigns in heaven with the Father, building his church, defeating its enemies, and interceding for his people. At the time that God has determined, he will return to consummate his work and initiate a new heaven and a new earth. Then we will reign with him for eternity, worshipping God and experiencing the full fruits of his saving work.

See Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 21:3-4

B. Gospel-Centered

It is our goal in this local church to keep the gospel at the heart of all that we do. It will be the substance of our proclamation, the fuel for our adoration, and the source of our motivation. We will do all we can to ensure that our zeal for the gospel is never eclipsed by any other doctrine, teaching, or practice.

"The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living by it." — Jerry Bridges

Ephesians 2:8-9: "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."





EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY: OUR RESPONSE

The gospel tells us that God has acted through the person and work of Christ to save us from our sins and remove the barrier that exists between God and ourselves. 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. We are therefore not to look inward for the reason why God saves us, but upward and outward—to the Savior who died for us.

However, salvation is not somehow "automatic." The gospel comes to us as news and it is news to which we must respond. Our response will determine whether we truly embark upon the journey of faith in Christ.

I. Our Responsibility

The appropriate response to the gospel has two components: repentance and faith. These components are often summarized under the term "conversion." Although repentance and faith are spoken of separately, they always work together in conversion. There is no true repentance without faith, and no genuine faith without repentance.

A. Repentance

The biblical words for repentance have at their core the idea of turning around or changing direction. To sin is to rebel against God and His rule over our lives. To repent is to turn back to God and to embrace Him and His rule and authority over our lives.

1. Repentance is a command of God. All people are commanded to repent and believe the gospel. (*Acts 17:30: "...now he commands all people everywhere to repent"*) This repentance has three primary aspects:

- a. Mind: an awareness of the holiness and majesty of God, of our sin and guilt, and of God's mercy and readiness to forgive.
- b. Emotions: a heartfelt sorrow for sin and joy at the prospect of forgiveness
- c. Will: a willingness and steadfast purposing to turn away from all sin and to turn to God in obedience

2. Repentance is a gift from God. It is the grace of God that enables us to repent.

2 Timothy 2:25: "...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth."

B. Faith

Faith is the instrument through which the saving benefits of the cross come to us. Salvation is "by grace"—grace is its ground, but it is "through faith"—faith must be exercised before salvation is received (Ephesians 2:8). It is both a gift of God and an act of our will. God gives us faith, but we are responsible for exercising it.

1. The New Testament word for faith, when used in the context of salvation, means a true commitment of oneself to God, an unwavering trust in His promises, and a persistent loyalty and obedience. Saving faith has three elements:

- a. Knowledge: We must have certain information—the gospel—revealed to us.

Romans 10:14,17: "But how are they to 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."

b. Assent: We must believe that what is revealed is true.

Hebrews 4:2: "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

c. Trust: We must place trust in what is revealed, being willing to stake our lives on it. This will find expression in our obedience and commitment.

2. We are saved by faith alone, but true saving faith will be validated by a lifestyle that testifies to the reality of faith. True saving faith will always lead to obedience.

James 2:17, 22: "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works."

C. Observing the Ordinances

1. What is an ordinance? An ordinance is a sign of the covenant (a picture) and a seal (a mark of being set apart) given to believers in order to teach and assure us of our salvation (Romans 4:11). The Lord ordained two ordinances: baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23), also known as "communion." Participation in the ordinances does not bring salvation; this comes only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16). These ordinances are visible signs of an invisible grace which has already taken place in the life of the believer.

2. Baptism uniquely depicts initiation into the Christian life, portraying the believer's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). It points to the beginning of the Christian life (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38) and displays one's commitment to turn from sin and trust in Christ for salvation. For this reason, we do not baptize infants. If you were baptized as an infant, we would ask that—in obedience to Scripture and as part of becoming a member of Grace Bible Church—you be baptized as a believer.

A candidate for baptism should be able to:

- a. Communicate the content of the gospel as well as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
- b. Evidence godly sorrow over sin, followed by repentance which leads to the fruit of the Spirit.
- c. Examine himself and the condition of his soul (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).
- d. Demonstrate a willingness to turn away from the world and instead live a life keeping God's commands and loving God's church (1 John 2:15-17; 5:1-5).
- e. Exhibit fruit which proceeds from regeneration (Galatians 5:22-23).

3. The Lord's Supper uniquely depicts continuing fellowship with God. It is a repeated act whereby the believer remembers the Lord's death, renews his commitment to Christ, and participation in his church (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

In receiving the Lord's Supper:¹

- a. We symbolize the death of Christ; our actions give a picture of his death for us.
- b. We participate and share in the benefits of Jesus' death.
- c. We picture the spiritual nourishment and refreshment that Christ is giving to our souls.
- d. We mark our unity with other believers.
- e. We affirm Christ's love for us.
- f. We are assured of the blessings of our salvation.
- g. We proclaim our dependence on and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

¹ These seven points are adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 1999

II. God's Initiative

In the previous lesson, we spoke about the pervasive, corrupting effects of sin. 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 (Ephesians 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.

A. Chosen in Eternity Past

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

Ephesians 1:4-6: "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 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."

"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. Effectively Called

God's choosing of us eventually results in his calling us and drawing us to himself through the proclamation of the gospel. This is often referred to as "effective calling."

While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from his own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the "divine summons" of God brings about the response it requires.

Romans 8:30: "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

C. Regenerated ("Born Again") by the Spirit

When God calls us, he then changes our hearts so that we can freely respond. This change is called "regeneration." In regeneration, the Holy Spirit acts sovereignly to change our inner natures and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive, are then able to believe the gospel, and repent of our sin.

John 3:6-8: "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."

Colossians 2:13: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him..."

D. The Supernatural Nature of Conversion

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.





CONTINUING THE JOURNEY: SANCTIFICATION

As noted in Lesson 2, we embark upon the Christian journey when we respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ. No change could be more momentous—we are "born again" (John 3:3), we are "made alive" (Ephesians 2:5), we are transferred from the "domain of darkness" into "the kingdom of his beloved son" (Colossians 1:13), we are forgiven our sins (Ephesians 1:7), we are delivered from wrath (Romans 5:9), and we are reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18)—as Jesus put it, we pass "from death to life" (John 5:24).

As dramatic as this change is, this is only the beginning. God's purposes for us don't end when we become Christians. Rather, conversion sets us on a glorious path in which God will continue to work out His gracious purposes in our lives. What are those purposes? How are they worked out? In this lesson, we will explore what God has for us as we "continue the journey" of the Christian life.

I. The Goal of Our Salvation: Holiness

Salvation is much more than simply deliverance from the penalty of sin. When God saves us, He makes us His own, and begins a renovation program: the process of making us more and more like our Lord Jesus—the process of making us holy.

A. The Barrier to Holiness: Sin

1. Sin not only deserves God's punishment; it mars God's good creation and obscures the display of His glory. He therefore desires to eradicate sin and its corrupting effects from His creation. For the believer, salvation is the beginning of the process of removing sin and its effects from our lives.

- a. At regeneration: The power of sin is broken and we are made alive in Christ.
- b. In justification: The penalty of sin is removed as we are declared righteous in Christ.
- c. In sanctification: The pollution of sin is progressively removed as we are made holy in Christ.

2. To be holy means to be set apart to God. This includes being set apart from all that is sinful and opposed to God. Holiness is God's goal for His people, and the Christian life involves the process of reaching this goal. The New Testament is full of words that describe this process: transforming, renewing, conforming, maturing, and growing. Although we will never reach perfection in this life, we are called to make every effort to live a holy life for the glory of God.

1 Peter 1:15-16: "...but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

1 Thessalonians 4:7: "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness."

B. The Model for Holiness: Jesus Christ

1. Jesus is our Lord, Savior, and example. We are to follow him in attitude and action. Paul called this being "imitators of God." John used the phrase, "we ought to walk as Jesus walked." Jesus said simply, "Follow me."

2. More remarkably, God Himself has committed to making us like Jesus. The ultimate goal in sanctification is conformity to the image of Christ.

Romans 8:29: "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."

C. The Motive for Holiness: Love for God

As we grow to know His love and appreciate what He has done for us, we will also grow in our desire to live a life that is pleasing to Him—as Paul says, “a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” (Ephesians 4:1).

1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”

II. The Battle for Holiness

While holiness is God’s will for us, this does not mean that the process of sanctification is easy. Given our own sinfulness and the sinful world in which we live, this process involves a battle—one that will require our energies for the rest of our lives.

A. The Power of Sin Is Broken

As unbelievers we were slaves to sin—we were unwilling and unable to resist sin. When we were redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we were freed from the power of sin—its ruling force in our lives was broken. We became willing and able to resist sin.

Romans 6:2, 6, 11: “How can we who died to sin still live in it?... We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

If we are dead to sin, why do we still sin?

B. The Presence of Sin Remains

Although sin has been deposed as the ruler of our lives, it has not been removed as a factor in our lives. We are free from its dominion, but not its presence and influence—our quest for holiness is not unopposed. The remaining influence of sin is called different things: “the flesh,” “the sinful nature,” or “indwelling sin.” The sinful world we live in and the devil who opposes us take advantage of this situation to tempt us into all manner of sin. Here is how Paul describes this battle:

Galatians 5:16-17: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

C. The Heart Is the Battlefield

1. Growth in holiness always comes through the pathway of the heart. The Holy Spirit doesn’t just change us outwardly by “dressing us up” with new behaviors; he transforms us from within.

2. The remaining sin in our hearts is deceptive, wicked, and in active rebellion against God.

Romans 7:8, 21: “But sin...produced in me all kinds of covetousness...when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things... who can understand it?”

3. The Bible teaches that our sinful behavior is not caused by other people or our circumstances, but by our own desires, cravings, longings, or lusts. Whatever rules our hearts determines what we do and say in response to people and situations.

James 1:14: “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”

James 4:1(-3): “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

4. We do not sin because our hearts are empty, wounded, broken, or in need of love, self-esteem, or significance. We sin because of sinful desires that have not been identified and put to death by God’s grace and our effort.

Romans 8:5, 8: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

*Given our own sinfulness,
and the sinful world in
which we live, sanctification
involves a battle.*

5. Remaining indwelling sin inclines our hearts to forget the gospel and to seek happiness, joy, peace, rest, security, and satisfaction outside of Christ. The heart's idolatrous pursuit of "life" outside of Christ leads to sinful behavior.

III. The Process of Holiness: Sanctification

A. Sanctification Defined

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of a believer. It is a progressive work in which we become more and more free from sin and like Christ. In short, our actual lives become increasingly conformed with our legal status before God.

1. **It is a lifelong process.** We don't become instantly perfect. Rather, we become progressively more holy as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
2. **There is discernible progress.** We actually do become more and more holy, overcoming various manifestations of sin (lying, pride, selfishness, etc.) becoming more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.
3. **It is a work of grace.** A common mistake of thinking is that we are saved by grace but that we then become holy by our own efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are justified by grace and we are sanctified by grace as well. Grace is necessary in both cases, and it is unmerited in both cases. The key difference is that in justification we are passive but in sanctification we actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit in receiving and responding to God's grace.

This cooperative activity is vividly portrayed by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:12-13: "Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

B. The Holy Spirit Works

The activity of the Holy Spirit precedes any action towards holiness on our part and makes our actions possible. Although we aren't always aware of his activity, if we are becoming more holy it is because he is at work, using the Word of God to progressively transform us into the image of Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Many make the mistake of thinking that we are saved by grace but that we then become holy by our own efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth.

2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

A common mistake of thinking is that we are saved by grace but that we then become holy by our own efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth.

C. We Work

Because the Holy Spirit is at work in us, we can therefore work; he makes it possible for us to live holy lives. However, we must never be passive in this process. We are responsible before God to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Colossians 1:29: "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Hebrews 12:14: "Strive...for the holiness."

IV. Weapons for the Battle

A. The Bible

Scripture exposes and judges the motives, intents, and desires of the heart. It provides truth—God's perspective on reality.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

B. Prayer

Prayer deepens our fellowship with God, and therefore brings a greater sensitivity to and conviction of sin. In prayer we can confess our sins, cultivate a hatred for sin, a love for godliness, and receive strength for our battle with sin.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

C. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit dwells in us so that we can say "no" to the passions and desires of our sinful nature. God has made us new creatures in Christ, and He is actively at work to transform our hearts.

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

D. Fellowship

Fellow Christians are a crucial part of this battle. Therefore, each Christian should be committed to receiving help from others. God designed the church so we can help each other on the journey of faith. If a church member is struggling to resist sin, he or she should seek a spiritual friend who can pray for and encourage them.

Hebrews 10:24: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works..."

In this church, the practice of sanctification is woven throughout all the facets of our church life. Each member is encouraged to practice the spiritual disciplines—especially Bible reading and prayer—and through them to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). An essential part of our small groups is the specific and personal application of God's word to our lives. Our emphasis on relationships provides countless contexts in which we join arms and help each other grow in godliness. The weekly preaching of God's word is a key means to our growth in godliness as a body. Through these avenues and more, we desire to live lives that increasingly reflect God's character to a lost world.





UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY: SOUND DOCTRINE

The Christian life is not meant to be an aimless wandering; it is not a journey without meaning. God intends for us to understand who He is, how we are to relate to Him, and how we are to understand our lives and the world in which we live. In short, we need God's take on reality. To this end, He has graciously given to us His word, the Bible.

The Scriptures are God's revelation of Himself and His purposes. The Bible is, therefore, essential to our lives, our spiritual well-being, our knowledge of God, and our growth in godliness. In this lesson, we will examine this most critical component to the Christian life. How is God's truth to function in our lives? Is it really important to grow in our understanding of doctrine? Isn't simply "loving Jesus" enough? We must answer such questions before we will be prepared to truly "understand the journey" to which God has called us.

I. What Is Doctrine?

Before we look at the importance of doctrine, perhaps it will be helpful to understand what we mean by "doctrine." We can look at this in two distinct ways.

A. The Storyline of the Bible

The Bible is not simply a mixed bag of books and ideas that bear no particular relationship to each other. The Bible tells a story: the story of God and His relationship to His creation in general, and to humanity in particular. We must understand this story in order to truly understand God, ourselves, history, and the future.

Some of the main facets of the Bible's "plot-line" provide for us a general overview of God and His purposes in the world:

1. Creation: The Bible tells us that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This opening statement of the Bible implies some significant truths.

a. The world, and history itself, have meaning. They came about by God's will and proceed in accordance with His will.

Psalm 33:11: "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."

b. As Creator, God has authority over His creation. He rules it according to His purposes, and all creation, including humanity, owes its existence and allegiance to Him.

2. The Fall: Though created to live in communion with and dependence upon God, mankind rejected God's loving and benevolent rule and sought to live independently from God, doubting His word and spurning His commands (Genesis 3).

a. This rebellion introduced sin into the world, and with it death (spiritual and physical), a break in fellowship with God, physical hardship and suffering, and turmoil in human relationships.

Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..."

b. The fall brought with it judgment. Because God is holy, He must not only separate Himself from sin but He must also punish all sin.

3. The plan of redemption: God is not only holy, but loving and merciful. Despite mankind's alienation from Him and the necessity to punish evil, God sets out to redeem man from sin and to restore man to fellowship with Himself. The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3 on, unfolds this history of God's redemptive purposes. Here are some of the "highlights" of this wonderful story:

- a. God chooses Abraham, reveals Himself to Him, and tells him that He will have a special relationship with Abraham and his descendants. In addition, all the nations of the earth will receive God's blessing through him (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18).
- b. The story of Israel traces the outworking of this plan as God gathers from Abraham's descendants a people for Himself, who would know Him, and who would make Him known in the world.
- c. Israel's history reaches a climax when, from this chosen people comes a Savior—Jesus Christ—in whom all of God's promises of forgiveness, redemption, and restored communion with God are realized.
- d. The New Testament tells the story of the accomplishment of God's saving purposes through Jesus' life and death, the realization through the church of God's plan to have a people for Himself, and the extension of God's saving plan throughout the earth through the preaching of the gospel. It also foretells the consummation of all things when Christ will return to gather his people, to judge the nations, and to restore all things back under the rule of God.

B. The Teachings of the Bible

In addition to the flow of Scripture's story, the Bible contains all that we need to know about God in order to know Him and live a life pleasing to Him. All that the Bible teaches about various topics we call "doctrine."

1. **When we endeavor to understand what the Bible teaches about any subject, we are pursuing doctrine.**
2. **The study of doctrine and study of the Bible are not opposed;** Bible study should result in sound doctrine. When some react negatively to the idea of "sound doctrine," it would seem they are misunderstanding the concept; the only alternative is "unsound doctrine!"

*When we endeavor to understand what the Bible teaches
about any subject, we are pursuing doctrine.*

II. Why Do We Need Doctrine?

Hopefully what we mean when we speak of "doctrine" is clear: what the Bible teaches. But this doesn't answer the question of whether we need to know doctrine—"Isn't loving God enough?" "Isn't having Jesus enough?" Why do we as Christians need to give ourselves to the study of God's word?

A. The Necessity of Doctrine

1. **We cannot truly love God without having true knowledge about God.**

Mark 12:28-30: "And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

- a. True love for God involves the whole person. There is an unmistakable inclusion—if not emphasis—on loving God with our minds—with what we think, our values, our opinions, our reasoning, with our view of God and ourselves and the world.
- b. We simply cannot love what we do not know.

B. The Purpose of Sound Doctrine

1. **Sound doctrine provides a right understanding of God's person and character.**

The only way for us to know God is for Him to reveal Himself to us. The only place He does this in such a way that we can have a relationship with Him is in His word (see 2 Timothy 3:10-17).

2. Sound doctrine enables us to live lives worthy of our Savior.

Colossians 1:9-10: "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

3. Sound doctrine produces stability in the Christian life.

Ephesians 4:13-14: "...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..."

4. Sound doctrine protects us against false doctrine.

Ephesians 4:13-14: "...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."

5. Sound doctrine produces in us true discernment.

Philippians 1:9-10: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent..."

6. Sound doctrine strengthens the church.

Ephesians 4:15-16: "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."

III. How Is a Commitment to Sound Doctrine Expressed in This Church?

We seek to express our commitment to sound doctrine in a variety of ways.

A. A Commitment to the Authority of God's Word

1. We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written word of God; that they are the only infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind; that Scripture in the original manuscripts is fully inspired by God and free from error in all it teaches.

2. The Scriptures are the final authority for all that we do as individuals and as a church.

B. A Commitment to the Preaching of God's Word

Preaching is the unique means by which God's word is brought effectively to the assembled congregation.

2 Timothy 4:1-2: "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."

"Nothing is more important for the life and growth, health and depth of the contemporary church than a recovery of serious biblical preaching." —John Stott

C. A Commitment to the Singing of Truth from God's Word

Ephesians 5:18-20: "...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

D. A Commitment to Apply God's Word through Private Reading, Study and Meditation

The Bible is God's self-revelation to man. In it we learn what God is like and how we are to respond to Him. There is no more important activity for the Christian than reading and meditating upon the word of God.

See Psalm 119.

E. A Commitment to Provide Biblical Resources

1. **Recommended Books to Read:** www.gracebiblelorton.com/books
2. **Books (at cost)** in the Resource Room in the church office
3. **Sermon audio** available online: www.gracebiblelorton.com/sermons
4. **Grace website:** www.gracebiblelorton.com
5. **Grace Blog:** www.gracebiblelorton.com/grace-blog
6. **Appendix B:** Confession of Faith





TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY: THE LOCAL CHURCH

I. Why Is the Church Important?

When it comes to the Christian life, the question of the church's importance is perhaps one that is too often overlooked. 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 the body of Christ and encouragement to be faithful as we play our part in it.

In this lesson, we will explore the critical role that the local church plays in God's glorious purposes, as well as the overall vision of this particular local church. We will find that our relationships with other believers are a tremendous means of blessing, both for ourselves and others. God never meant for us to live the Christian life alone. Instead, He gives us the marvelous privilege of traveling on this journey together.

A. The Ultimate Purpose of the Church Is the Glory of God

The Church universal and its local expressions are that which Christ came and died for. It's this people that Christ calls his bride (Rev. 19:7). It's this bride clothed in the righteousness of Christ, whose purpose is to give glory and honor and praise to her Groom (e.g. Col. 3:16; Eph. 1:12, 5:16-19). A church brings glory to God as it grows toward maturity through the process of edification, a maturity that is characterized by faith, hope and love, which in turn enables the church to be a dynamic witness in the world.

B. The Church's Role Is Exclusive

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.

Matthew 16:18: "...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

1 Timothy 3:15: "...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth."

C. Our True Nature as the Church, and as Christians, Is Corporate

Throughout the history of redemption, God has been acting to save a people, not a disconnected group of isolated individuals.

1 Peter 2:9-10: "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."

It is a key assumption of New Testament teaching that the Christian life is to be lived out in relationship with other believers in the context of the local church. Although we enter into a relationship with God as individuals, we nevertheless enter into something greater than our own individuality: the church—the community of God's people.

II. 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 universal Church"? Isn't my relationship with Jesus all that really matters? Such questions are common, and not altogether surprising given our individualistic culture and natural tendency toward independence.

However, the Scriptures make 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

The primary New Testament metaphors for the church – body (1 Corinthians 12:27), temple (Ephesians 2:21), household (1 Timothy 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28) – have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals joined together into a single entity.

B. Church Membership Is Vital to Our Spiritual Health and Growth

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

Ephesians 4:15-16: "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."

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

C. Church Membership Is Sharing Life Together

The biblical picture of the church can best be described as community: a group of people, joined by a common life, united by common values and a common purpose, and devoted to living out this life together within the larger society. This is the type of church life to which God calls us—a life that shines as a testimony to His work in us. His intention for our lives together is more than simply attending the same Sunday meetings and believing the same doctrines.

Acts 2:42-47: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people."

III. Fellowship: The Foundation of Our Relationship

Because the Holy Spirit has joined us together as a community, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don't simply attend the same service, or enjoy the same interests—we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. The New Testament characterizes our relationships with each other by the word fellowship.

A. What Is Fellowship?

The word often translated fellowship in the New Testament (koinonia—cf. Acts 2:42) is also rendered participation, partnership, and communion. The word expresses the idea of sharing something in common, or joining a mutual endeavor (often with sacrifice involved).

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

1. With God: Biblical writers took up this word to describe the relationship believers have with God through Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

2. With others: It was also extended to describe the relationship believers have with each other.

1 John 1:3: "...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

3. A unique bond: Our fellowship with God is what makes our fellowship with other believers unique. The richness Christians experience in their relationships with one another is human relationship at the deepest level possible. Biblical

fellowship is not merely "socializing"—it is sharing our common life in Christ: life that is rich, enduring, and eternal.

B. The Biblical Example of Fellowship

The Bible describes fellowship in concrete terms as actions we do with or for "one another." Here is a sampling:

1. **Love one another** (John 13:34; 15:17; Romans 13:8)
2. **Pray for one another** (Ephesians 6:18)
3. **Carry one another's burdens** (Galatians 6:2)
4. **Encourage one another** (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
5. **Build up one another** (Romans 14:19)
6. **Stir up one another to love and good works** (Hebrews 10:24)
7. **Serve one another** (Galatians 5:13)

We must recognize our responsibilities as members of the body and position ourselves to serve others. In short, we must give ourselves to purposeful involvement in each others' lives.

See Appendix D: Life in the Body of Christ.

IV. The Fruit of Our Fellowship

Genuine fellowship profoundly enriches our relationships within the church.

A. Growing in Godliness

Sanctification is a group project. We simply cannot make the same progress in isolation that we can make in community with other believers.

1 We need the consistent encouragement of others. Consistent, intentional, and specific encouragement is to be a mark of those who serve "the God of encouragement" (Romans 15:5).

1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

2. We need others to help us resist sin and to strengthen our resolve for godliness.

Hebrews 3:13: "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."

B. Providing Mutual Care

We live in a fallen world, and the effects of sin—our own and others—are all around us: pain, sorrow, sickness, death. God has promised to care for us, and much of His care comes to us through other believers. Indeed, Christians are to be distinguished by their sacrificial love for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:24-26: "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."

C. Benefiting from the Diversity of Gifts

God has designed us to be interdependent upon one another; therefore, He has not given one person all the necessary gifts for the building up of the church. Rather, because Christ's Church is a body, its various parts minister to each other through the power, grace, and gifts given by the Holy Spirit, so that each believer is gifted to minister to others for the mutual building up of and edification of the whole body.

Ephesians 4:16: "...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."

1 Corinthians 12:7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

V. A Means of Our Fellowship: Home Group

One of the primary ways we build relationships and cultivate fellowship with each other here is through Home Groups. While we are joined to all believers in the local church, Home Groups allow us to relate more deeply with a small number of people. An integral part of our church's ministry since its founding, Home Groups provide an important context for accomplishing a number of biblical priorities.

A. The Purpose of Home Groups

- 1. Application of God's word to our lives.** Merely hearing God's word is insufficient; we must apply it to our lives for there to be fruit. Home Groups enable us to do this together. We seek to apply the Bible's teaching, review Sunday messages, discuss Christian books, and use a variety of other resources with the intention of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2. Pursuit of biblical fellowship.** Genuine fellowship isn't practical in a large crowd. Home Groups provide a place where we can build intimate relationships, care for one another, and help each other grow in our relationship with God. God has made us dependent on each other, and Home Groups also provide a context where we can minister to each other with the gifts that God has given us. Meetings often include times of prayer for one another and opportunities for individuals to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of others.

B. Participation in Home Groups

Membership in this church assumes active involvement in a Home Group. DISCOVER participants are encouraged to visit Home Groups as well as ask questions about this during the class. Each person will be placed in a Home Group after meeting with a pastor and finalizing his or her membership. Each member is important to the group, and should seek to contribute to the group's health and success. We each have the responsibility to:

- 1. Attend.** We're much more likely to benefit if we are actually present!
- 2. Participate.** Come ready to contribute, serve, share, and open yourself to others. When the group has an assignment, diligently complete it. Both you and others will benefit from your participation.

VI. The Church: God's Glory Manifested

Our main concern is not whether you become part of our church, but that you become a part of a church. Ultimately, this is not an issue of our personal preference or convenience, but of the glory of God. We exist for His glory, and Scripture is clear that God desires to make His glory known through the church. This is why the church—the gathering of God's redeemed—is so important to Him.

As we see in the New Testament, this life is one that is to be shared with others. The church—with all its imperfections—is to be a foretaste of our fellowship with the saints in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24). May this amazing privilege be our ongoing experience as we "continue the journey together."

Also see Appendices A and E: Church Covenant and Restoration Policy.





PARTICIPATING IN THE JOURNEY: SERVANTHOOD & STEWARDSHIP

One of the realities of Christian existence is that we now belong to Another (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). All that we are and all that we have now belong to God. Of course, everything that we are and have—our personality, intellect, gifts, abilities, opportunities, and possessions—has been given to us by God anyway (1 Corinthians 4:7)! Conversion simply gives the believer the opportunity to offer all of this back to God for His glory and for our eternal good.

A common metaphor in Jesus' parables is that of the servant—we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are "Well done, good and faithful servant." Such is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion—it is a way of life. The Christian journey is not one of observation, but participation. In this lesson, we will explore two of the primary ways we are called to participate in this journey: through servanthood and stewardship (the faithful use of our resources) within the context of the local church.

I. Servanthood

A. The Christian's Call to Serve

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the express purposes of our salvation is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve God: "...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).

Serving is therefore a God-given expectation of every Christian. But it is much more than merely a duty; what higher privilege is there than to give one's life in glad service to our gracious, sovereign God who saved us?

Since our service to God is closely connected to our salvation by God, we begin our exploration of servanthood with the greatest servant of all: Jesus Christ.

1. Servanthood is modeled by Jesus' example.

Although Jesus was worthy of the worship and service of all creatures, he humbled himself as a servant and modeled a lifestyle of servanthood for all who would follow him.

Philippians 2:5-8: "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 made himself nothing, 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."

John 13:14-17: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

2. Servanthood is mandated by Jesus' call.

While we can do nothing to earn our salvation, our salvation nevertheless ushers us into a life of following our Master, relinquishing our prerogatives and rights.

Mark 10:43-45: "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."

3. Servanthood is motivated by Jesus' sacrifice.

At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross. Because we stand forgiven, we are set free to find joy in knowing and serving God. Because the Spirit indwells us, we find we have fresh affections for God and a new desire to glorify God. We do not serve God in order to be forgiven or to gain God's favor, but because we have been forgiven and have received God's favor as a gift. Gratitude and joy provide the fuel for the believer's service to God and others.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross. Because we stand forgiven, we are set free to find joy in knowing and serving God

B. The Marks of Christian Service

The grace of God expressed through the cross of Christ provides the primary basis for our service to God. When this is the case, our servanthood will be characterized by certain qualities that both provide godly motivation for service and assure that our service is glorifying and pleasing to God.

1. Christian service is God-centered. When we serve other people, whether they be fellow Christians in the local church or non-believers in our lives, we are actually rendering service to God Himself.

Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

2. Christian service is others-focused. When serving is motivated by grace, it will not be self-serving. Rather, it will be characterized by an authentic desire to glorify God and to meet the needs of others.

Galatians 5:13: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

3. Christian service is characterized by humility. True servanthood adopts a posture that others are more important than self. A servant doesn't demand recognition or dictate how he is to serve, but rather takes simple delight in being used by God to meet the needs of others.

Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

4. Christian service is empowered by the Spirit of God. The believer not only labors for God, but by the power God provides. Dependence upon God for motivation, strength, and effectiveness in serving assures that God receives the glory for our service. God gives each believer spiritual gifts that motivate and empower our service for His glory and others' good.

1 Peter 4:10-11: "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."

See also 1 Corinthians 12:7.

C. Giving Expression to Servanthood in Our Church Family

An important aspect of membership here is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others. Involvement in service typically takes one of two forms:

1. Spontaneous ministry opportunities: We all have numerous opportunities provided to us by God to serve Him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and in cultivating the heart of a servant.

2. Structured ministries of the church: These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as Home Groups, Women's Ministry, or the Children's Ministry. These and other ministries of the church provide

concrete opportunities for service that meet specific needs and spur us on in building relationships and growing in accountability.

II. Stewardship

Stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. An important part of following Christ is the use of our material resources for God's purposes and to meet the needs of others. In fact, Scripture is clear that an authentic relationship with Christ will find expression in the faithful use of our resources for his purposes. For the remainder of this lesson, we will examine a second important means of participation in the Christian journey: the use of our money and possessions for the glory of God, the work of His church, and the well-being of others.

A. The Reality of Stewardship

The faithful use of our resources begins with a stark realization: God owns everything! All that we have comes from Him, and therefore we don't really own anything; we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—over things that belong to God.

Psalm 50:10-12: "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."

B. The Purpose of Stewardship

In addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of His kingdom through the local church.

Throughout salvation history, God has called His people to support His work through giving.

1. 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).

2. In the New Testament, giving to support the work of the church remained an expectation of believers. In fact, the financial support of the New Testament church is likened to the support of the temple in the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 9:13-14).

a. Giving to support the needs of individuals.

Acts 4:34-35: "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."

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

1 Corinthians 9:13-14: "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."

c. Giving to support the extension of the gospel.

Philippians 4:15-16: "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."

All that we have comes from him, and therefore we don't really own anything; we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—over things that belong to God.

C. The Character of Stewardship

The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Moreover, what we actually do with our money reveals where our heart truly is (Matthew 6:21). Materialism, selfishness, greed,

hoarding, and anxiety over money—all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God—by such things we confess that God, not our possessions, is the source of our life.

Luke 16:11-13: "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Here is a sampling of the motives and attitudes Scripture commands in the area of giving:

1. Giving is to be generous, not stingy.

2 Corinthians 9:6: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

2. Giving is to be enthusiastic, not grudging.

2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

3. Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard.

2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (cf. Acts 11:29).

Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, and anxiety over money—all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money.

4. Giving is to be discreet, not showy.

Matthew 6:1-4: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

5. Giving is to be with faith, not anxiety.

Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

III. The Privilege of Participation

One of the great tragedies in much of western Christianity is the misconception that "church" is an ornate building or a service to be attended, rather than the community of God's people saved by His grace. By definition, then, to be a member of the church is to be a participant in the life of God, with the people of God, made possible by the grace of God. Viewed in this light, our participation in the life of the church is not an option, or the prerogative of a privileged few, but the call and responsibility of every person redeemed through the work of Christ on the cross. Having been purchased by God, we have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and have to Him for His glory.





CARE ALONG THE JOURNEY: ELDERS & DEACONS

We have explored how the journey of the Christian life is not to be merely an individual one, but a journey we undertake with others. We are not self-sufficient, independent creatures, but we need the help and blessing that comes from relationships with other believers in the context of the local church. In addition to the normal relationships with others in the church, God provides another essential means of grace for our lives: the leadership of the church. The leadership team of Grace Bible Church is composed of the Elders. The church is also gifted with deacons who, under the direction and oversight of the Elders, seek to attend to the ministry needs of our local church.

To enable the building of His church and the extension of the gospel, God has appointed leaders within the local church. God's desire is for churches to experience the maturity, stability, and fruitfulness that result when leadership and care are extended by gifted leaders with proven character. In this lesson, we will explore the biblical mandate for, and strategic importance of, leadership—God's provision for all of us to experience "care along the journey."

I. The Biblical Basis for Pastoral Ministry

A. Clarifying the Terms

The New Testament uses three main terms to speak of what we typically call a "pastor:" elder (presbyteros-Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:17), overseer/bishop (episkopos-1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7), and pastor (poimen-Ephesians 4:11¹). Scholars have long agreed that these terms, instead of indicating separate offices, actually give us three different facets of the same office:

1. Elder indicates the necessity of spiritual maturity.
2. Overseer/bishop indicates the role of oversight.
3. Pastor indicates the role of care.

B. How We Deploy the Terms at GBC

Here at Grace Bible Church we have both vocational (paid) and non-vocational or lay (unpaid) elders. Again, the terms for elder, pastor, bishop, and overseer are used interchangeably in the Bible, but for the sake of differentiating between vocational and lay, we use the term "pastor" to refer to those elders who are paid staff, while affirming that the Elder Board together shepherds the congregation.

C. Structure of the Elder Board

According to the pattern of the New Testament (e.g. Acts 14:23, 20:17; 1 Tim. 4:14; Titus 1:5), Grace is shepherded by a plurality of elders. Christ Jesus alone is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14); the church belongs to him. Christ Jesus alone is the "great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), elders are assigned by him to care for his people, and will give an account to him for how well they handle the care that has been entrusted to them (Heb. 12:17).

II. The Characteristics of a Pastor/Elder

The Scriptures give us clear guidelines for viewing pastors/elders and for determining what pastors are to be like. These markers provide for us both perspective (to view this through God's eyes) and protection (from cultural distortion).

¹ The verb from the word "Pas" appears in 1 Peter 5:2.

A. A Gift from God to the Church

Unlike gifts such as serving, hospitality and mercy, some gifts God gives to the church are actually people—the leaders God gives to serve the church. An elder is a man given by God (Eph. 4:11ff.) to the church to shepherd, oversee and govern the congregation. This is why we do not vote on elders: we are not electing someone to an office. We are recognizing and affirming the work of God in the life of the man.

Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-14: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors 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."

B. A Model for the Church

Elders are to lead lives of integrity, faithfully modeling biblical standards for the Christian life. Indeed, all of the biblical qualifications for an elder except one deal with character. Elders are certainly not sinless, but there should be the consistent display of these characteristics in their lives.

1 Timothy 3:1-7: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

Elders in this local church take this responsibility serious, therefore they pursue accountability with each other and in the Home Groups that they participate in.

C. Consistent with God's Design for the Church

In addition to the requirement of godly character, Scripture also teaches that leadership in the church is to be exercised in a primary way by men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). This requirement, far from being an outmoded, culturally-conditioned standard, instead reflects the unique and complementary roles men and women have as part of the created order.

We seek to affirm and apply all that Scripture teaches about manhood and womanhood. Indeed, the biblical vision of manhood and womanhood is a glorious one! Both men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, men and women are equal in value and dignity. We have equal worth before God, equal access to Christ and the blessings of salvation (Galatians 3:28; Acts 2:17-18), and we are equally valued members of the body of Christ. This Scriptural vision leaves no room for feelings of superiority or inferiority, for pride or discouragement, on the basis of gender.

Scripture is also clear that men and women have different—but equally valuable—roles in the home and in the church. All members of the body of Christ are gifted by God and are essential to the health of the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-26). However, Scripture restricts the primary governing and teaching roles in the church to men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). Because we desire Scripture to govern our practice, the elders of this church are all men. The elders count it an unspeakable privilege to care for and equip all the members of our church—both men and women—to fulfill their God-given callings and to bear fruit for His glory and for the good of the church.

D. Recognized by His Actions within the Church

Another aspect in identifying an elder is that he is already "eldering." He does not start shepherding after being affirmed into office, he is already shepherding because he is an elder; that is who God has made him to be.

Since God gives leadership to the church, it is the responsibility of the church—and especially the church's leaders—to recognize and acknowledge this leadership. When we use biblical criteria to assess leadership in the church, we can be confident that our leaders are called by God and given to the church to lead us.

III. The Role of a Pastor/Elder

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 an elder 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:

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

1 Peter 5:2: "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight..."

1 Timothy 3:4-5: "[An elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?"

Romans 12:6, 8: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:...the one who leads, with zeal."

B. Nourish the Church

God has ordained His word as the primary instrument for the nourishment and strengthening of His church, and He charges pastors/elders 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.

1 Timothy 4:6: "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" (NASB).

2 Timothy 4:1-2: "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."

C. Equip the Church

The elder 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!

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

D. Protect the Church

As shepherds of God's people, pastors/elders 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. Elders protect the church in a variety of ways:

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

1 Timothy 4:6: "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" (NASB).

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

Acts 20:28-31: "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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears."

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.

Matthew 18:15-17: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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."

E. Serve the Church

Although pastors/elders 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.

Mark 10:43-45: "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."

1 Peter 5:2-3: "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."

IV. The Biblical Response of the Church Towards Their Elders

A. Actively Identify Your Designated Place of Involvement

The New Testament is clear that each Christian is allotted by God to a specific local church and to the eldership of that church. This divine assignment results in numerous benefits:

- 1. It helps to ensure that believers are properly cared for.**
- 2. It provides an explicit context in which believers are to serve others.**
- 3. It helps leaders to identify those for whom they are accountable before God.**
- 4. It creates an accountability arrangement** in which unrepentant believers can be cared for biblically and redemptively.

Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

B. Exercise the Responsibilities of Membership

At our church, there are certain expectations of members, which are simply expressions of a biblical commitment to a particular local church. It would be natural to expect that any member who is pursuing his or her relationship with God and believes that God has called him or her to this church will fulfill these expectations:

- 1. Support of the church's Statement of Faith.**
- 2. Consistent participation in the Sunday morning service.**
- 3. Consistent participation in a Home Group.**
- 4. Regular involvement in serving.**
- 5. Regular financial support of the church.**
- 6. Willingness to support and follow the leadership of the church.**
- 7. A commitment to living by God's word and to growing in godliness.**

C. Maintain a Biblical Attitude Toward Your Leaders

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. By what should our attitudes be characterized?

- 1. A faith-filled submission.**

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. 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.

Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

2. A God-honoring appreciation.

The appeal to honor leaders can seem self-serving. Biblically, though, honor is an expression of humility and integrity. 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. There exists an unfortunate confusion 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.

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

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."

D. Support Your Leaders in Their Labors

The apostle John voiced a sentiment which resonates in the heart of every pastor: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4). In addition to passionately pursuing God, believers can support the labors of their elders in many ways. For example:

1. Joyfully participating in the life of the church.
2. Praying for your elders.
3. Refusing to listen to slander or false accusation against your elders (1 Timothy 5:19).

V. The Blessings of Pastor/Elder Leadership

Biblically, ungodly leadership (or the absence of leadership) is viewed as an expression of God's judgment, and godly leadership as an expression of blessing (e.g., Isaiah 3:1-5). The same is true in the church: God appoints leaders for the purpose of bringing about His intentions for the church, including health, growth, stability, and maturity.

Ultimately, the church's leaders are a primary means by which God's own care for His people is expressed. Pastors/elders are merely under-shepherds, laboring on behalf of the Chief Shepherd—Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2, 4). As a famous hymn states, the journey of the Christian life is fraught with "many dangers, toils, and snares." Leadership in the church helps provide "care along the journey," that we might not only have safe passage, but grow into the fullness of God's purposes for the church, for His glory.

VI. The Biblical Basis for Diaconate (Deacon) Ministry

Clarifying the term: The New Testament term for deacon is a translation of the Greek word diakonos, which is the ordinary word for "servant" when it is used in contexts not dealing with church officers. Deacons are clearly mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and are more extensively discussed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons, under the direction and oversight of the elders, seek to attend to the ministry needs of our local church. This service enables the elders to devote themselves "to prayer and to the teaching of the word" (Acts 6:4).

VII. The Characteristics of a Deacon

The Scripture gives us clear guidelines for viewing the character of deacons but not as clear on determining the specific function. The two primary distinguishing marks between that of an elder and that of a deacon are deacons do not have ruling authority over the church and are not required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine.

A. Another Gift from God to the Church and Elders

One thing seems clear from Scripture regarding the purpose of deacons: attending to the ministry needs of the local church, under the oversight and authority of the elders, so to free them up to attend to their primary calling from God—"prayer and to the ministry of the word" (see Acts 6:1-7).

B. Another Model for the Church

Deacons are to lead lives of integrity, faithfully modeling biblical standards for the Christian life. Indeed, all of the biblical qualifications for a deacon deal with character. Deacons are certainly not sinless, but there should be the consistent display of these characteristics in their lives.

1 Timothy 3:8-13: "Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

C. Recognized by His Actions Within the Church

Similarly to that of an elder, another aspect beyond the character of the person, a deacon is one who is already "deaconing". He does not start to serve after being affirmed into office, but he is someone who is already serving in a capacity.

Since God gives deacons to the church, it is the responsibility of the church—and especially the church's elders—to recognize and acknowledge these men. When we use biblical criteria to assess deacons in the church, we can be confident that these men are called by God and given to the church to serve in this unique capacity.

VIII. The Role of a Deacon

The role of a deacon is to attend to the ministry needs of the local church, thereby enabling the elders to elder.

We have to remember that Acts 6:1-7 is descriptive not prescriptive, so when it comes to the exact duties of a deacon there is latitude for churches to deploy deacons into varied serving roles. Deacons were called into service because there was a need within the church; and desiring to meet the need effectively and to remain focused on their primary task of prayer and ministry of the word, elders appointed deacons to serve. Therefore a deacon's main function will always be the same: taking care of whatever ministry needs there are within a particular local church that could cause the elders to not be able to devote their time to their main task. A deacon is thereby not only serving the people, but also serving the elders by enabling them to fulfill their God-given responsibilities.

See Appendix C: Our Constitution.





OTHERS ON THE JOURNEY: EVANGELISM & GLOBAL MISSIONS

We've looked at many essential topics that relate to our relationship with God and with other believers in the context of the local church. However, our study wouldn't be complete without giving attention to a critical component of the Christian life: the mandate from our Lord to reach others with the gospel.

Our relationship with God was never intended to be merely a private journey concerned only with one's personal beliefs. On the contrary, those who have been reconciled to God through the work of Christ by definition become "ambassadors for God" in sharing the gospel with others (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The people of God, the church, gather together for edification and then scatter for evangelism.

One of the songs of Revelation proclaims that Christ's death ransomed people for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelations 5:9). As we turn our attention to the church's mission to glorify God through the proclamation of the gospel throughout the earth, we will see that each of us has the great privilege and responsibility of sharing the gospel with others, demonstrating its reality in our lives, and participating in the mission of the local church.

I. Church with a Mission

We want to avoid the mistake of viewing church life as simply a routine to fulfill, or viewing ourselves as a static gathering of believers. From the very beginning, God's people had, at the core of their identity, an element of mission and the goal of expansion.

A. The Plan Commenced: God's Covenant with Abraham

When God revealed Himself to Abraham, He promised not only to bless Abraham, but to in turn make him and his descendants a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

B. The Plan Continued: The Great Commission

After Jesus accomplished his atoning work on the cross, he gave his followers a mandate to proclaim the gospel to all the nations; and this mandate was and is really a charge to all of those who have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that God will gather His people to Himself, and thus fulfill His original promise to Abraham to bless "all the nations."

Matthew 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.'"

C. The Plan Completed: The Heavenly Throng

We see the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan and Jesus' commission in the book of Revelation, which pictures people from all over the earth giving glory to God and to the Lamb of God who died for them. The Bible is clear that God's intention to bring glory to His name by gathering a people to Himself will surely reach its intended goal.

Revelation 7:9-10: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

II. People with a Message: Evangelism

Since every Christian has personally experienced the grace of God through the gospel, each of us has a part to play in this glorious commission as we testify to the salvation God offers through the gospel.

A. The Participants in Evangelism: Every Christian!

The work of evangelism is essentially that of bearing witness—each of us is called to testify to what God has done for us through the gospel. Each of us has been empowered by God, and each of us has his or her own story to tell of God's amazing grace to us through the cross.

Acts 1:8: "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."

The work of evangelism is essentially that of bearing witness—each of us is called to testify to what God has done for us through the gospel.

1 Peter 3:15-16: "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..."

B. The Substance of Evangelism: The Gospel

We aren't merely calling others to live a moral life, asking them simply to "believe in God," or trying to convince them that Christians are "nice people."

Salvation comes only through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. As the Apostle Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

The gospel is the "Good News" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Communicating the gospel faithfully will help to preserve its power and protect us from distorting its truth.

C. The Method of Our Evangelism: Declaration and Demonstration

1. Declaration: Telling the Good News.

Since the gospel is, by definition, "Good News," evangelism always involves the sharing of this news. Every Christian is called to be an ambassador of the gospel, and we seek to equip each of our members to share the gospel accurately, joyfully, and faithfully.

The work of evangelism is essentially that of bearing witness—each of us is called to testify to what God has done for us through the gospel.

Romans 10:14-15: "But how are they to 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? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

2. Demonstration: Living the Good News.

In addition to proclaiming the gospel, Christians are to testify to the reality of the gospel by the way they live. The Bible describes believers as "...his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). These good works include acts of mercy and love that express God's love to people and give credibility to the message we proclaim.

This demonstration of the gospel takes place in countless, daily ways through the lives of individuals and families as they live in our community. We are also seeking to facilitate this demonstration through various organized ministries now and in the days to come, through which our members can use their gifts to care for others and testify to the gospel.

Matthew 5:13-16: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

III. The Context of Our Mission

A. Locally

We encourage each of our members to bear witness to Jesus Christ and share the gospel in the network of relationships He provides to us through personal evangelism. These "fields of harvest" (see Matthew 9:38) include our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, classmates—anyone whom God has sovereignly placed in our lives. We also seek to do a stateside mission trip every-other-year where we encourage as many people as possible to be involved either directly in going or indirectly in prayer and/or financial support.

B. Globally

We believe from the Bible's example that the primary way of advancing the gospel is through the planting of local churches. Therefore our heart's desire is to send out missionaries to establish or to assist in establishing churches among the least-reached people of the world.

One of the ways we seek to fulfill this is through our partnership with four other Northern Virginia Churches (Immanuel Bible, Cherrydale Baptist, Chantilly Bible, and Reston Bible), who are similarly committed to the evangelical faith and to spreading God's glory to the nations. The goal of this Missions Consortium is to send out a missionary or a missionary couple from one of our five churches each year; a goal that has been met every year since the inception of the Missions Consortium in the mid-90's. These missionaries are supported by the Missions Consortium up to 80% of their required support levels, which makes them a true extension of us as their roots are here, we know them well, and they spend their furloughs being ministered to and serving alongside of us. We also seek to do an overseas mission trip every-other-year where we seek to encourage the missionaries that we support through assisting them in their efforts (this is done only in countries that it is safe to evangelize in).

See Appendix F: Theology of Missions.





NEXT STEPS: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DISCOVER

We are so grateful that you have joined us for this "journey" of discovering Grace Bible Church. We hope this course has been encouraging and informative as you seek to determine God's will for your life, especially with regard to your involvement in a specific local church. What we have said before bears repeating: although we do hope that you will find in Grace a church home where you can thrive, our main burden 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 Jesus, and serve in ways that glorify God the Father.

Once you have completed the DISCOVER course and would like to become a member of Grace Bible Church, the process is a simple one with a few straightforward steps:

- 1. A clear testimony of personal faith in Jesus Christ.**
- 2. Support of the church's Confession of Faith (see Appendix B).**
- 3. Baptism as a believer (if not already done).**
- 4. Meet with one of the pastors/elders to discuss church membership.**
- 5. Signing the Church Covenant (see Appendix A).**

Upon completion of these requirements, you will be welcomed into membership with other new members during a Sunday morning service. We welcome new members into the church on a regular basis and consider these special Sundays significant days in the life of our church.

If there are any remaining questions, please do not hesitate to ask. We want to do all we can to serve you as you consider the very important decision of church involvement. Whatever decision you make, we hope your time here has increased your love for the Lord and has strengthened you to "continue the journey" as you seek to glorify God, cherish the Savior, and serve his purposes in the context of the local church. May God's richest blessings be upon you!



APPENDIX A:

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH COVENANT

OUR COMMITMENTS TO ONE ANOTHER IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

Believing that the Church of Jesus Christ is the very Household of God on earth; and

Believing that Jesus Christ is the Foundation, Chief Cornerstone, and Master Builder of His Church; and

Believing that the only means authorized by Christ for carrying out His Great Commission is His Church; and

Believing that from apostolic times, Christians gathered together in local assemblies (churches) for worship, instruction, fellowship, and expression of faith; and

Believing that these churches were made up of specific, baptized, professing disciples of Jesus Christ; and

Believing that there is no way of carrying out the many Body Life (one-another) commandments of the New Testament short of a recognizable, mutually accountable body of such professing disciples of Jesus Christ; and

Having believed in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and

Having publicly professed our faith through believer's baptism;

We willingly and joyfully enter into covenant with others and with God in becoming and being His church in our location (Grace Bible Church) for His glory.

We have read the Grace Bible Church Confession of Faith and Restoration Policy, and are in agreement with both documents.

We understand that a church is a visible community of faith, and we desire to commit ourselves to any and all others who voluntarily, in Christian liberty, join themselves to the Body of Christ as it is represented in this local assembly.

We understand that a church's leadership is accountable to God for the spiritual welfare of each person in their "flock" and that, to fulfill their responsibilities, the leadership must know for whom they are responsible and who willingly and voluntarily desire such oversight.

We understand that joining ourselves to this assembly means that we are stating publicly our desire to follow Christ as His disciple (Matthew 28:18-20) and to fulfill the "one-another" principles of the New Testament through serving within this body of believers.

Name (print): _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (print): _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Elder (as witness): _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B:

CONFESSION OF FAITH

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF KEY DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE

The Scriptures & Revelation

All that now needs to be known of God, Man, and Salvation has been revealed in God's Word, the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Bible. These documents have come to us preserved by the Spirit as fully faithful representations of the original manuscripts, which were God-breathed, and although penned by human authors, are without error in all areas they address.

These Scriptures are self-authenticating, and not dependent upon men or tradition for their authority. Rather, they are authored by God, who is Himself Truth, and are to be received because they are His Word. They are known as Truth by those who know God, by the testimony of the Spirit of Truth, who indwells all believers, and who leads them into all Truth.

2 Peter 1:3, 4, 19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Matthew 5:18; Psalm 138:2; John 16:12-15; Romans 3:4; Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

God

God is a Spirit, who, existing from all eternity, is one God. He is unchangeable, everywhere-present at all times, is all-powerful, allknowing, and all-wise. He is just, holy, and is love itself. He is the creator, sustainer, and sovereign of all things, and is due the worship of all persons.

John 4:24; Deuteronomy 5:6-10; 6:1; Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 139:7-10; Malachi 3:6; Job 34:12; 37:23; 40:8; 41:34; 42:2; 1 John 4:8; Genesis 1:1ff; Romans 11:33; Jeremiah 23:23.

God is one Being in essence, but exists in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are equal in their essential Godhood, but, in perfect love and harmony, fulfill different roles in their relationships with each other, man, and the creation.

Luke 3:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Acts 13:2; Colossians 1:15-20; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-14; 20:28.

God loves man in such a way that He commissioned the Son to give Himself as a substitute for sinners, bearing God's wrath against sin. The Son did so willingly, by taking upon Himself full and true humanity (including a human body, but free of sin) through birth to a virgin, suffering an unjust death, and rising again bodily on the third day. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for His people. The Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration (through the Word of God), and makes the work of the Son real in the believer's experience. He is the Person in the Godhead who convicts of sin, leads believers in the daily practice of godliness, and also intercedes for them.

John 3:3-8, 16; 16:7, 8; Romans 3:21-25; 8:4-17, 26; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Hebrews 1:1-3; 7:23-25; 1 Timothy 4:10; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35; James 1:18.

Man

All men and women are one with the first man, Adam, who was created in innocence, but who sinned as mankind's head. Each human is a sinner from birth, by nature and by choice. Therefore, apart from the sovereign grace of God, each person stands under His wrath. Man is still in the image of God, but that likeness has been tainted, damaged, and ruined by sin and disobedience, which bring weakness, sickness, pain, suffering, and death. Unconverted man is spiritually dead in his sin, with no hope for a right relationship with God, and is unwilling to receive either His natural revelation in creation, or His mercy as revealed through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:1-7; 6:5; Romans 3:9-21; 5:12, 16-19; John 3:18-20, 36; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 6:44.

Salvation

Man's only way to be reconciled to God is by becoming one with the new Head, Christ. Union with Christ occurs when one be-

believes the Gospel by repenting from his sins and in faith trusting God's promise that the perfect life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient payment for sin and therefore God forgives all of the past, present, and future sins of the believer. At the moment of faith in Christ, the Christian partakes of God's very nature, being born of His Spirit. He has Christ's righteousness placed to his account, Christ's Spirit given to him as a pledge of full and final redemption, is made a new creation, and is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, the Church. He is given eternal spiritual life with assurance of physical resurrection in a glorified body. God is sovereign in salvation: All whom God has chosen to salvation are drawn by the Father to the Son and will be kept by the power of God until death or Christ's return.

Romans 5:15-21; 8:9, 14, 23, 35-39; John 3:6; 6:37, 44; Acts 13:48; 15:1-10; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:3-7, 13, 14; 2:8-10; Colossians 1:22, 23; Titus 3:5, 6; Hebrews 3:6, 14; 6:9-12; Philippians 1:6; Revelation 5:9.

Faith & Good Works

Nothing in man naturally will bring him to do any "good work" that delights God and accomplishes salvation. Saving faith, however, once alive in the heart of the believer, produces works appropriate to that faith. Believers are said to be justified by faith alone. However, the faith that justifies the sinner is never alone, accompanied as it is by works of love. This love, far from being opposed to God's moral law, fulfills it. The very grace of God that teaches us the Gospel message also teaches and guides us into godly living. And the very Spirit of liberty that sets believers free from the curse of the Law, indwells believers to the end that the righteous requirement of the Law may be fulfilled in them.

Galatians 5:4-6, 19-24; Romans 8:1-4; 12:1, 2; 13:8-10; Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 12:14; James 2:14-25; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; Titus 2:11-14; 3:8; 1 John 2:3-6; 4:19-21; 5:2, 3.

The Church

All of the redeemed since Pentecost constitute the Church, the Body of Christ, which is the present expression of God's Kingdom program, and is to be distinguished from the nation of Israel. This church is reflected in local assemblies of believers, who voluntarily have banded together for the purposes of baptizing, observing the Lord's Supper, edification, evangelism, worship, fellowship, prayer, and equipping for service to one another. These churches are served by pastor-elders and deacons, who have been gifted by Christ, and are to be recognized (affirmed) by the members of the churches.

Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4-16; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:5; 2:42; 11:16; 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 3:1-14; Titus 1:5; Romans 12:3-12.

Only two ordinances for the church were established by Jesus Christ, and followed by the Apostles and the early church: baptism of believers (by immersion in water) and the Lord's Supper. Both are to be practiced today.

Matthew 26:26-29; 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 1:13; 11:17-34.

Men & Women

Scripture teaches that God created man and woman equal in value and dignity, but distinct in roles. In the church, all members – both men and women – are called to be subject to the loving, sacrificial leadership of the men called to serve as elders. In the family, the wife is to respectfully subject herself to the leadership of her husband, as unto Christ. The husband is the head of the wife, and is commanded to sacrificially love his wife, as Christ loved the church.

While some men and women are called to a life of singleness for devoted service to God and His church, God's general design for the flourishing of mankind is through marriage and family. God's design from creation is that marriage be between one man and one woman, as a sacred reflection of Christ's faithful union with His Church. Therefore all deviations from that design are sins against God, including pre-marital sex, adultery, pornography, many instances of divorce, polygamy, and homosexual behavior.

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-24; 1 Timothy 2:12, 3:2; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:1-4

Spiritual Gifts

Because Christ's Church is a body, its various parts minister to each other through the power, graces, and gifts given by the Spirit of God, each believer gifted for ministry to others.

Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Hebrews 2:3, 4; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

We affirm six things:

1. Further revelation, whether through prophecy, tongues, or interpretation, is unnecessary in the church today, and such claims to revelation tend not only to undermine the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, but lead many into instability, heresy, and division, often elevating experience over the Word of God. Jeremiah 23:16-32; 2 Timothy 3:5-17; Matthew 5:18.

2. Today's "speaking in tongues" (ecstatic utterance) is not to be identified with the first century gift of the supernatural ability to suddenly speak foreign languages, either in essence, practice, purpose, or effects. Acts 2:1-13.

3. While God can and does heal, such healings must be judged on their own merit, and much of what passes for healing today bears little resemblance to the healings recorded in the gospels and the book of Acts, which also included raising the dead. Matthew 9:18-34; John 11:43, 44; Acts 3:6-9; James 5:14-16.

4. The Holy Spirit, the giver of gifts, has given warnings of charismatic excess, proper guidelines for the use of the gifts, and clear statements of the priority of the proclaimed Word as the key means of instruction, in 1 Corinthians chapters 1, 2, 12, 13, and 14.

5. Sickness and poverty both were present in the lives of the apostles, their associates, and the early church, and should not be judged abnormal, or as signs of unbelief. John 9:3; Philippians 2:26, 27; 2 Corinthians 8:2; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20.

6. Since miracles of all sorts can be performed by Satan, and will be signs of the end-times and of the Antichrist, the believer must be most cautious in endorsing a given manifestation as from God. Matthew 24:11, 23-25; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Revelation 13:13-15.

Last Things

When we come to the end of what the Bible calls "the last days," Jesus will return to receive His people, and to establish His kingdom upon the earth. The dead in Christ will rise first, and living believers will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. He will judge all men, both the living and the dead, according to their deeds.

All of those who have opposed God will be cast, with Satan (the tempter and deceiver who, as a fallen angel, is the chief enemy of his creator-God) and his demons, into the lake of fire to be tormented forever apart from God. This is "the second death." Believers, in contrast, will be raised to eternal life, and will enjoy the unbroken fellowship of God forever, in the new heavens and new earth. They will be conformed spiritually and bodily to the image of Jesus Christ, God's Son, and will remain forever in His likeness, and in fellowship with Him, the Father, and the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:8-13; Daniel 9:24-27; Revelation 5:1ff; 20:1-22:21; Romans 8:21-30; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.

Sanctification

Knowledge of all the above gives the believer encouragement and reason to be faithful to his Lord, for whose return he looks, and whose will he has the heart to obey, even in the face of opposition. In this life, the believer must be ever watchful in prayer, and active in resisting Satan, fleeing temptations, and "putting to death" the deeds of the flesh.

Ample provisions of grace and wisdom are granted the believer for the purpose of living skillfully and successfully in this present age—including the promises and precepts of Scripture, the power of the Spirit, and the fellowship of the church. Although perfection is not possible in this life, the power of sin over the believer has been broken by the death of Christ, so that it no longer "reigns over" him. This fact allows the believer to find freedom from habitual sin and addictive behaviors. The normal Christian life is one of obedience, peace, and joy.

2 Peter 1:3-11; 3:11-13; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:2, 3; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 15:58; Acts 14:22; Matthew 13:19-23; Philippians 2:12, 13; 4:4-8; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 John 2:14-17; 2 Timothy 3:16.

APPENDIX C: GRACE BIBLE CHURCH CONSTITUTION

I. Name, Organization, and Property

The official name of this corporation is Grace Bible Church of Lorton, Virginia. This corporation may be referred to as "church" in this constitution or any other document, and may do business as "Grace Bible Church." This church is a nonprofit corporation under Virginia state law.

The purposes, objectives, and beliefs of this church are set forth in its mission statement and its confession of faith. All property and assets of Grace Bible Church shall be owned by the church. Decisions on the disposition of the property and assets are to be made by the elder team acting on behalf of the covenant members.

II. Covenant Membership

Grace Bible Church is a New Testament church. As such, we are a group of believers who covenant or agree together to submit ourselves to one another and to the principles of church order as outlined in the New Testament by Jesus and His apostles. A "believer" is one who has a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, having received Him as Savior and Lord. The New Testament calls these believers "disciples."

We believe the teaching of our Lord Jesus, and the practice of the early church, in baptizing disciples after they have believed.

We believe that ownership, participation, and accountability are infinitely more important than merely "belonging" to a church as a formality, so we invite all those who desire to participate actively to become a covenant member. In order to become a covenant member of Grace Bible Church, an individual, along with an elder representing the elder team, must sign the Grace Bible Church Covenant. In agreeing to covenant together, the elders pledge to see that each covenant member is properly disciplined.

We understand being a part of a community of faith to mean having a willingness to participate actively with the other believers in this church in fulfilling Christ's commands (to most specifically include making disciples; see Matthew 28:18-20) and the "one-anothers" of the New Testament. We invite all believers or disciples who share our common faith to join with us. However, we respect our sister evangelical churches, and will honor their decisions to exclude those who have come under their censure or discipline.

III. Wisdom from Covenant Members

To pursue unity within the church and to gain wisdom from the covenant members, the elders will present to the church any major decisions, such as (but not limited to) proposed future elders or deacons, any cases of discipline and/or restoration, proposed changes in location, proposed sale or purchase of real property, proposed changes in: the confession of faith, covenant, or in any proposed modification(s) or addition(s) to this constitution.

With any of these matters, sufficient time must be given to the covenant members to exercise sound judgment and responsibility. Under normal circumstances, when possible, a period of at least thirty (30) days should be given after a general announcement in order for the church to hear and consider the persons and the issues involved, and to give input and make responses. Anonymous input will not be considered. After this period of time, with the wisdom of the covenant membership in mind, the elder Team shall reach a final decision and must formally bring the outcome before the church and an appropriate public statement made by the elder team to the church which reflects the elders' consideration of wisdom from the covenant members.

Such public statements and actions may be at regularly scheduled meetings of the church or at specially called meetings, provided that two weeks' notice has been given to the church.

IV. Elders and Deacons — Appointment and Accountability

We recognize two New Testament offices:

- 1. Elders.** The leadership of the congregation is vested in elders, who are responsible for the spiritual oversight (i.e. feeding the flock (John 21:15; Acts 6:4; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9), overseeing the flock (1 Tim. 3:1,

3:4-5, 5:17; Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thes. 5:12; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:17), caring for the flock (Acts 20:28), and protecting the flock (Acts 20:28-30; Titus 3:10) that is entrusted to them by Jesus) of all of the covenant members. All Grace Bible Church groups, committees, and ministries are accountable to the elders, who are stewards of these before God and the congregation. Such men comprise an elder team that collectively guides the whole congregation according to the precepts of Scripture. These same men make up the board of directors of Grace Bible Church of Lorton, Virginia Incorporated.

The process that shall be followed for the nomination, candidacy, and appointment of an elder will accord with this constitution and the Handbook for Elders of Grace Bible Church.

Elders are accountable first and most importantly to the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 4:1-2a; Heb. 13:17). Elders are also accountable to the plurality of elders they mutually submit to (Heb. 13:17). Finally, as covenant members of the church, the elders are accountable to the other covenant members of the church (1 Tim. 5:19-21).

2. Deacons. Under the direction and oversight of the elder team, deacons seek to attend to the delegated ministry needs of our local church (Acts 6:1-6). This service enables the elders to devote themselves "to prayer and to the teaching of the word" (Acts 6:4).

The process that shall be followed for the nomination, candidacy, and appointment of a deacon will accord with this constitution.

Deacons are accountable to the elders of the church (i.e. Acts 6:3). As members of the church, the deacons are also accountable to the other covenant members of the church (i.e. Matt. 18:15-20).

Gaining wisdom from the covenant members of the church, according to Section III of this constitution, is required for the appointment of all elders and deacons, who are to meet the qualifications for their offices as set forth in the New Testament passages of 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 8-13, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The elders of the church shall at least once per year give a full accounting of the church's financial resources to the congregation, and its books shall be open to any legitimate inquiry of its covenant members.

V. Staff

All staff members are those so designated by the elders as they and the congregation may have need. These persons are responsible to the elder team.

VI. Staff Elders

Staff elders shall be appointed by the elder team, which is responsible to search for and screen candidates, using the applicable processes that accords with this constitution and the *Handbook for Elders*. As a matter of wisdom, the elder team will select a lead pastor, and may select additional staff elders who will be known as associate pastors. Staff elders are held accountable to the same standards as the rest of the elder team (see Section IV.1). Staff elders are expected to use electronic communication, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and regular elder meetings to keep the full elder team apprised of all matters relevant to the shepherding and oversight of Grace Bible Church.

APPENDIX D:

LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

GOD DESIRES FOR HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE INTER-DEPENDENTLY

God has kindly not left us to try and figure out the Christian life on our own. He has also made the promise of ongoing grace to empower change and has given us the privilege to live life together in the local church. As odd as it may seem to us, it pleases the Father to use other sinners, saved by grace alone, to aid us in living out the Christian life. We know this to be true in light of the many "one another" commands in the New Testament.

As we share life with other believers, God the Father gives each of us grace to come alongside others to encourage, exhort, instruct, teach, bear one another's burdens, love one another, and so much more. It's because of God's desire for His people to live inter-dependently that Grace Bible Church has chosen small groups - called "Home Groups" here - to be the way we seek to obey these commands. Below is a list of these grace-filled commands:

- Love one anotherJohn 13:34; 15:17; Romans 13:8
- We are members of one another.....Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25
- Be devoted to one another.....Romans 12:10
- Honor one another.....Romans 12:10
- Be of the same mind with one another.....Romans 12:16; 15:5
- Stop judging one another.....Romans 14:13
- Edify (build up) one another.....Romans 14:19
- Accept one another.....Romans 15:7
- Instruct (admonish) one another.....Romans 15:14
- Greet one another.....Romans 16:16; 2 Corinthians 13:12
- Wait for one another (in Communion).....1 Corinthians 11:33
- Have concern for one another.....1 Corinthians 12:25
- Serve one another.....Galatians 5:13
- Do not "bite and devour" one another.....Galatians 5:15
- Do not boastfully challenge one another.....Galatians 5:26

- Carry the burdens of one another.....Galatians 6:2
- Bear with one another.....Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
- Be kind/compassionate to one another.....Ephesians 4:32
- Submit to one another.....Ephesians 5:21
- Consider one another better than yourself.....Philippians 2:3
- Do not lie to one another.....Colossians 3:9
- Increase your love for one another.....1 Thessalonians 3:12
- Encourage one another.....1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11
- Seek the good of one another.....1 Thessalonians 5:15
- Spur one another to good deeds.....Hebrews 10:24
- Do not slander one another.....James 4:11
- Do not grumble against one another.....James 5:9
- Confess your sins to one another.....James 5:16
- Pray for one another.....James 5:16
- Be hospitable to one another.....1 Peter 4:9
- Be humble toward one another.....1 Peter 5:5

APPENDIX E:

RESTORATION POLICY

RESTORATION: A DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER HUMAN FAILURE THROUGH REDEMPTION

I. Introduction

At its heart, this policy relies on the demonstration of God's sovereignty through redemption. It relies on God's sovereignty not only over the human failures that may lead to a formal restoration process, but also over the flawed humans upon whom He relies to carry out the process of restoring their brothers and sisters who have lost their way.

Scripture makes it clear that one function of the body of Christ—the church—is for members of the body to assist one another in living godly lives. The process of living, and assistance in this living, involves four components or phases:

- 1. God commands all Christians to make every effort, with His help, to discipline themselves** and walk in obedience to His commands (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Ephesians 4:25-5:6; 2 Peter 1:5-11).
- 2. If a Christian fails to discipline himself and is trapped in a sin**, God commands that another believer who has knowledge of the specific sin should confront the sinning brother in private (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3-4; Galatians 6:1-2). In the spirit of unity and Christian love it is important to keep the information within the smallest possible circle of individuals. If the sinning believer confesses, repents, and makes appropriate response, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9; Matthew 18:15).
- 3. Should the sinning believer continue in sin after being privately confronted**, the confronting brother/sister should take one elder and one person selected by the elder to confront the sinning believer so that "the facts may be confirmed," and the elders can verify that the approach is being handled graciously (Matthew 18:16b; Deuteronomy 19:15; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1). If the sinning believer confesses, repents, and makes appropriate response, then the issue is resolved and restoration has been achieved (Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9; Matthew 18:15).
- 4. God has ordained church leaders to be ultimately responsible for protecting the church** and restoring wayward brothers and sisters (Matthew 18:17-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 13:17). Accordingly, if these personal and informal efforts prescribed above do not result in the complete restoration of the sinning believer, the matter should be brought to the attention of the full Elder Board. The elders will then consider whether the formal restoration process outlined below should be implemented.

II. Purposes of the Formal Restoration Process

God views efforts to restore wayward believers as a blessing and a sign of genuine love demonstrated by the church (Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 6:23; Revelation 3:19). Conversely, God views a failure to do so as being unloving and hateful (Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 5:23; Proverbs 13:24). Accordingly, when the formal restoration process is necessary, it has three specific purposes:

- 1. To restore sinning believers** to usefulness for God and fellowship with His church (Matthew 18:12-14; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, 7:8-10; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).
- 2. To guard and preserve the honor of God** (Romans 2:24; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- 3. To protect the purity of the church** and to guard other Christians from being tempted, misled, divided, or otherwise harmed (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:6; 1 Timothy 5:19-20).

III. When the Formal Restoration Process May be Invoked

An offense that is serious enough to warrant implementation of the formal restoration process is:

- 1. Sin in an area of conduct or practice that seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity** of the church (see, for example, Galatians 5:19-21; Proverbs 6:16-19);

2. Sin in an area of doctrine as set forth in Grace Bible Church's Confession of Faith that would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith; and/or

3. For members and regular attendees in leadership or teaching positions, sin in an area of doctrine that would constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Bible as that system is set forth in Grace Bible's Confession of Faith.

Offenses in these categories warrant implementation of the formal restoration process when they become that which threatens to overtake and overcome people in our church family.

IV. Scope and Applicability of the Restoration Process

The formal restoration process is applicable to members, who will be provided a copy of this policy and will sign a covenant indicating their willingness to abide by it, and to regular attendees (those who have made GBC their home, but have yet to sign the Church Covenant), who will be made aware of the process through its periodic publication throughout the church. Voluntarily withdrawal of membership or fellowship with Grace Bible Church will not terminate the formal restoration process once it has begun, as set forth in section V(1) below.

V. Procedures

1. The elders may engage in informal efforts to achieve restoration of a person who has fallen into sin if they have reason to believe that such will be effective. If they determine the formal restoration process should be implemented in a given situation, however, they will present the sinning believer with a letter that sets forth the basic nature of the conduct of concern. The letter will request the sinning believer to appear before the Elder Board at a specific time and place. Ordinarily, these letters will be served in person, but in case that is not possible, it shall be sent by certified mail. Receipt of this letter constitutes the beginning of the formal restoration process. If at any point in this process the sinning believer confesses, repents, and makes appropriate response, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9; Matthew 18:15). The elders will respond accordingly from that point by graciously accepting true repentance and its accompanying signs, and by providing accountability as set forth in (11)(e) below.

2. At the first meeting with the sinning believer, only the following actions may be taken

- a. The specific issues of sin shall be formally presented to the sinning believer, along with the names of any witnesses and copies of any documents that may be presented against him;
- b. The elders shall fix the time, date and place for a second meeting which shall not be less than ten days later, and shall issue invitations requesting all necessary persons to appear; and
- c. The sinning believer shall be given the opportunity to inform the elders of witnesses whom he wishes to include in the process.

3. At the second meeting, the participating elders will hear evidence concerning the issues of sin. If the sinning believer refuses or fails to appear without satisfactory reason for his absence at the time appointed, he shall again be notified in writing of another time, place and date at which to appear. This writing will contain a warning that, if he does not appear, the elders will proceed in his absence. When proceeding in the absence of the sinning believer, the elders shall appoint an elder to represent the sinning believer, who shall present a case to the elders in defense of the sinning believer. This appointed elder shall be entitled to present evidence, interview witnesses, interpose objections, and otherwise act in defense of the sinning believer.

4. If the sinning believer appears at the second meeting of the elders, he shall be called to admit or deny the specific areas of sin. If he denies the area of sin in his life, the elders shall proceed to receive evidence. The elders will sit in a closed session. Subsequent meetings of the Elders are permitted when required.

5. The sinning believer shall be entitled to the assistance of counsel. No person shall be eligible to act as counsel who is not a member in good standing or does not affirm the Confession of Faith of Grace Bible Church. Minutes will be taken of the proceedings, and the sinning believer will be provided one copy.

6. Any person may be a witness if the elders are satisfied that he has sufficient competence to speak the truth concerning the matters before the participating elders.

7. Evidence must be factual in nature. It may be direct or circumstantial. Caution should be exercised in giving weight to evidence that is purely circumstantial. The accused may object to the competency of any witness and to the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any testimony or evidence produced in support of the charges. The elders

shall decide on all such objections after allowing the sinning believer to be heard in support thereof. The testimony of two witnesses shall be sufficient to establish the truth of any specification. If the sinning believer so requests, no witness, unless a member of the elders, shall testify in the presence of another witness who is to testify concerning the same specification.

8. At the conclusion of the hearing, the sinning believer may make a final argument with respect to the evidence and the issues before the church. The elders, after deliberation, shall vote on each charge and each specification separately. The vote must be unanimous to proceed further. The elders will sustain a specification or charge only when they conclude that it is established by a preponderance of the evidence. If the elders decide that the accused is guilty of any charge, they shall proceed to determine the censure. If the elders determine that the sinning believer is not guilty, notification will be given to all parties involved.

9. The following censures may be pronounced by the elders:

- a. Admonition, which consists of tenderly and soberly confronting the sinning believer with his sin, warning him of his danger, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ;
- b. Rebuke, which is a form of censure more severe than admonition. It consists in setting forth the serious character of the sin, reproving the sinning believer, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ;
- c. Suspension, which is a form of discipline by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church. The elders may suspend any or all privileges as it believes necessary in order to effect the purposes of the restoration policy, including attending congregational meetings; receiving communion; serving in ministry, leadership or teaching positions; receiving financial help and other services from ministry teams of the church, etc. It may be for a definite or indefinite time. An individual under suspension shall be the object of prayer, and earnest and loving pursuit from the Elder Board and the church to the end that he should be restored.
- d. Excommunication, or removal from fellowship, which is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of sin aggravated by persistent impenitence. If the person still refuses to repent after the elders have heard his case and found him to purposefully continue in a sinful state, then, as a last resort, the church will remove him from fellowship. Excommunication consists of a solemn declaration by the elders that the sinning believer is no longer considered a member of Grace Bible Church and is no longer welcome to attend worship services or ministry activities until they seek repentance and restoration with the church. (Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:2, 13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

10. The Scripture instructs that the church be informed when believers choose to continue in sin after the restoration process has occurred (Matthew 18:17). The elders interpret this consistent with the stated purposes of the restoration process set forth in Section II above. Accordingly, notification will be made by the elders in such a way as to promote these purposes and not to unnecessarily share sensitive information.

11. Whenever a sinning believer who is removed from fellowship or a suspended sinning believer demonstrates repentance (acknowledgment of sin, asking forgiveness of God, asking forgiveness of those offended, and making appropriate response where necessary) the following steps will be taken:

- a. The repentant believer should contact an elder to express a desire to meet with the Elder Board to discuss his desire for restoration;
- b. The elders will meet and discuss the situation. If the elders recommend restoration, they will schedule a meeting with the repentant believer;
- c. At said elder meeting, the repentant individual should acknowledge the sinful actions and the steps taken to demonstrate repentance;
- d. With the elders' approval, the repentant individual will be restored through a process of personally acknowledging their sin, asking forgiveness of God, asking forgiveness of those offended, and committing themselves to be held personally accountable by one elder and one person selected by the elder in a spirit of harmony and unity. Announcement of restoration will be made in such a way as to further the stated purposes of this restoration process as set forth in Section II above.
- e. If the individual wishes to remain at Grace Bible Church, the Elder Board will assign one elder and one other person selected by that elder to work with the repentant individual for the purpose of accountability and discipleship.

IV. Conclusion

This Policy is designed to be an obedient response to God's desire and direction, revealed to us in His word and through the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is a realistic confession of our fallen nature, and a best effort to put on display His sovereign power over the failures that result from our fallenness. Finally, it is filled with the hope that the outcome of the display of God's sovereignty, discipline, mercy and grace in all of this will be:

- 1. To put His glory on display.**
- 2. To transform those being restored.**
- 3. To transform those whom God would use in that process.**

APPENDIX F:

THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS

THE GOSPEL'S ADVANCE TO ALL THE NATIONS

Part I: The Purpose of Missions

We see the primary purpose of missions as bringing God glory through the building up and increase of both the breadth ("of all nations") and depth ("make disciples...teaching them") of His Church—the body of believers throughout the world. We desire to see God raise up godly men and women from within Grace Bible Church (GBC) who will serve as career missionaries.

Part II: A Brief Theology of Missions

A. Old Testament

God desire to reach the nations with the good news of His Son, Jesus Christ. We believe the Old Testament foundation for missions is clearly seen in Genesis 12:1-3, wherein God stated His intent to create a nation that would spread His glory among the nations: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

B. New Testament

The mission continues in the New Testament, as Christ Jesus instructs all believers to take the gospel with us 'as we go' into the world, as stated in this foundational passage in Matthew 28:18: "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.'"

The mission of reaching the nations is to be carried out by the church. Jesus said, in Matthew 16:18: "...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The rest of Matthew's Gospel is a record of Jesus explaining what His church would look like: who the leaders are—those who serve; what are collective heart should be—one that seeks the lost; who the foundation of the church is—Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected; and what our commission is: as we live among those whom God has placed around us we are to make disciples.

C. Sent by the Church

The pattern of missions in the book of Acts is that existing churches send out proven people as missionaries to take the gospel to the nations and establish churches among unreached peoples. The sent ones should be those who have been set apart by God, those whose lives demonstrate that His hand is on them. These are to be equipped, prepared, tested, affirmed, and sent out by the church with much prayer:

"While they (the church) were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." — Acts 13:2-3

These missionaries serve under the authority of, and give an account to, their sending church:

"...they (Paul and Barnabas) sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." — Acts 14:26-27 (see also Acts 13:3, 15:41, 18:22-23, and 21:17-20a)

It is GBC's desire to exalt God and His mission by following the Biblical pattern for missions and thereby spreading His glory among the nations. We are eager to see God raise up men and women from our congregation to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the unreached and unengaged peoples, and to strengthen the Church around the world. May God, through a partnership between senders and goers, be pleased to draw various peoples into enjoyment of His glory! We are both humbled and excited that He would invited us to participate in this, the greatest cause in the universe.

Grace Bible Church
9115 Lorton Station Blvd.
Lorton, VA. 22079

www.gracebiblelorton.com
info@gracebiblelorton.com
703-339-7292

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