

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
WORSHIP CENTER LOCATED AT
732 SOUTH MAIN
CLUTE, TX

CONSTITUTION GRACE BIBLE CHURCH OF BRAZOSPORT

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CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION

It is our desire that this document clearly state the Biblical position concerning doctrinal beliefs, the organizational structure of the church, and the purposes of the church. This document has been written both to promote unity among the people who comprise the church and to explain our beliefs and objectives to those interested in becoming a part of this ministry (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3, 13).

This Constitution is intended to summarize, but not comprehensively review, the basic doctrinal specifics emphasized at Grace Bible Church. It is subscribed to by the elders, and represents our understanding of the Biblical truth concerning the topics discussed.

This document also contains policies in matters which need definition but are not specifically addressed in scriptures for example the manner of nominating elders and deacons. The church has been given freedom in establishing these sorts of policies.

Finally this document is authoritative only in that it reflects Biblical truth. As we grow in our understanding of the Word we may find it necessary to amend this document according to the provisions of Article XIV. Complete agreement with the content of this Constitution is neither required nor expected of those worshipping or seeking the Lord with us.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this local church shall be Grace Bible Church of Brazosport, a corporation under the laws of the state of Texas.

ARTICLE III: VISION, COMMITMENTS, AND STATEMENT OF FAITH

A. VISION

We proclaim Him ... teaching the Word, calling all to a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ and to fulfillment of His call to ministry (Col 1:28; Matt. 28:19-20).

B. STATEMENT OF FAITH

For membership in Grace Bible Church, agreement with the full Doctrinal Statement (Article V) is not required, however, members must wholeheartedly agree with the following Statement of Faith, which is a summary of the key doctrinal elements that we believe. Scriptural references are listed in the parallel subject areas of the full Doctrinal Statement (Article V).

1. We believe that The Bible was written by God through human authors, is without error in the original manuscripts, and is the supreme and final authority in the lives of believers.
2. We believe in one God, eternal and self-existing in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. We believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ and that He entered the human race as the virgin-born son of Mary.
4. We believe that all mankind participated in Adam's fall from his original sinless state and is thus lost in sin and separated from God (without the atoning sacrifice of Christ).
5. We believe Jesus died upon the cross as the sinless substitute for all sinners, sufficient for all who repent and believe. We believe Jesus arose bodily from the dead on the third day.
6. We believe that the one and only way to salvation is through faith and faith alone, in Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord.
7. We believe that regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential for the salvation of lost and sinful mankind.
8. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells all who receive Jesus Christ and enables the process of sanctification in each believer.

C. COMMITMENTS

We are committed to:

1. God centered worship.
2. Study and application of God's Word.
3. Team leadership.
4. Encouraging, facilitating, and supporting our church members wherever God leads them to serve.
5. Evangelizing the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ.
6. Small group ministries targeted at both fellowship and discipleship.
7. Active prayer ministries.

ARTICLE IV: DOCTRINE

The Bible emphasizes throughout that its teaching is essential to true spirituality, fellowship, spiritual sustenance, effectiveness in service and ministry, faith and doctrinal accuracy. The Bible also charges the local church with the responsibilities both to teach sound doctrine and to protect the church from false teachers who promote deceitful doctrine. Thus we believe our most important function and our central thrust is consistent teaching and study of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:6-7).

The study of the Word of God is not an end in itself but careful application of Biblical truth is the means to advance toward the goal of becoming complete in Christ and to effectively minister to one another and to the world. It will not therefore, be bypassed or made secondary in the interest of social concerns, actions, or activities, but will be so promoted that the Word, and the teaching of the Word, remains the pulse and heartbeat behind all church and non-church related activities or concerns (Ps. 119:1ff; 138:2; Isa. 77:2b; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 1:5; 4:1-16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 4:1-3).

Grace Bible Church shall thus function as an independent, evangelical Bible church, committed to the truths recorded in God's inerrant Revelation—the Holy Scriptures.

ARTICLE V: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

This Article describes the doctrine that is intended to be the basis for teaching in Grace Bible Church. To hold positions within this church, all elders, ministerial staff, deacons and teachers must also agree with the Doctrinal Statement, Article V, of this church. If an individual considering such a position has any areas of concern about the doctrine described in Article V, they should inform the Board of Elders before assuming the position in order to reach suitable resolution.

A. THE SCRIPTURES

WE TEACH "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," by which we understand the whole Bible is inspired in the sense that holy men of God "were moved by the Holy Spirit" to write the very words of Scripture. We teach that while there was progress in Revelation from God, this divine inspiration extends equally and fully to all parts of the writings—historical, poetical, doctrinal, prophetic and to the smallest word and inflection of a word as appeared in the original manuscripts. We teach that the whole Bible as originally written is therefore without error.

We Teach the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We teach the Bible is sufficient in that it contains all the words of God one needs for life and godliness. This sufficiency is rooted in the sufficiency of God Himself. We teach that, while the Holy Spirit continues to aid the believer in understanding and applying the truth of Scripture, the canon of Scripture was closed at the end of the apostolic age and the Holy Spirit is not revealing new truth to believers today.

We Teach for every passage of Scripture there is only one true interpretation. Every believer is responsible to determine carefully the true original intent and meaning of Scripture. This meaning is to be ascertained as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation. We teach this process requires both effort on the part of the believer and the aid of the Holy Spirit. While there is one truth in a given passage there may be many proper applications.

We Teach all Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read or understood until it leads to Him. We also believe that all the Scriptures were designed for our practical instruction (Matt. 5:18, 24:35; Mark 12:26, 36; Luke 24:27, 24:44; John 5:39; 7:17; 10:35; 16:12-15; 17:17; Acts 1:16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:22-23; 28:23; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 2:7-15; 10:1-13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 1 John 2:20; Jude 1:3-4).

B. THE GODHEAD

We Teach that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10,11; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).

C. THE FATHER

We Teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps. 145:8-9; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1-31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As

Creator He is Father to all men (Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:14-15; 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chr. 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Hab. 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He divest the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pet. 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as his own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 12:5-9).

D. JESUS CHRIST

We Teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine attributes and perfections, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial (of the same substance), and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

We Teach that, as provided and purposed by God and as preannounced in the prophecies of the Scriptures, the eternal Son of God came into this world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy and become the Redeemer of a lost world. To this end He was born of the virgin and received a human body and a sinless human nature (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:18; 3:16; Heb. 4:15).

We Teach that on the human side, He became and remained a perfect man but sinless throughout his life; yet He retained His absolute deity being at the same time very God and very man (Luke 2:40; John 1:1-2; Philip. 2:5-8).

We teach that in fulfillment of prophecy, He came first to Israel as her Messiah-King, and that being rejected of that nation, He according to the eternal counsels of God, gave His life as a ransom for people from every tribe, tongue and nation (John 1:11; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:6; Rev. 5:9).

We Teach that in infinite love for the lost, He voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb and took away the sin of the world, bearing the holy judgments against sin which the righteousness of God must impose. His death was therefore substitutionary in the most absolute sense—the just for the unjust—and by His death, He became the Savior of people from every tribe, tongue and nation (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:14; 5:21; Heb. 10:5-14; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9).

We Teach that according to the Scriptures, He arose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He had lived and died, and that His resurrection body is the pattern of that body which ultimately will be given to all believers (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Philip. 3:20-21).

We Teach that on departing from the earth, He was accepted of His Father and that His acceptance is a final assurance to us that His redeeming work was perfectly accomplished (Heb. 1:3).

We Teach that He became Head over all things to the church which is His body, and in this ministry He ceases not to intercede and advocate for the saved (Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

E. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We Teach that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, though omnipresent from all eternity, took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the day of Pentecost according to the divine promise, dwells in every believer and, by His baptism, unites all to Christ in one body and that He, as the indwelling One, is the source of all power and all acceptable worship and service. We Teach that He never takes His departure from the church, nor

from the feeblest of the saints, but is ever present to testify of Christ; seeking to occupy believers with Him and not with themselves nor with their experiences. We Teach that His abode in the world in this special sense will cease when Christ comes to receive His own at the completion of the church (John 14:16-17; 16:7-15; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22; 2 Thess. 2:7).

We Teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity including intellect (1 Cor. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1 Cor. 12:11), eternity (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), omniscience (Isa. 40:13-14), omnipotence (Rom. 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial (of the same substance) with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Jer. 31:31-34 with Heb. 10:15-17).

We Teach that in this age, based on that which the Holy Spirit is to the believer, the Holy Spirit has certain well defined ministries, and that it is the responsibility of every Christian to humbly yield to the Holy Spirit in his own life and experience. We Teach that the Holy Spirit, as a special provision of God, is an anointing, a seal, and an earnest (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 John 2:20-27). His ministries include: the restraining of evil in the world to the measure of the divine will; the convicting of the world respecting sin, righteousness and judgment; the regenerating of all believers; the indwelling of all who are saved whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption and anointed of God for service; the baptizing into the one body of Christ of all who are saved; and the continued filling for power, witnessing, teaching, leading, and service of those among the saved who are yielded to Him and who are subject to His will (John 3:6; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:3-14; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2:20-27).

We Teach that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healings were given for the purpose of authenticating the message of the first century church. We Teach that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary evidence of the baptism of or the filling of the Spirit. We Teach the complete deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection (Acts 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 13:8; 2 Cor. 12:12). We Teach that in accordance with the sovereign will of God, healing is available through the prayer of believers (Jam. 5:14). We Teach that every believer is given a spiritual gift or gifts by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). Every believer is to exercise his or her gift(s) for the purpose of the building up of one another in the church, the Body of Christ (see Section L. 'The Christian's Service' for further explanation).

F. CREATION

We Teach the Genesis account of creation as being neither allegory nor myth but a literal, historical account of the direct, immediate, creative acts of God over six literal days and those things created did not evolve from a lower order of life. We also Teach that all men are descended from the historical Adam and Eve, first parents of the entire human race. (Gen. 1-2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17)

G. MAN CREATED AND FALLEN

We Teach that man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God. We Teach man fell through sin and, as a consequence of his sin, lost his spiritual life becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and that he became subject to the power of the devil. We Teach that his spiritual death, or totally depraved human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race of man, the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life, but is essentially and unchangeably sinful apart from divine grace (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 6:5; Ps. 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; 5:24; 5:40; 6:53; Rom. 3:10-19; 5:12 – 21; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:6).

H. SALVATION

1. THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION

We Teach salvation is brought about by our sovereign God in a manner above our comprehension where certain aspects of Salvation are a mystery to us, but not a mystery to God. This inability of man to completely understand certain Biblical truths is also clearly illustrated by other foundational truths in Christianity. For example, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and how two can become one flesh in marriage. Each of these falls into the category of truths that are difficult to understand, yet they are plainly taught in scripture as are certain truths concerning salvation.

2. THE PROVISION OF SALVATION

We Teach that God's only provision for salvation is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the Redeemer (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), and Savior of all those who believe in Him for eternal life (John 3:16). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one can come to the Father but through Him, and there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved (Matt. 11:27; John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

3. APPROPRIATION OF SALVATION

We Teach Salvation is not a result of works but it is an undeserved, unearned gift, received by God's grace and mercy, through the faith which God supplies (Gal. 5:4; Eph. 2:8-9; Philip. 1:29; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). Saving faith is not only an intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel (Jam. 2:19) but a volitional heart commitment to trust in the gospel (Luke 9:23; Luke 14:26) and a willingness to submit and obey the Lord of the gospel who is Jesus Christ (John 3:36; 1 John 2:3-5). Salvation is only appropriated through the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby God draws His people to His Son (John 3:5-8; 6:44). Men, apart from the grace of God, do not seek Him (Rom. 3:10; John 3:19). God seeks men (Luke 5:31-32; 19:10) and men respond to the grace of God which draws them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:27; 13:11; John 6:37; Acts 13:48; Philip. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25; 1 Cor. 1:18). Repentance is to have a change of mind, to acknowledge one's sins, turn from them and to pursue righteousness and faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnate, Savior, and Lord (Isa. 55:6-9; Joel 2:12-13; John 1:12; 8:24; Rom. 14:8-9; 1 Cor. 4:5).

4. THE REGENERATION IN SALVATION

We Teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Regeneration is evidenced by good works in the life of the believer (Acts 26:20; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; 3:8), and will be exhibited to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:17-21; Philip. 2:12b; Col. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Such conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Rom. 8:17; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

5. THE ELECTION IN SALVATION

We Teach that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28-30; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 1:4-11; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). We also Teach this great truth never nullifies or diminishes the sinner's responsibility to repent and believe (Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Thes. 2:10-12; Rev. 22:17). We also Teach that God's choosing and call is effectual, meaning that all whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Jam. 4:8).

We Teach that although God knows those who He has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, we do not. Therefore, we teach that it is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian to evangelize the lost (e.g. Romans 10:8-15). We further teach Election is the only hope we have in evangelism. We also Teach the Gospel is to be presented to all persons in the world. God calls all men everywhere to repent and believe in the gospel (Acts 17:30-31). God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11). Men are without excuse before God because creation, conscience, and the law of God written in men's hearts is enough to show them that God exists, yet all men suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-20, 25; 2:14-16). Because all men suppress the natural Revelation of God, the only way a person can be saved is by hearing and believing in special Revelation, which is the Word of God, the gospel (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 1:16-17; 10:8-17; 1 Cor. 1:18).

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

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

We Teach, that although a mystery exists in our minds between the Sovereignty of God in Election and the Responsibility of man in repentance and faith, they are compatible, complimentary and are clearly taught in scripture. We also Teach that although we may fail to completely comprehend this great truth, we must humbly trust God and His Sovereign Plan of redemption (Rom. 9).

6. THE EXTENT OF SALVATION

We Teach that when an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one will have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is therefore not possible to seek a so-called "second blessing" or a "second work of grace" (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; Rom.8:1; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10; 1 John 4:17; 5:11-12).

7. THE JUSTIFICATION IN SALVATION

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

8. THE MANIFESTATION OF SALVATION

We Teach Salvation is the supernatural work of God in a person that manifests itself in a transformed life (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). All true believers will bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance and will be known by their fruit (Matt. 3:8-10; 7:16-23; 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-45). The kinds of fruit which salvation produces in the life of the believer are things such as: the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25), a hunger for God's Word (1 Pet. 2:2), a pursuit of righteousness (Prov. 4:18), increased godliness and Christ likeness (Philip. 1:6; 2 Cor. 3:18), a desire to be with the

saints (Heb. 10:24-27; I John 2:19), and a desire to obey God in everything (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:11-14; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 2:12).

9. THE SECURITY OF SALVATION

We Teach that, because of the eternal purpose of God toward the objects of His love, because of His freedom to exercise grace toward the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory blood of Christ, because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life, because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven, because of the immutability of the unchangeable covenants of God, because of the regenerating, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved, we and all true believers everywhere, once saved shall be kept saved forever. We teach, however, that God is a holy and righteous Father and that since He cannot overlook the sins of His children, He will, when they persistently sin, chasten them and correct them in infinite love; but having undertaken to save them and keep them forever, apart from all human merit, He who cannot fail will in the end present every one of them faultless before the presence of His glory and conformed to the image of His Son (John 5:24; 10:28; 13:1; 14:16-17; 17:11; Rom. 8:29, 32-39; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5 Eph. 1:13-14; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2; 5:13; Jude 24).

10. THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

We Teach it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Lord and Savior; and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 5:13).

I. SANCTIFICATION

We Teach that sanctification is three-fold: it is past, present, and future.

1. PAST

We Teach that every believer has been sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore made holy in Christ and identified as a saint. This sanctification is instantaneous and is not to be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with a believer's standing in Christ, not his state or behavior. (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thes. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 3:1; 10:10; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2).

2. PRESENT

We also Teach that the Holy Spirit performs a progressive sanctification by which the state or behavior of the believer is brought closer to the standing in Christ the believer enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17,19; Rom. 6:1, 22; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thes. 4:3-7; 5:23; Heb. 10:14).

In view of this, we Teach that every believer is in daily conflict – the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh – but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This struggle stays with the believer all through this earthly life. Although the old self has been crucified, the flesh remains and the believer will still sin. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 4:22, 24; Philip. 3:12; Col. 3:9, 10; 1 Pet. 1:14, 16; 1 John 3:5, 9).

We also Teach that part of this present and progressive sanctification includes the Biblical call for believers to separate themselves from sin and the sinful practices of this world and instead continually pursue personal holiness. (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).

3. FUTURE

We also Teach that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state or behavior as he is now sanctified in his standing in Christ. This will take place when he shall see his Lord and shall be like Him (1 Thes. 5:23; 1 John 3:2).

J. THE CHURCH, A UNITY OF BELIEVERS

1. THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

We Teach that the church is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, that by the same Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, and thus being members one of another, we are responsible to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, rising above all sectarian prejudices and denominational bigotry, and loving one another with a pure heart fervently (Matt. 16:16-18; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:20-24; 4:3-10; Col. 3:14-15).

2. THE LOCAL CHURCH

We Teach that God's primary (intended) organization of believers, after the family unit, is local assemblies of believers, committed to the Lord and to each other for the purpose of carrying out the universal church's visible activities; that is, the communication of God's truth to the people of God, the worship of and prayer to God by God's people, the loving care of God's people for one another, and the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Heb. 10:24-25).

K. THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

1. THE LORD'S SUPPER

We Teach that the Lord's Supper is for those who have personally placed their faith in Christ alone for Salvation. It is first and foremost a time to remember Christ and His redemptive death. This is summed up in Christ's command, "Do this in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper is also a time of reflection and confession as each individual reflects on their life for the purpose of confessing any area of known sin that would keep them from being able to truly respond to the significance and meaning of this important ordinance. It is also a time to worship God for making us a new Creation and adopting us into His family. We also believe that fellowship is involved as we take the elements together as a body to demonstrate our common faith, love, and devotion to Christ and the ministry He has called us to together (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:17-34).

2. BAPTISM

We Teach that salvation is a gift of God to all who place their faith in His Son Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus directed new believers to follow that step of faith with water baptism as an outward symbol of their spiritual identification with His death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is not necessary for salvation however it is a command Jesus expects his followers to obey. Immersion is the mode of baptism practiced in the New Testament. Scripture emphasizes the spiritual aspect of this symbolic act, indicating that the mode of baptism is not of primary concern. We will practice immersion, however other modes may be used as substitutes when necessary (Titus 3:5; Matt 28:19; Rom. 6:4-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12).

L. THE CHRISTIAN'S SERVICE

We Teach that divine, enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit upon all who are saved. While there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the same Spirit and each is called to his or her own divinely appointed service as the Spirit may will. Redemption in Christ gives women and men an equal standing before God and equal share in the blessings of salvation including the bestowing of spiritual gifts. All Christians are exhorted to exercise their gifts through a variety of ministries but we teach there are God-ordained distinctions in masculine and feminine roles within the church. This does not mean that one gender is more valued than another, but simply that, in some cases, God has called each to differing responsibilities.

We Teach that the governing roles in the church, such as Elder and Pastor, are biblically restricted to men. Therefore, we believe men should fulfill the role of teaching/preaching the assembled Body of Christ (for example, at the Sunday worship service). However, this does not mean that women will be prohibited from speaking or praying during a church worship service. When they do, as outlined in the Bible, they will do so under the authority of the Elders. We also Teach that God grants both men and women the gift of teaching to be used in the building up of the body of Christ (for example, women teaching other women and children, as well as men teaching other men and children). (Rom. 12:6; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Cor. 14:33-35; Gal. 3:28; Ephes. 4:11; Philip. 4:3; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 4:10-11.)

We Teach that, wholly apart from salvation benefits which are bestowed equally upon all who believe, rewards are promised according to the faithfulness of each believer in his service for his Lord, and that these rewards will be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ after He comes to receive His own to Himself (1 Cor. 3:9-15; 9:18-27; 2 Cor. 5:10).

M. THE GREAT COMMISSION

We Teach that it is the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved that they are sent forth by Him into the world even as He was sent forth of His Father into the world. His command in Matt. was to "make disciples of all nations." We teach that after they are saved they are divinely reckoned to be related to this world as strangers and pilgrims, ambassadors and witnesses, and that their primary purpose in life should be to make Christ known to the world (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11).

N. ANGELS, FALLEN AND UNFALLEN

We Teach that God created an innumerable company of sinless, spiritual beings known as angels; that one, "Lucifer, son of the morning," the highest in rank, sinned through pride thereby becoming Satan; that a great company of the angels followed him in his moral fall (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; 1 Tim. 3:6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:3-4).

We Teach that Satan is the originator of sin, and that under the permission of God and as the adversary of God and His character, he through subtlety led our first parents into transgression, thereby accomplishing their moral fall and subjecting them and their posterity to his own power; that he is the enemy of God and the people of God opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; and that he who in the beginning said, "I will be like the most High," in his warfare appears as an angel of light even counterfeiting the works of God by fostering political and religious movements and systems of doctrine, which systems are characterized by such as

the denial of God, the person and work of Christ as the God-man substitute or salvation by grace alone (Gen. 3:1-19; Rom. 5:12-14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11:3-4, 13-15; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3).

We Teach that Satan was judged at the cross, though not then executed, and that he, a usurper, now rules as the "god of this world;" that at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years and after the thousand years he will be loosed for a little season and then "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" where he "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Col. 2:15; Rev. 20:1-3, 10).

We Teach that a great company of angels kept their holy estate and are before the throne of God from whence they are sent forth as ministering spirits to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation (Luke 15:10; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 7:11-12).

We Teach that man was made lower than the angels and, that in His incarnation, Christ took for a little time this lower place that He might lift the believer to His own sphere above the angels (Heb. 2:6-10).

O. ESCHATOLOGY

We realize that the Bible is not explicitly clear about the chronology of the end times. The three paragraphs below represent the position that will be taught at Grace Bible Church, but we expressly allow for honest differences of opinion within the church.

1. THE BLESSED HOPE – THE RAPTURE

The next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Philip. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Tit. 2:11-14).

2. THE TRIBULATION

The rapture of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of "Israel's seventieth week", commonly called the tribulation (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 6:1-19:21). Although the church, the Bride of Christ, will be in heaven during this time as referenced above, new Christian conversions will take place during the tribulation and these new Christians will endure tremendous persecution. The tribulation will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We teach that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.

3. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God's covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:15-25:46; Acts 15:16-17; Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; Rev. 20:1-3).

P. THE ETERNAL STATE

We Teach that at death the spirits and souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated but, to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42; 2 Cor. 5:8; Philip. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15).

ARTICLE VI: GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The local church body is composed of one body with many members all of whom fill a vital role under the headship of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Executive authority or leadership, however, is invested by the membership, as authorized by Scripture, in a Board of Elders who lead the church and to whom the membership is to submit under the headship of Christ. These men have the authority and responsibility to delegate to individuals, committees or other boards (as a Board of Deacons) authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and material matters (Acts 20:28; 15:6; Eph. 4:11-13; Philip. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

In using its delegated authority, and in making its decisions, the Board of Elders must seek to be guided by the Scripture, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and by input from the membership (Acts 6:2-5a; 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19).

In the event of the misuse of the delegated authority, the church has recourse to the principles as set forth in Articles VII, VIII, and XIII.

ARTICLE VII: ELDERS

A. QUALIFICATIONS

Elders shall be men whose lives are characterized by the qualities set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. These qualities can be categorized as:

1. They must desire the office of elder and demonstrate spiritual leadership abilities among the members.
2. They must be mature lovers of God. Men who take God and His Word seriously.
3. They must be men who are seeking to be controlled by Christ and His Word rather than by worldly and fleshly de-sires (self-controlled, not a lover of money, holy, disciplined, above reproach, temperate).
4. They must be able to teach and use the Word of God with wisdom and patience.
5. They must be able to manage their household in a biblical manner.
6. They must be able to spiritually manage their interpersonal relationships (hospitable, gentle, and not quarrelsome).

These men shall hold to the doctrinal statement of this Constitution in accord with the statements of Article V, and be supportive of the entire Constitution.

B. AUTHORITY

The ministry of Grace Bible Church shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the Board of Elders. The elders will be the primary decision-making body within the church. However, it is critical that the elders make decisions based on carefully assembled facts, scriptural insight, the individual and corporate leading by the Holy Spirit, and input from the membership (Acts 6:5; 15:5-6, 22; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each church member, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input, information and guidance from the membership, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result, in some major decisions of church life, the membership will vote to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. In these cases, the elders will not move forward with a decision until or unless at least a 2/3 of the membership agrees on the matter as describe in Article X, Section F.

The following major decisions should be presented for a vote:

- Adding unpaid elders to the Board of Elders (Article VII).
- Adding paid elders, both pastors and associate pastoral staff (Article VIII, Section E).

The Board of Elders will decide if additional items should be presented to the membership for a vote. When a vote is taken, the procedure outlined in Article X, Section F shall be followed.

C. DUTIES

Because of external and internal Christian testimony to be promoted with the local church, the elders must first and foremost exercise a personal spiritual walk which promotes self examination, maintain a servant-like quality in life, and serve with gentleness and humility in all that he does. Out of his biblical perspective, the elder is to joyfully undertake the following duties:

1. Give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
2. Guard and protect the members.
3. Oversee and provide spiritual direction for the activities and growth of the members.
4. Aid in finding and developing gifted teachers of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2).
5. Warn and discipline as outlined in Article XI.
6. Support, encourage, counsel and lead in humility.
7. As the need arises, appoint deacons as per Article IX.
8. Provide guidance to the deacons as needed.
9. See to the oversight of the finances of the members per Article XII.
10. Pray for and encourage the sick.
11. Seek the Lord's will to interpret the Articles and provisions of this Constitution in the light of Scripture.
12. Make decisions and perform any other duties as situations within the church dictate, either directly or through proper and orderly delegation of committees or persons as necessary.

13. The elders shall strive to maintain open communication with the members, both to discern needs, concerns and viewpoints, and to communicate information and decisions (Acts 6:1-5; 11:22; 15:1, 6, 22; 16:2).

D. APPOINTMENT: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Scriptures emphasize that elders in the church are not appointed by men, but by God (Acts 20:28). The task of the membership then, should be to seek and discover God's direction and leading in the appointment of elders.

The need for an additional elder, paid or non-paid, may be recognized by either the elders or other members of the church. The elders, in consultation with or in response to the request of membership, shall seek to discern the nature of the need and to follow God's leading in deciding if the need justifies the appointment of an elder. Upon a decision by the Board of Elders that a need does exist, the church will prayerfully and carefully seek God's direction in choosing the right man or men.

It is the purpose of Grace Bible Church to base the selection process upon an orderly, proper sequence of events which will most easily facilitate the recognition of God's appointment of men to this ministry. The entire membership should be on the alert for men whose lives characterize the qualifications laid out in Scripture. Only qualified men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if men are unwilling to serve, who would otherwise be qualified, no appointment will be made. The church should wait on the Lord either to remove the need or to provide qualified men.

The Scriptures speak of two categories of elders within a church: non-paid elders and paid elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18). The following procedures outline the steps necessary to appoint elders:

E. APPOINTMENT OF NON-PAID ELDERS

When the need arises for a new non-paid elder (either for a new position or to replace an elder who has left the Board), the existing Board of Elders should assume a guiding and directing role in the search for the right man. The specific nature of the need and the decision to seek a new elder should be announced to the membership. The membership will be asked to suggest qualified men for the position based on the biblical criteria for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9; Acts 14:23; 6:1-6).

After a period of time and prayerful consideration, the elders will meet to consider all the nominees as to their qualifications for the position. If the Board believes a man (men) to be qualified, after they have considered the man's qualifications, a member of the Board will be appointed to approach the nominee to explain the specific nature of the need and to determine his willingness to serve (1 Tim. 5:22, 1 Pet. 5:1-3). The Board will, by unanimous vote, select one candidate for each position to be filled.

The Board will then announce the candidate(s) to the membership. A time and place will be announced for conducting a vote by the membership to insure substantial agreement among the membership and of God's selection of the candidate(s). If during the time between the announcement and the actual vote, a church member has a concern about a candidate's qualifications, he/she should contact an elder. If the concern raises doubts in the minds of elders as to the candidate's qualification, they may remove the candidate from consideration and cancel the planned vote. Assuming no such concerns, the vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section F.

After the above steps are successfully completed, the appointment of the man as a non-paid elder will be announced to the membership. The new elder will be ordained by the Board of Elders.

F. TENURE

Elders are appointed to an indefinite tenure consistent with their continued desire and ability to serve in this capacity. This must be evaluated and recognized by themselves, by the other elders, and by membership (Rom. 12:3-8). The removal of elders from office shall be effected by personal resignation or by involuntary dismissal in accordance with the following sections.

G. VOLUNTARY RESIGNATION

An elder may step down at any time he so chooses. The Elder should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board before making a final decision.

H. INVOLUNTARY DISMISSAL

Involuntary dismissal of any elder, paid or non-paid, will be a disciplinary action of the membership in accordance with the instruction of 1 Tim. 5:19-20; Gal. 6:1 and Matt. 18:15-18. The specific procedures for this are spelled out in Article XI with the following differences:

If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, he can be removed by unanimous vote of the other elders.

If members believe they are not being properly and biblically represented by the Board or any member of the Board, they should prayerfully and privately approach the leadership. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Board, or meeting with the Board at the church member's request. The Board of Elders will sincerely consider the issue presented, with the resolution remaining the responsibility of the Board as outlined in the previous paragraphs of this article (Mat 18:15-16).

ARTICLE VIII: PAID ELDERS AND STAFF

A. PAID ELDER(S): PASTOR

The paid elder(s) plays a critical role in the growth, maturity, spirituality and effectiveness of the church. He is responsible for the quality and content of the teaching and counseling within the church (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:6-16). Grace Bible Church recognizes that the Lord has given spiritual gifts to all believers and therefore does not expect the paid elder(s) to provide all the teaching, evangelism and counseling, etc., within the church (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Rather they are to equip the saints "for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).

B. PAID ELDER(S): DUTIES, QUALIFICATIONS AND AUTHORITY

The duties, qualifications and authority of the paid elder(s) shall be the same as for non-paid elders (Article VII), with the following additional duties:

1. Guide the board of elders in long-term, strategic thinking/spiritual planning – Where is Grace Bible Church and where does God want this church to go?
2. Ensure that there is active, effective prayer in the church.
3. Share with the other elders the privilege of teaching (worship services, Sunday school, small groups, etc.).
4. Provide guidance for small group ministries with the purposes of spiritual growth, fellowship, outreach.
5. Prepare God's people for works of service by guiding and coordinating (with the elder board) the church's outreach ministry – both to the local community and to the world.
6. Oversee (with the staff) the administrative functions of the church. Supervise the paid staff of the church unless otherwise specified.
7. Minister to special needs in the Church (Baptisms, Lord's Supper, weddings, funerals, counseling, etc.).
8. Serve as a member of the elder board.

C. PAID ELDER(S): SELECTION

Upon recognition of the need for a new senior paid elder, the Board of Elders will guide and direct the selection process. The attitude of the Board should be one of submission to the Lord, waiting on Him to fill the need with the right man. They should also be expectant, knowing that God will provide a person to fill the need.

The following procedure outlines the method Grace Bible Church will follow in selecting a new senior paid elder:

The selection committee shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The committee shall consist of elders, along with at least an equal number of church members as chosen by the elders.

The committee shall seek the names and resumes from any qualified and interested men by any means at their disposal. This may include contacting doctrinally sound seminaries to assist in finding qualified men for the position and seeking information from the membership about possible candidates.

The committee will carefully and prayerfully consider any resumes submitted. The resumes will be evaluated in light of the man's experience, interests, doctrinal beliefs, philosophy of the ministry and in light of the needs of the church.

The committee will contact one or more men who appear to fill the needs of the church based on the resumes and other gathered information. The men may be invited to visit the church one or more times. These visit(s) should include time for the committee and other members to evaluate the man and his family, time for him to present the Word and time for him to evaluate the church and the community. Attendance of a man's family is not required on the first visit.

After each visit, the committee will prayerfully consider the candidate. During the process, they will seek input from the members concerning the individual by means of written questionnaire. All questionnaires will be reviewed by the committee. After evaluation of the candidate(s), the committee will announce their recommendation to the Board.

The Board of Elders must unanimously approve the recommendation of the committee.

The Elders will call a membership meeting to vote to see if there is unified agreement with the recommendation. The meeting date should be at least two (2) weeks after the committee's recommendation is reported to allow the church ample time to prayerfully consider the decision. The vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section

F. If at least two-thirds of the voting members agree with the committee's recommendation, a job offer may be made.

If the man turns down the offer, or if the membership does not agree with the committee's recommendation, the above procedure will be repeated until a qualified man is hired.

D. PAID ELDER(S): TENURE AND REMOVAL

Tenure and removal of a paid elder will follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VII, F, G, and H.

E. ASSOCIATE PASTORAL STAFF

The need for paid associate pastoral staff to assist in meeting the needs of the church may be recognized by any member or leadership. Such need must be unanimously agreed to by the Board of Elders before action is taken. The need for this expenditure should be discussed with the membership.

The procedure for hiring associate pastoral staff members shall be the same as for a senior paid elder.

Unless otherwise specified, all paid pastoral staff will look to the senior paid elder for supervision of their duties and for periodic reviews of their performance. A written job description will be prepared for all paid staff members.

After appropriate consultation with the elders, a recommendation by the senior paid elder will be sufficient for modifying the duties or redirecting the efforts of any paid staff member. Removal of any associate pastoral staff member shall follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VII, G and H.

Associate pastoral staff members may be elders if so desired by the Board of Elders.

F. NON-PASTORAL STAFF

The hiring of baby sitters, janitorial services, secretary, etc., will be planned for and directed by the Board of Elders.

Since the secretary will be working primarily for the senior paid elder, he will make the final decision, in consultation with the Board of Elders, on who will fill the position.

ARTICLE IX: DEACONS

A. QUALIFICATIONS

Deacons shall be men who desire to be servants of the membership, who are able to serve, who meet all the qualifications of Scripture set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Tim. 3:8-12, and who are conscientiously and wholeheartedly in agreement with the Constitution of this church.

B. DUTIES

In Acts 6:1-4, certain men were appointed to minister to the physical needs of the members, to relieve the elders so they would have more time to concentrate on prayer and on the Word. These were undoubtedly the first deacons and functioned as helpers to the leaders of the Jerusalem church. These leaders were forerunners of the elders in the New Testament church.

Deacons shall be helpers of the elders in ministering to the needs of the church, especially the physical needs (such as caring for the building and property), though they may serve in other capacities as their gifts and training allow.

Their specific duties will be designated by the elders according to the need of the church and a deacon's particular gifts, capacities and talents. If so desired by the Board of Elders, the Deacons may be given the task managing the finances of the church under the appropriate oversight of the Board.

C. APPOINTMENT

Deacons shall be appointed to serve as long as they are qualified and willing to serve and as long as a need for their ministry exists. The Board of Elders will determine if, and when, deacons should be appointed.

First Tim. 3:10 teaches that potential deacons are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the members to evaluate a man's commitment to the Lord, his qualifications according to 1 Tim. 3:8-12, his doctrinal understanding and his willingness to serve. The members and the Board of Elders should be on the alert to those men who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon.

In the New Testament church, both the church leaders and the members played an important role in choosing deacons (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons will be appointed as the need arises. However, only qualified and willing men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if those qualified are unable or unwilling to serve, no appointment will be made. The church shall wait on the Lord to provide a qualified man or men to meet the need.

The following outlines the procedure Grace Bible Church will follow in selecting deacons:

The Board of Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon(s) exists.

When there is a need, then the Board shall notify the membership of the need and ask them to recommend to the Board those men whom they believe meet the qualifications.

The Board of Elders will review the names submitted to them along with any additional names of men they believe to be qualified.

Each name submitted will be carefully and prayerfully considered and reviewed according to their qualifications, gifts, the need, and the individual's willingness to serve.

Members of the church will be consulted about the qualifications of men under consideration.

The elders will then appoint that man (men) whom they believe to be the most qualified to serve according to the specific needs and the qualifications.

D. REMOVAL OF DEACONS

A deacon may voluntarily step down from his position at any time that he so chooses. The deacon should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board of Elders before making a final decision.

Involuntary dismissal of a deacon shall be in accord with the procedures for church discipline outlined in Article XI. If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, the Board may remove him from office, but only after the principles for church discipline have been prayerfully considered and followed (Matt. 18:15-18).

ARTICLE X: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. UNION IN THE UNIVERSAL BODY OF CHRIST

At the time of personal faith in Jesus Christ, the believer is called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and joined into union with the universal body of Christ, the church, by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 12:12-13, 20; Col. 1:18).

B. UNION WITH A LOCAL ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS

There is another aspect of this fellowship into which the believer is joined. He is brought into the fellowship of fellow members of that body, other living believers on earth that he might share and participate in the various blessings and ministries of the body of Christ. For this to occur properly, believers are to seek the fellowship of one another in a local church or assembly of believers to which they are to become responsible, a mini-church, so to speak, of the greater and universal church of God (1 Pet. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Believers in isolation, operating independently of other believers of a local assembly, is an idea contrary to Scripture. Scripture teaches that there are to be local assemblies of believers, united together by a common faith, by union in Christ, and the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by common purposes, commitments and responsibilities, and with a common leadership of that specific body, independent in government from other local assemblies. The local church is to be a body of people allotted to the charge of elders and subject to the discipline of that body or assembly (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 5:2; 1 Cor. 12:20-27; Ephes. 4:4-6; 1 Thess. 5:11-14; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Tim. 5:20; Heb. 10:14-15; Heb. 13:7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:8-10; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

This of necessity implies more than a loose relationship of a believer or believers to a particular body or assembly. It involves a tie, an involvement, a commitment, responsibility and submission to both the leadership and to each other.

C. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Scriptures contain neither a mandate for nor a command against an official membership roll. In Acts, we see that believers were added to the church in Jerusalem; however, this serves primarily to show the growth in the early church (Acts 2:47; 9:31; 16:5). These people were devoting themselves to a local assembly and its leadership for teaching, leadership, fellowship and worship (Acts 2:42). There were also letters of commendation or acceptance written on behalf of both men and women to be welcomed and accepted into the fellowship or various

assemblies. These letters commended believers to other assemblies regarding their faithfulness and ministry and thus they were not a transfer of membership by letter (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:10; Col. 4:10; 2 Cor. 3:1; 8:16-24).

The emphasis of these Scriptures is that every believer become identified and committed to a specific local assembly of believers following the leading and direction of God. This commitment is revealed by their attitude, faith, attendance, involvement, giving and submission to that assembly.

Grace Bible Church does have a membership roll to aid in conducting business in an orderly manner and to provide legal protection in important, yet potentially controversial church decisions (such as discipline, Article XI). An individual's decision to be placed on the membership roll should flow from his or her commitment to the church. The individual should remember that being on the membership role has no merit or value so far as his spiritual maturity or growth is concerned. It is, however, an important tool in helping the church function smoothly.

D. PROCEDURE FOR MEMBERSHIP

Any individual who confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and who is in agreement with the Statement of Faith listed in Article III is qualified and eligible for membership in Grace Bible Church. Anyone who desires to become a member should contact one of the elders and request membership. At least two elders will meet with the individual to discuss this decision. If the individual meets the qualifications for membership, he/she will be placed on the roll and will be acknowledged before the full membership as a new member.

E. MEMBERSHIP ROLL

The elders will review the membership roll annually. Members may be removed from the roll by the member's choice, by church discipline (Article XI), by death or by noninvolvement with the church. If an individual appears to no longer be involved with the church, an elder(s) will contact the person to verify their membership status. In such cases, if the person cannot be contacted after a sincere effort has been made, their name may be removed from the roll by two thirds vote of the Board of Elders.

F. VOTING AND MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

In the cases outlined in Article VII Section B, a membership meeting for the purpose of voting will be called. The purpose of voting is not to simply obtain a "majority-rules" consensus. Rather, all voting in this church is designed to show God's leading within the members on an issue. Unless specifically indicated differently within the Constitution, a two-thirds vote of members present in favor of an issue shall signify to the church leadership that the members agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being voted on. If the two-thirds vote in favor is not achieved, the leadership will reevaluate the situation.

The means of voting will normally be by written ballot. This may vary, however, if the leadership announces the form of voting to be used when the membership meeting is announced. The membership will be advised of the date, time, and location of a meeting for a vote at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Any member of the church present at the meeting may vote. Non-members may attend but may not vote. No quorum is defined or required. Voting by proxy is not allowed.

ARTICLE XI: CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We Teach in the responsibility and necessity of church discipline as clearly outlined in Scripture. It is a very difficult area and hard to practice. Nevertheless, church discipline has the divine authority of Scripture and is vital to the purity of the church. In church discipline, the following matters must be carefully understood and applied.

A. THE PATTERN AND BASIS FOR DISCIPLINE

The discipline of the church is first patterned after the fact that the Lord Himself disciplines His children (Heb. 12:6) and, as a father delegates part of the discipline of the children to the wife, so the Lord has delegated the discipline of the church family to the church itself.

Discipline is further based on the holy character of God (1 Pet. 1:16; Heb. 12:11). The pattern of God's holiness, his desire for the church to be holy, set apart unto Him, is an important reason for the necessity of church discipline. The church is therefore to clean out the leaven of malice and wickedness from its ranks (1 Cor. 5:6-8). A failure to discipline in a church today evidences a lack of awareness of the holiness of God.

Church discipline must be patterned after and based on the divine commands of Scripture. We have numerous passages which both command and give us biblical directives on the how, when and where of church discipline. Again, a failure to exercise this responsibility demonstrates a lack of obedience and belief in the authority of the Bible (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Matt. 18:15-18; Titus 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:20; Gal. 6:1).

A final basis for the necessity of church discipline is the testimony of the church in the world. The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church corporately and individually acts no differently than the world it loses its credibility and authenticity (1 Pet. 2:11-18; 3:8-16; 4:1-4).

B. THE PURPOSES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- Concern for the glory of God and the testimony of the church.
- The restoration and building up of the sinning believer.
- The winning of souls to Christ.
- The purity of the membership and its protection from moral and doctrinally impure influences, knowing a little leaven can leaven the entire lump (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

Such goals automatically govern the spirit in which all disciplinary action is to be given. Thus:

It must be done in the spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to yourself lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Those who walk disorderly are to be admonished, warned, and appealed to in love (1 Thess. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). This admonishing, etc., is not restricted to the elders but may be done by any member (1 Thess. 5:14).

If there is no response in repentance and obedience, then members are to withhold intimate fellowship until there is obedience (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). This is to indicate to the offender that his action has caused a rupture in the harmony of the church. Its goal is restoration and the person is still to be counted as a brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

If the person persists after admonition and withdrawal of intimate fellowship, the final step is rejection or excommunication (Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17b), accompanied by public rebuke before all (1 Tim. 5:20). Examples of church discipline are found in Scripture. The Corinthian believers were to be "gathered together" in order to take action against the offending brother (1 Cor. 5:4). We also find that it was the whole church in Rome and in Thessalonica who were to take action with regard to the unruly and schismatic and not just a few (2 Thess. 3:6-15; Rom. 16:17).

Finally, discipline in the name of our Lord always includes a readiness to forgive. The many or majority who discipline must also be ready and eager to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love to the sinning person (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

C. THE PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. WHEN IT IS TO BE PRACTICED

Great care must be exercised here. Scripture does not warrant the exercise of church discipline for an individual or a church's pet taboos or peeves. According to Scripture, there are five categories which warrant church discipline. These are:

- Difficulties between members (Matt. 18:15-17).
- Divisiveness: People causing divisions in the church (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11).
- Disorderly conduct: Conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- Sins of the type mentioned in 1 Cor. 5: incest, immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, and swindling (1 Cor. 5:1, 11).
- False teaching: Erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith, not lesser differences of interpretation (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; also implied in Rev. 2:14-16; Philip. 3:2-3, 15-19; Rom. 16:17-18).

The key concerns here are: (a) the holy character of God, (b) the testimony of the church, (c) the effect upon the unity and purity of the church, and (d) the edification and restoration of the individual.

2. HOW IT IS TO BE PRACTICED

Scriptural procedure here is clear and specific steps are prescribed. They are as follows:

Recognize the offense. Caution—one must be sure it is an offense which calls for discipline. Again, the Word is our criterion.

Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender (Matt. 18:15). This is when the problem involves two believers. The one offended or the one who recognizes the offense is to go privately and try to rectify the problem. If this fails, he is to take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven or established (Matt. 18:16-17).

Seek reconciliation through the spiritual leadership if the problem involves an offense that is against the entire membership, or is a threat to its unity. Initiatory action following the concept of Gal. 6:1 should be taken by the mature spiritual leaders of the church rather than by just one person. "You who are spiritual" in Gal. 6:1 is plural meaning literally, "you, the spiritual ones ..." These initial contacts provide opportunity for loving admonition, cor-

rection and forgiveness. On the other hand, if these first steps are not heeded, it constitutes a warning that further action will be taken and gives occasion for serious rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; Titus 2:15; 3:10).

Seek reconciliation through the whole church. If further action is necessary, it is to be taken before the entire membership (Matt. 18:17). This action could consist of a loss of privileges, for example voting or teaching, but may result in more severe action, for example loss of membership.

In essence then, this is the action of the Lord carrying out discipline through the action of the entire membership through the leadership of the elders or the spiritually mature (1 Cor. 5:4 "in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled... with the power of our Lord Jesus ..."). Similar heavenly authority is seen in the ratification of this disciplinary action as spelled out in Matt. 18:18-19).

ARTICLE XII: FINANCES

Believers are to give financially from an attitude of commitment to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-6). It is the policy of Grace Bible Church to keep the membership informed of financial needs. There will be no individual solicitation of members nor taking of financial pledges. The purpose of this information is not to coerce or pressure anyone into giving, but rather to provide avenues for giving as the Lord provides. Each believer is to give according to their ability with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

Because giving is done unto the Lord, it is critical that the local church handle the finances given with care and wisdom both for the glory of the Lord and for the testimony of the church (2 Cor. 8:20-21). With this view in mind, the following outlines the policies of handling financial decisions:

All paid staff shall be paid a salary commensurate to their duties and abilities (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Cor. 9:6-11).

The local church has the privilege and responsibility to provide financial support for those in service for the Lord (missionaries, seminary students, etc. Philip. 4:14-17; 2 Cor. 8:1-5). Grace Bible Church will support certain of those in service as the Lord leads and provides. The Board of Elders, with the help of an appointed committee if desired, will communicate to the membership which people and ministries Grace Bible Church will support.

It is the goal of GBC to generously and sacrificially use our resources - money, possessions, talents and people's time - to fulfill the Great Commission as outlined in Matthew 28:19-20 through the ministry of the church, local ministries and outreach activities, supporting domestic and foreign career missionaries, and benevolence.

It is the goal of Grace Bible Church to be debt free. With respect to major capital investments like property and buildings short term debt of 3 years or less may be considered. Any longer term debt must be approved by a vote of the membership, and should not be undertaken without a plan in place to retire the debt as soon as feasible.

On an annual basis, a finance committee will be appointed. The duties of this committee will include, but not be limited to, the preparation of an annual financial plan which details the expected expenditures for the following year including the salaries of all paid staff members and the amount of support given to the persons and ministries supported in number 3 above. In addition, this committee will recommend the expenditure limits for the paid elder(s) and staff. This committee shall consist of at least one elder and the church treasurer. All recommendations concerning changes in these areas will first be presented to the Board of Elders for unanimous approval of the non-paid elders only. The Board of Elders will then communicate the plan to the membership.

In order to keep orderly records, a treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The treasurer shall keep all necessary books, write necessary checks to pay bills, prepare monthly financial statements and any other duties as prescribed by the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE XIII: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Suggestions and proposals from the membership can be a vital and healthy avenue by which the elders may minister to the church. When handled scripturally, this type of communication edifies the church, ministers to the needs of the members, helps preserve and promote unity within the church and brings glory to God (Prov. 15:22).

Following the principles outlined above, any member who harbors a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or its elders, should prayerfully and privately approach the elders. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Board, or meeting with the Board at the church member's request.

The Board should seek to prayerfully accept and address any complaint thus presented and seek to resolve all problems in a manner which best promotes those benefits mentioned above (Prov. 16:21-24).

ARTICLE XIV: AMENDMENTS

The need to amend or replace this Constitution may be suggested by any church member. At the time such a suggestion is made, the elders, after consultation with the membership, shall make a decision on the suggestion in light of Scripture and all essential information. The final resolution shall be appropriately communicated to the person(s) making the suggestion. If the decision involves changes of any kind to this Constitution, the changes will be communicated to the membership in written form, providing adequate time for study and response before becoming final.