

DISCOVER



Grace Bible Church

Membership

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Lesson 1

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: God's holiness and our sinfulness.

A. God's Holiness and Wrath

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.

- a. God's wrath is His holy just response to sin; it's His personal, active, righteous anger towards every evil thing.

- b. 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."

B. 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."

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

- 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."

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..."

- 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; indeed, 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."

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.

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

A. The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, lived a righteous and sinless life, died for our sins, and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies. The result is that there is now no condemnation for those who believe (Rom. 8:1), but only everlasting joy.

1. Jesus' birth

Jesus is fully and eternally 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 truly God and truly 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

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

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.

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 everyone 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."

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."

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. In justification...

- a. God considers our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us.
- b. This declaration from God is a once-for-all, permanent event in our lives, that nothing can change.

4. Jesus' resurrection from the dead

Jesus Christ rose from the dead, demonstrating that his 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

The ascension marks the beginning of Jesus' reign. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven as Lord, with 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

Lesson 2

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”) There are at least three ways in which repentance is experienced:
 - 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. Heart/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.”

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 that we are able to repent of our sin and turn in faith to Jesus Christ and His gospel? 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 nature 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.

Lesson 3

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).

God's supernatural work in saving sinners is dramatic and instantaneous, but it is only the beginning of a lifelong walk with God. 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 that can be described by the word sanctification. Sanctification literally means to be set apart. We are set apart from the world and for God at salvation, but sanctification continues in a progressive way to cause believers to grow in holiness, that is becoming more and more free from sin and more like Christ.

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, and we are *declared* righteous in Christ.
 - c. **In sanctification** the pollution of sin is progressively removed as we are *made* righteous 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." (John 12:26)
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."

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 Sanctification

A. Sanctification Is a Cooperative Activity

In sanctification, we are in process of actually becoming what we have already been declared to be in justification, righteous. (see Section 3.05.a.ii, iii)

We are saved by grace and we are sanctified by grace. It is necessary and unmerited in both cases. In salvation, God's grace enables us to respond with repentance and faith; in sanctification, His grace enables us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our growth in holiness.

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, the truth from Scripture is that we become more like Jesus because *"it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:13)

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."

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."

D. God Equips Us for This Work

1. **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."

2. **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."

3. **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."

4. **Community.** The community of believers is crucial part of this battle. Therefore, each Christian should be committed to regularly engaging with that community and 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..."

E. 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.

F. 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.

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 Home Groups (see Lesson 5) 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.

G. Kept to the End

The process of change is tough; it's a battle! But it's not tough because God's commands are burdensome (1 John 5:3–4), they're good and life-giving. It's a battle because sin still remains. Yet here's the good news: the presence of the battle is not a sign of failure, it's the evidence of new life. Dead hearts don't wrestle with sin. Only those born of God do. Even more, Christ has already broken the power of sin at the cross. So now, we don't fight for victory, we fight from it. In other words, believers fight against an already defeated enemy. And we don't fight alone; the Spirit empowers real change. Every step of obedience to God and growth in change is grace-enabled. And all of it is grounded in God's promise: He will finish what He started in us (Phil. 1:6). No one God saves will ever be lost. He will bring every one of His children safely home.

Jude 1:24-25; “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Lesson 4

Understanding the Journey: The Bible

The Christian life is not a wandering without direction. God has not left us to stumble in the dark, unsure of who He is, how we are to live, or what our place is in the world. He has spoken—and He has spoken with clarity, authority, and grace. He's given us His Word: the Bible.

Through it, we come to know God, understand ourselves, and grasp the true story of the world. In short, the Bible reveals God's perspective on reality, and we desperately need that.

I. What Is the Bible?

The Bible is one book made up of a collection of 66 smaller books, written by roughly 40 human authors over 1,500 years, in three different languages. And yet, it tells one unified story—because behind every human author stood one divine Author: God Himself.

The Bible—also known as the Scriptures and God's Word—is where God tells us about Himself and His purposes. The Bible is also where we learn about who we are in relation to God.

At its core, the Bible tells the grand story of God glorifying Himself by saving sinners through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every book—whether law or narrative, poetry or prophecy—leads us to Jesus (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

Finally, the Bible is Inspired, Authoritative, Sufficient, and Effective.

II. The Bible Is Inspired

Inspiration means that God Himself is the source of Scripture. The Bible is not human speculation about God; it is God's self-revelation, written through human authors as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). That word—God-breathed—means the words of Scripture come from the very mouth of God. Similarly, Peter writes, "No prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Though written in human language and shaped by human personalities, every word of Scripture is exactly what God intended. The Spirit ensured that the Bible would be true, trustworthy, and complete.

Inspiration is what makes the Bible not just ancient writing, but living revelation. The same Spirit who inspired it now works to illuminate it—helping us see Jesus, believe the gospel, and walk in God's ways.

III. The Bible Is Authoritative

Since the Bible is inspired—*breathed out by God*—it comes with divine authority.

Authority means the right to rule, to command, to define what is true and good. And there is no higher authority than God. Since Scripture is His very Word, it carries that same authority into every area of life.

To read the Bible is to hear God speak. What Scripture says, God says. So, to believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God Himself. And to reject the Bible's commands or truths is not a minor disagreement, it is rebellion against the King.

Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable..." (2 Timothy 3:16). Its authority doesn't depend on how it makes us feel or how popular it is in a given culture. It's authoritative because its Author is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

Jesus affirms this when He says in John 17:17, "Your word is truth." Scripture is not just true, it is the standard by which all truth is measured. It doesn't merely contain truth, it is truth.

If we are to think rightly about God, ourselves, and the world, we must humbly submit to Scripture. The Bible doesn't sit under our judgment—we sit under its judgment. And by grace, through the Spirit, we learn to delight in its authority as life-giving, wise, and good.

IV. The Bible Is Sufficient

Because the Bible is inspired by God and carries His authority, it is also sufficient; it gives us everything we need to know God, trust Christ, and walk in obedience.

Paul continues in 2 Timothy 3:16–17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

This doesn't mean the Bible tells us everything about everything. But it does mean that in everything God calls us to believe and do, the Bible is enough. This is the heart of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible is not lacking. We don't need new revelation. We need to trust, treasure, and obey what God has already spoken. And by the Spirit's help, we'll find that everything we need for life and godliness is already in our hands (2 Peter 1:3).

The Bible doesn't just inform us, it equips us. It tells us what is true, where we've gone wrong, how to be made right, and how to live in the way that pleases God.

A. Sufficient for Godly Thinking

2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof..." (2 Tim. 3:16)

The Bible teaches us what to believe about God, ourselves, sin, salvation, and eternity, and it corrects us when our thinking strays (2 Tim. 3:16).

B. Sufficient for Godly Living

2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for...correction, and for training in righteousness,"

The Bible trains us in righteousness. It not only tells us what is true, but shows us how to live in light of that truth. It forms our character and fuels our obedience—not by law alone, but by the grace of God revealed in Christ.

V. The Bible Is Effective

Scripture isn't just powerful in theory, it's effective in practice. It changes people. It shapes lives. Why? Because it's alive (Hebrews 4:12) and it's purposeful.

Paul says Scripture exists "so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). In other words, God gave us the Bible to fully equip us for everything He calls us to do.

This echoes Ephesians 2:10: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The Bible is God's gracious tool to prepare us for those very works.

VI. Our Commitment to the Bible

We seek to express our commitment to the Bible in a variety of ways.

A. Preaching the Bible

Preaching is the primary, God-ordained means by which His Word is proclaimed to His gathered people. Through faithful preaching, God's people hear the voice of God—calling, convicting, and comforting them by His Spirit (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

For this reason, we are committed to expository preaching. This means we open God's Word and seek to unfold the original meaning of the text in its biblical and redemptive context, and then apply it to our lives today.

Our goal is not simply to inform minds, but to transform hearts through the clear and Christ-centered proclamation of Scripture, because when the Bible is rightly preached, God transforms lives.

B. Singing the Truths of the Bible

We believe that the songs we sing on Sunday should reflect the truth of God's Word. That's why every song includes Scripture references, so there's clarity and confidence that what we're singing is biblically rooted and theologically true.

Singing is not filler before the sermon, it's one of the ways God's truth dwells richly among us (Col. 3:16). Through gospel-rich lyrics, we aim to stir hearts, shape faith, and exalt Christ together as one voice.

C. Private Reading, Study and Meditation

God's Word is meant to shape not just our Sundays, but our everyday lives. We're committed to applying Scripture through regular private reading, study, and meditation.

The Bible is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), and through it, God renews our minds, strengthens our faith, and leads us to Jesus. We believe we shouldn't just read to gain knowledge, but to know God and be transformed by His grace.

Lesson 5

Together on The Journey: The Local Church

In this lesson, we will explore the critical role that the local church plays in God's glorious purposes. 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."

We will find that our relationships with other believers are a tremendous means of blessing, both for ourselves and others. By God's design, He doesn't intend for His people to live life alone. Rather, when He saves us, He puts us into community, giving us the marvelous privilege of going on the journey together.

I. The Church: A People, Not a Place

The word "church" (*ekklesia*) means a gathering of people, an assembly, with a shared belief. In other words, the church is not *where* God's people gather, but it *is* God's people gathered. Indeed, the church are those whom Christ came and died for.

Although "church" can refer to the *universal* church—the body of believers of all time and in all places (i.e., Matt. 16:18, Galatians 1:13, Ephesians 1:22), the predominant use of "church" in the New Testament refers to the *local* church—an *identifiable* gathering of God's people in *specific* locations (e.g., Acts 5:11, 8:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Phm. 1:2; Jam. 5:14; 3 Jo. 1:6; Rev. 1:4; etc.).²

II. The Local Church

A. Identifiable Leadership

An "ordered" local church will eventually have elders (Titus 1:5). More will be said about elders in Lesson 7, but for now it's important to understand that, by God's design the local church is to have qualified men who, under the chief Shepherd Jesus Christ, shepherd and oversee His people.

Further, a local church *must* have identifiable—local and known—leadership if the people are to fulfill the command, "Obey your leaders and submit to them" (Heb. 13:17). If not identifiable then to which leaders should Christians obey and submit? Is it every elder from any church? Certainly not. Christians are called to obey and submit to their "identifiable" leadership.

B. Identifiable People

- 1. A People Counted:** The first church began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and took up residence in the first believers. It is recorded that this church began with about 120 persons (Acts 1:15), but the counting did not stop there. After Peter preached Christ as both Lord and Messiah, "...those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41)

² The letters in the New Testament are primarily written to local churches.

The local church was not a loose association of unidentifiable people, rather people were literally counted as they were included into the gathering. Luke, the author of Acts, continued to track growth and kept a count of those who joined the community (i.e., Acts 2:47; 4:4).

2. **A People Known:** The people were not just numbers, they were names. These people were *known*. In the New Testament letters, various names of those who belong to those local churches are often mentioned (e.g., Rom. 16:1-24, 1 Cor. 1:14, Phil 4:2, Col. 4:7-8, 1 Thess. 3:2). Even the thoughtfulness of care for widows gives insight into how local churches necessarily consisted of *known* people (i.e., 1 Tim. 5:9).³

Jesus gave His church baptism and the Lord's Supper (more on these in Section III). These ordinances publicly identify believers and gives shape to local churches. (More on the Ordinances and how this is in Section III.)

Consider again the command of 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..." A known people are the souls who elders keep watch over, and it is for *those* to whom they "will have to give an account" to Jesus. Hebrews 13:17 goes in both directions when it comes to the inherent nature of the local church consisting of an identifiable leadership and people.

C. Corporate by Design

Although God saves people individually, by His design He then joins individuals *together* to make the church. As early church history moves along in Acts and the New Testament, we are not presented with Christians living in isolation, but Christians who are vitally joined together in local churches.

Below are some key ways we see the nature and benefits of the local church being corporate:

1. **The Metaphors:** 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.
2. **Gift Diversity:** 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 the whole body. (Eph. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:7)
3. **One Another:** The assumption of the New Testament is that the Christian life will be lived out together in local communities. Consider the various "one another" commands in the New Testament given to local churches. These can only be obeyed in community. (See Appendix D, *Life in the Body of Christ*).
4. **Transformation Together:** Sanctification is a community project. We simply cannot make the same progress in isolation that we can make in community with other believers. We need each other to resist sin and strengthen our resolve to press on toward Christlikeness. (Rom. 15:5; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13) It's not surprising that most of the commands in the New Testament letters are in the plural; that is, they are given to the local church to live out *together*.

³ Being known is how the church in Jerusalem was able to "pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom..." to serve the widows (Acts 6:3). In Acts 6:5 Luke records the specific names, along with some descriptions, because these men were known. (The whole account is found in Acts 6:1-7)

5. **Mutual Care:** We live in a fallen world, and the effects of sin—our own and others—are all around us: pain, sorrow, sickness and 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. (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:24-26)

III. The Ordinances

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are distinguishing marks of a local church. These are called "ordinances" because the Lord Jesus Christ ordained—commanded—they to be administered and observed.

The Lord Jesus 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, which comes only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16). Participation in the ordinances is obedience to the Lord's commands.

Truly, the ordinances give shape to a gospel community, identifying local gatherings of God's people ("members"), who live in pursuit of God's glory together.

A. Baptism

Baptism is the first ordinance administered and observed by local churches to disciples of Jesus—observed once by each disciple—whereby he or she, ideally shortly after conversion, publicly testifies to faith in Christ and joint union with Christ and His people—thereby publicly committing to Christ and His people.

We see baptism as the first ordinance observed by believers in passages like Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38, 41. GBC further understands the following about baptism:

1. **Believer's Baptism.** Since baptism uniquely depicts initiation into the Christian life, GBC does not baptize infants, but only those who have professed faith in Christ. If you were baptized as an infant, we would ask that—in obedience to Scripture and as part of becoming a member of GBC—you be baptized as a believer.
2. **Baptismal Participant.** Any person who clearly understands and has clearly responded to the Gospel message through repentance of sins and faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation ought to be baptized. (The Gospel message as summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Note, in the book of Acts, the issue is understanding and response: Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12, Acts 16:31-33, and Acts 18:8.).

Since baptism is both an act of personal testimony of faith and the church's affirmation and celebration of that faith, we also believe it to be biblically appropriate for there to be some measure of visible fruit in the lives of those who have clearly responded to the Gospel (e.g., Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:22-23). We understand that this will look different for children versus adults.

3. **Baptism and Membership.** We believe the New Testament links baptism and membership (see previous in III and in II.B.2). Because of this, we do not baptize adults who do not desire to commit to membership. In unique circumstances, we would baptize an adult if they are unable to covenant with GBC in membership, yet are soon to do so with another biblical church. (More on membership later in this Lesson)

4. **Children & Youth (Minors).** We believe minors can be genuine participants of baptism, because we believe God can and does save children and youth. With that said, we also believe that the evidence and fruit of their conversion should and will look very different from adults; this is to be expected with less life lived out. With that, we believe there is a necessity to walk alongside parents to help them and the elders to discern God's saving activity and for there to be appropriate teaching for them as children who are now spiritually united to Jesus and a part of God's family. However, unlike with adults, we would not require or expect formal Covenant Membership (see III.A.3 above for membership expectations for adult baptism candidates and IV.B for Covenant Membership), but as warranted, we would apply the "non-member" provision in the Restoration Policy (see Appendix E), recognizing that how we handle restoration will take into account the nature of their previous public testimony and our affirmation of it, their age, and engagement with their parent(s). Furthermore, as they near adulthood, we will engage with them on the expectation of formalizing Covenant Membership.

B. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is the "ongoing" ordinance administered and observed by local churches to disciples of Jesus (ordinarily, baptized) whereby the local believing community shares together in this New Covenant meal to proclaim, as one body, Christ's death until He comes, thereby confirming their commitment to Christ and each other.⁴

The Lord's Supper is for Christians, those who have turned from their sins and are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. The Lord's Supper is a corporate meal.

Since baptism is the "initiating" ordinance observed by disciples of Jesus, it is appropriate that, ordinarily, those who participate in the Lord's Supper have been baptized. Having said that, Christians who have yet to be baptized following professed faith in Christ are allowed to participate, while being urged, in obedience to Jesus, to be baptized as soon as possible.

The Lord's Supper symbolizes and affirms several things (i.e., 1 Cor. 11:17-33)⁵:

1. **Christ's Death:** When the bread is broken, it symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body, and when the cup is poured out, it symbolizes the pouring out of Christ's blood for us.
2. **The Marriage Supper of the Lamb:** The Lord's Supper points us forward to the supper we will partake in for all eternity. (Rev. 19:9)
3. **Our Participation in the Benefits of Christ's Death:** When we "take, eat", each one of us gives evidence that we participate in and share in the benefits earned for us by the death of Christ.
4. **Spiritual Nourishment:** Participation in the Supper symbolizes the spiritual nourishment and refreshment that Christ, by faith, gives to our souls (John 6:53-57).

⁴ Regarding the order of the ordinances—especially the Lord's Supper coming *after* baptism, note for example, "the breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 *follows* the baptism of believers in Acts 2:41. Or, note the crux of making disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 is baptizing and teaching, and with the Lord's Supper not in view it logically *follows* baptism.

⁵ This section is adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp.1221-1223.

5. **Our Unity:** "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread." (1 Cor. 10:17) To share the spiritual food is to reinforce our spiritual fellowship and unity together; the many who are yet united together in Christ as one. Additionally, through the corporate participation and self-examination⁶ we continually forge our unity with one another in Christ.
6. **Affirmation of Faith:** Each time we partake of the Lord's Supper, in that act, we say again that we are—individually and corporately—united to Christ and trusting in him alone for salvation.

IV. Local Church Membership

A. Is Local Church Membership Biblical?

Does it really matter if I "join" a local 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. But God has not designed the Christian life to be lived out alone. Again, when He saves us, He then joins us to His people in the context of a local church. This is where we get baptized, partake in the Lord's Supper with His people, and necessarily live out the "one another's" together.

Joining a local church—being a member—is what this chapter has been conveying and building to. Although church "membership" is not a formal term used in the New Testament, it is conceptually the "air" that the New Testament breathes. The New Testament pictures God's people vitally joined to a local body of believers.

One more argument for New Testament local church membership is seen in the final act of church discipline. We see it in several places (e.g., Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 1:20), but maybe none so clearly as 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. Here, Paul confronts the church in Corinth for approving of a man walking in blatant, unrepentant sexual immorality. The Corinthians celebrated this as God's grace, but Paul warned them that this type of wickedness shouldn't make them boast but mourn. Indeed, He told them to remove this man for the destruction of his flesh *and* for the hopeful salvation of his soul. In verses 11-13, Paul is direct, "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'"

So, regarding membership, here's the question, "How can someone be put "out" if there isn't an identifiable "in"? If there is no commitment to a local community (see all previous in this Lesson), then how do you remove someone from that community? Church discipline doesn't work if local church "membership" doesn't exist.

If you are still uncertain about local church membership, skim back over this lesson with it in mind. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they practically live out their Christian life as a member to a specific local church. As individuals are joined to and participate in local churches, God's specific purposes for His people are accomplished.

⁶ Note the repeated phrase "come together" in 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34. The error being committed was that when they came together "each one goes ahead with his own meal" (1 Cor. 11:21); they were being selfish and inconsiderate. The corrective was to examine themselves and discern the body (certainly the body of the believers) and wait for one another.

B. Why Covenant Membership?

Over again in the Scriptures, God makes covenants (promises and commitments) with His people (Noahic—Gen. 8:20-9:17; Abrahamic—Gen. 12, 15, 17; Mosaic—Deut. 28; Davidic—2 Sam. 7; The New Covenant—Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:19-22). In the process, He calls them to a pattern of life and worship that's best for them and most glorifying to Him. In addition to divine covenants, we find a variety of human covenants in the Bible, where people make different kinds of commitments to one another (e.g., Joshua and the Gibeonites in Josh. 9; David and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 23:16-18; King Solomon and King Hiram in 1 Kings 5). These biblical realities represent the heart behind Covenant Membership at GBC. The commitments that we make to one another are articulated in our GBC Covenant, which is found in Appendix A.

C. Church Membership Is Partnership

The word often translated "fellowship" or "partnership" in the New Testament (*koinonia*, see Acts 2:42 and Phil 1:5) expresses the idea of close association involving mutual interests and sharing. Fellowship/partnership is a key concept of the local church. Our fellowship/partnership is...

1. **With God:** Biblical writers took up this word to describe the relationship believers have together 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:** Fellowship also describes 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;"*
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. 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."*

V. Home Groups: Living Life Together

It is because of God's desire for His people to live interdependently that we have Home Groups. These groups, made up of a smaller number of GBC people, allow us to build more intimate relationships and cultivate fellowship with one another. 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. Their Purpose

1. **Application of God's Word to our lives.** Merely hearing God's Word is insufficient (James 1:22-25); we must apply it to our lives for there to be fruit. Home Groups enable us to do this together. Primarily leveraging the Sunday sermons, we seek to further apply the Bible's teaching from that passage, 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 (think, the "one another" commands). 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. Our Participation

All Covenant Members of GBC are expected to be actively involved in a Home Group. We invite DISCOVER participants to either explore gbclortonc.com/homegroups or engage with one of the pastors to find a Home Group.

Home Group participation involves:

1. **Attending.** We're much more likely to benefit if we're actually present!
2. **Engaging.** 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 ready engagement.

VI. The Church: God's Glory Manifested

Ultimately, we exist for God's glory, and Scripture is clear that God desires to make His glory known through His church. This is why the local church—the gathering of God's redeemed—is so important to Him.

With that, our main concern is not whether you become part of GBC, but that you do become a part of a local church. As we see in the New Testament, the Christian life is one that is to be lived out in community. The church—with all its imperfections—is 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.

Lesson 6

Participating in the Journey: Servanthood & Stewardship

A reality of the Christian life is that all we are and all that we have now belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). 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.

Throughout the New Testament, believers in Jesus Christ are frequently identified as servants or slaves. 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 of participation. In this lesson, we will explore two of the primary ways we are called to participate in this journey: through servanthood and stewardship 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 a mere 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 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."

B. The Marks of Christian Service

The grace of God expressed through the cross of Christ enables our service to God. When this is the case, our servanthood will be characterized by certain qualities that 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 by meeting 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."

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

C. Giving Expression to Servanthood in Our Church Family

An important aspect of membership at Grace Bible Church is using 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."

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 is an indicator of the state of our heart (Matthew 6:21). Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, and anxiety over money all 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).

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."

6. Giving is to be in proportion to how God has provided.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come."

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, it is the community of God's people, saved by His grace, and to be a member is to be a participant 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.

Lesson 7

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.

The following material is a summary of Elders and Deacons. For a fuller discussion of how they function at Grace Bible Church, see the *Handbook for Elders* and the *Handbook for Deacons* on the GBC website.

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 4:11⁷). 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 Use the Terms

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 Team together shepherds the congregation.

⁷ The verb from the word "Pas" appears in 1 Peter 5:2.

C. Structure of the Elder Team

According to the pattern of the New Testament (e.g. Acts 14:23, 20:17; 1 Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5), Grace Bible Church 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" (Hebrews 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 (Hebrews 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).

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 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. 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.

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."

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 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 teaches that the oversight of a local church, and the primary teaching shall be done by 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 New Testament, 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 leadership 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 equippier, 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 to 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, administering 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 serve 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

In God's kind providence, He places believers in local churches with an eldership that He has assigned. This kind providence 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 Grace Bible 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 Confession 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, domineering. 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 to rightfully 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 Biblical Basis for Ministry of Deacons

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).

VI. The Characteristics of a Deacon

The Scripture gives us clear guidelines for viewing the character of deacons but not as clear on determining their 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 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."

B. Recognized by His Actions Within the Church

Beyond the character of the person, a deacon is one who is already actively serving. 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.

VII. 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 shepherd.

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 when the leaders recognized a physical need within the church. Desiring to meet the need effectively and to remain focused on their primary task of prayer and ministry of the Word, the leaders appointed deacons to serve. Therefore, a deacon's main function will always be the same: providing an organized structure to take care of various ministry needs that are delegated by the elders. 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.

Lesson 8

Others on the Journey: Personal Evangelism, Local Outreach, & 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.

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 Commandment to Adam and Eve

From the beginning, Adam and Eve were to multiply image bearers throughout the earth, bringing God's reign and rule wherever they went.

Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

B. The Plan Continued: God's Covenant with Abraham

When God revealed Himself to Abraham, He promised not only to bless Abraham, but to make him and his descendants a blessing to all the families 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.'"

C. 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. 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 both His original commandment to Adam and Eve to multiply image bearers through the earth and His promise to Abraham to bless “all the families of the earth.”

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.’”

D. The Plan Completed: The Heavenly Throng

We see the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan in the book of Revelation, which looks forward to a day when people from all over the earth will be 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: Personal 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 share the gospel and testify to what God has done for us in Christ. 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.”

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 share the gospel and testify to what God has done for us in Christ.

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. As a church we seek to demonstrate this through our organized outreach ministries that enable our members to 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. Local

Where God Has Placed You Individually. 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 strive to love our community of Lorton and the larger region of Northern Virginia by providing both material and spiritual support to those God has sovereignly placed in our local community. There are several ways we try to fulfill these callings, but two specific ways we seek to accomplish this is through specific local outreach efforts in our community, and through local partnerships that provide more expansive ways to engage with our neighbors and intentionally live out the gospel in our local community.

Our local efforts include things like:

1. Youth outreach camps at Lorton Park
2. Food drives to support the pantry at Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC)
3. Bible studies and church services at the Harmony at Spring Hill
4. Lorton farmers market community outreach
5. Military outreach, primarily to Fort Belvoir

In addition, we partner with Assist Pregnancy Center to make volunteer opportunities available to our members and with LCAC to provide volunteers at various community events throughout the year including National Night Out and the Fall for LCAC Festival.

Learn more at, www.gbclorton.com/localoutreach

B. Global

We see the primary purpose of missions to bring God glory through the building up and the increase of both the breadth ("of all nations") and depth ("make disciples... teaching them") of His Church - the body of believers throughout the world. 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.

As a local church in Lorton, Virginia we support several international missionaries in some of the hardest places to advance the gospel, amongst some of the least-reached people of the world. Grace Bible Church's support includes prayer, finances, short-term trips, and other practical means of ministry.

Learn more at, www.gbclorton.com/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 engagement in a 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 our main concern is that you become part of a sound local 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 steps, 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

Covenant *Our Commitments to One Another Before God*

Preamble

Believing that the Church of Jesus Christ is the very Household of God on earth; and
(Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 4:17)

Believing that Jesus Christ is the Foundation and Chief Cornerstone and Master Builder of His Church; and
(Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-8)

Believing that the only means authorized by Christ for carrying out His Great Commission is His Church; and
(Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 3:10)

Believing that from apostolic times, Christians gathered together in local assemblies (churches) for worship, instruction, fellowship and expression of faith; and
(Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 11:18; Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:23-25; 1 John 1:7; Further, the New Testament Epistles themselves and their content are evidence of this.)

Believing that these churches were made up of specific, baptized, professing disciples of Jesus Christ; and
(Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Further, the New Testament Epistles written to specific people in specific locations are evidence of this.)

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
(The "one-another" commands—e.g., John 13:34; Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:13; et al.—cannot be obeyed in isolation—they demand "another"; as these commands are given to believers in Christ, they must be carried out within the body of Christ.)

Having—by grace, through faith—believed in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and
(Acts 16:31; Rom. 5:15-21; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:8-9)

Having publicly professed our faith through believer's baptism; therefore,
(Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 10:47-48; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27)

Commitments

We do now, before God and through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, willingly and joyfully enter into covenant with other covenant members of this local church, Grace Bible Church of Lorton (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 1:2):

1. We will submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final word on all matters of life and doctrine.
(2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)

2. We will seek to resist sin and pursue holiness.
(Rom. 6:1-14; 8:13; 1 Thess. 4:1; Titus 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 John 1:6-10)
3. We will not neglect gathering together for weekly corporate worship and we will participate in the body of Christ by obeying the "one another" commands in Scripture, recognizing that unique circumstances may occasionally constrain us. In doing so, we will avail ourselves of the grace of God expressed through community (at GBC, the "one another" commands are primarily lived out in community through the Home Groups).
(Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25)
4. We will make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with one another. We will use our words to build up one another and glorify God rather than speaking lies, deceit, slander, or gossip. We will strive to count others as more significant than ourselves. We will guard against legalism by not binding consciences where the Bible allows freedom for personal conviction.
(Eph. 4:1-3, 29-31; Phil. 2:3-5; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8:1-13)
5. We will show Christian love, affectionate care, and genuine forgiveness toward each other. We will encourage, admonish, pray for, and exhibit watchfulness over one another with wisdom, gentleness, and humility in the power of the Holy Spirit. We will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, helping to carry each other's burdens.
(Matt. 7:1-5; John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:15; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:22)
6. We will work together to maintain the church's Christ-exalting witness by supporting: the Confession of Faith, the faithful expository preaching of the Bible, the ordinances of believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Biblical authority of the Elder Team, and the exercise of church discipline as expressed in the Restoration Policy.
(Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 11:26; 2 Tim. 4:2)
7. We will be faithful stewards of our time, talents, and finances by cheerfully and regularly serving within the body and by contributing to the expenses of the church, the help of those in need, and the spread of the gospel.
(Matt. 25:14-30; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 2:20; 6:10; Jas. 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 John 3:17-18)
8. We will be faithful to proclaim the gospel in our homes, neighborhoods, and to the ends of the earth in whatever way the Lord enables us.
(Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:16-21)
9. If we leave this congregation, we will join another gospel-preaching church as soon as possible where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.
(See the *Preamble* as substantiation.)

Benediction

May "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with [us] all." Amen.
(2 Cor. 13:14)

[Note: a separate Covenant form will be provided for signature(s), if membership is pursued.]

Appendix B

Confession of Faith

*As a community, we share some key truths that bind us together.
We call these our Confession of Faith.*

I. 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.

II. God

God is a Spirit, who, existing from all eternity, is one God. He is unchangeable, everywhere-present at all times, is all-powerful, all-knowing, 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.

III. 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.

IV. 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 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.

V. 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.

VI. 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 led by qualified men called pastor/elders, who have been gifted by Christ. These men are to be recognized by and accountable to fellow members of their local church, and will ultimately give an account to Jesus, the head of the church for how they led and shepherded the flock of God in their local church. All members—both men and women—are called to be subject to the loving sacrificial leadership of their elders.

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 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 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.

VII. Gender, Marriage, & Family

God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female, equal in value and dignity, but distinct in roles. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Therefore, rejection of one's biological sex or adopting a transgender self-conception is a rejection of God's design.

God's design from creation is that marriage be a covenant between one man and one woman, as a sacred reflection of Christ's faithful union with His Church. Therefore, "gay marriage" and polygamy are not biblical marriage. God commands that sexual intimacy occur only within marriage. Therefore, all sex outside of the covenant of marriage are sins against God, including lust, fornication, pornography, adultery, homosexual or bisexual behavior, polyamory, and incest. The grace of God in Jesus is sufficient to forgive all sins, including sexual sins, and to give power for holiness to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity.

Furthermore, because God loves marriage, He hates divorce, permitting it only where there has been sexual immorality, or desertion by an unbeliever (actual or functional abandonment of the marital covenant). A believer who was faithful through a divorce that had biblical grounds is also free to marry again.

While some men and women are called to a life of singleness which enables undivided service to God and His church, God's command from creation to mankind is to be fruitful and multiply through marriage and family. 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 his wife, and is commanded to sacrificially love her, as Christ loved the church. Children are a gift from God and are fully human from conception. Parents are to train their children by modeling a godly life, teaching them the Scriptures, disciplining them in love, and providing them a resource of wisdom and counsel. Children are to obey their parents with respect and honor.

We believe that abuse (such as the physical, emotional, or sexual harm, or exploitation of another person) is sin and is destructive, evil, and in direct opposition to the purposes of God. Abuse must not be tolerated in the Christian community, and we believe God calls us to protect, help, and love people who have been abused.

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-24; Malachi 2:14-16; 1 Timothy 2:12, 3:2; Matthew 5:32, 19:9, 4-6; 1 Corinthians 7 (1 Corinthians 7:12-15, 32-35); Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:1-4.

VIII. 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 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.

IX. 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.

X. 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.

Since October 14, 2021

Appendix C

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:

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| Love one another | John 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 |

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|--|----------------------------|
| 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

These procedures seek to honor God by relying on Scripture for principles pertaining to church discipline. We believe in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and that church discipline is a reliance upon God's grace through restoring discipline.

Scripture makes clear that one function of a local church is for members to come alongside other members to assist each other towards godly living. That includes:

1. A Christian who becomes aware of a brother or sister who is living in sin or who has been offended by that person's sin should go and speak to the sinning brother/sister 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, as evidenced in Matthew 18:15-16. If the sinning believer confesses, repents, and seeks forgiveness where necessary, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9).
2. If the sinning believer is unrepentant and/or continues in sin after being privately confronted ("he does not listen", Matthew 18:16), the confronting brother/sister should "take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." (Matthew 18:16; see also Deuteronomy 19:15; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1). If the sinning believer confesses, repents, and seeks forgiveness where necessary, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9).
3. God has ordained elders to protect the church (Acts 20:28), to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight" (1 Peter 5:1), and "to give an account" (Hebrews 13:17) to Jesus in the end for how they kept watch over the souls of those who are under their care. If the prescribed efforts above do not result in the restoration of the sinning believer, the charges should be brought to the attention of an elder. It is then incumbent upon the elder team to determine, through an investigation (see Restoration Investigation), if they can affirm the charges believed to be established. Under exceptional circumstances, the elders may exercise their authority to take precautionary measures prior to the completion and outcome of the investigation. Additionally, this process should not replace or delay any appropriate engagement with legal/civil authorities.
4. If the elders can affirm the charges believed to be established, then the elders will tell the Covenant Membership of the individual and situation, so that they can, in love, pursue the unrepentant believer to call him/her to repentance, and to make reconciliation where needed (Matthew 18:17). If the sinning believer confesses, repents, and seeks forgiveness where necessary, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9).

5. If the unrepentant believer remains unrepentant after pursuit by the Covenant Membership, the sober wisdom from Jesus is to, "...let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17). This is "excommunication". The Covenant Membership can now no longer publicly affirm the unrepentant sinner's profession of faith and thus are to consider him/her to be an unbeliever. As a result, the person is removed from Covenant Membership and may not participate in the Lord's Table. This is not forbidding the excommunicated person from attending the corporate worship services, though it may, depending on the seriousness of the sin. The desire is for everyone to come and hear and respond to the gospel. There is still hope for restoration at some point.

II. Purposes of Church Discipline

Church discipline has three specific purposes:

1. To restore unrepentant believers to fellowship with God and His church (Matthew 18:12-14; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, 7:8-10; Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Timothy 1:20; James 5:19-20). God views efforts to restore unrepentant 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).
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. Applicability of Church Discipline

Church discipline is applicable only to GBC Covenant Members (those who have signed the GBC Covenant, thus agreeing to abide by principles and procedures in this document).

Further, excommunication is only applicable after the steps in Section I.1-4 have been faithfully completed and if the sinning believer continues unrepentantly in sin after having been pursued by the Covenant Membership.

Since elders are charged to protect God's flock from threats, both spiritual and physical, if non-members are posing a serious threat to the flock of God at Grace Bible Church (GBC), the elders of GBC shall carry out their charge in ways consistent with applicable Scriptural principles (Acts 20:28-30; Titus 3:10-11; 2 Peter 2; Rev. 2:20-29).

IV. Warrants for Church Discipline

Outwardly observable, unrepentant sins that are serious enough to warrant the implementation of church discipline, are those of:

1. Conduct or practice that disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church (see, for example, Galatians 5:19-21; Proverbs 6:16-19).
2. Denial of doctrine, as set forth in GBC's Confession of Faith, that would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith.

V. The Case of Severe Sin

The normative approach to church discipline is summarized in Section I above. That said, Scripture also indicates, if the sin is severe in nature, excommunication might need to be wisely and rightly administered quickly for the protection of the body (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 11-13; Titus 3:10-11). This action shall be communicated to the excommunicated person in writing and then to the Covenant Membership, so that everyone can understand the full implications.

VI. The Investigation

The investigation to affirm the charges believed to be established, referenced in Section I.3, is necessary to determine if the sinning believer ought to be brought before the whole Covenant Membership. The Elder Team will presume the innocence of the accused during the investigation.

Only after the elders' investigation will a determination be made as to whether the elders can affirm the charges believed to be established. If the charges believed to be established *are* affirmed by the elders, then the unrepentant believer will be identified before the Covenant Membership, so that they can, in love, pursue the unrepentant believer to call him/her to repentance, and to make reconciliation where needed (Matthew 18:17b).

VII. The Investigation Process

- 1.** At any point in the investigation process, if the accused confesses, repents, and seeks forgiveness where necessary, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Matthew 18:15d-e; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9). All involved will respond accordingly from that point by graciously accepting true repentance. The repentant believer must then commit to accountability with an elder or one person selected by the elder team in a spirit of harmony and unity.
- 2.** If the investigation process is entered, the elders will notify the accused at the start of the investigation process in writing and include the following:
 - a.** Explain the purpose of implementing this process.
 - b.** Explain that this is not excommunication and that he/she is presumed innocent while going through the investigation. The elders desire to show compassion and love to all those involved, to include the accused.
 - c.** The investigation shall be undertaken expeditiously. But, in an effort to honor God and love all involved, it will also be careful and wise. As a result, the number of meetings required beyond the first two meetings outlined below, shall be determined by the elder team.
 - d.** Set forth the charges of sin believed to be established.
 - e.** Request the accused to appear before the elders at a specific time and place.
- 3.** Minutes will be taken of all proceedings, and the accused will be provided one copy.

- 4.** Witnesses and evidence shall meet the following requirements:
 - a.** Any person may be a witness if the elders are satisfied that he/she has sufficient competence to speak the truth concerning the matters before the elders.
 - b.** Evidence must be factual in nature.
 - i.** It may be direct or circumstantial. Caution should be exercised in giving weight to evidence that is purely circumstantial.
 - ii.** 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 accused to be heard in support thereof.
 - iii.** The testimony of at least two witnesses shall be sufficient to establish the truth of any specification.
 - iv.** If the accused 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.
- 5.** The accused shall be entitled to the assistance of wise counsel. Only GBC Covenant Members, who are in good standing, shall be eligible.
- 6.** At the first meeting, only the following actions may be taken:
 - a.** The specific charges of sin shall be formally presented to the accused, along with the names of any witnesses and copies of any documents that may be presented against him/her;
 - 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 accused shall be given the opportunity to inform the elders of wise counsel and/or witnesses whom he/she wishes to include in the process. (See Section VII.4.a and VII.5.)
- 7.** At the second meeting, the participating elders will hear evidence concerning the issues of sin.
 - a.** The accused shall be called to admit or deny the specific areas of sin. If he/she denies the area of sin in his/her life, the elders shall proceed to receive evidence.
 - b.** If the accused refuses or fails to appear without satisfactory reason for his/her absence at the time appointed, he/she shall again be notified in writing of another time, place, and date at which to appear.
 - c.** This writing will contain a warning that, if he/she does not appear, the elders will proceed to adjudicate the matter in his/her absence.
- 8.** The number of meetings required shall be determined by the elder team.

9. At the conclusion of the final meeting, the accused may make a final argument with respect to the evidence and specifications before the elders.

This concludes the Investigation.

VIII. Investigation Outcomes

1. At the conclusion of the investigation, the elders, after deliberation amongst themselves about the validity of the specifications and evidence presented, shall vote on each charge separately, following Section 12 of the Handbook for Elders, to affirm the establishment of the charges originally brought to them. The elders will sustain a specification or charge only when they conclude that it is established by a preponderance of the evidence.
2. If the elders decide that the accused is not guilty of any charges, notification will be given to all parties involved. Any reconciliation with the parties involved will be pursued. If it is determined that the accused was intentionally falsely accused, the elders shall call those who lied (or sinfully judged) to repent of their sins and seek forgiveness.
3. If the elders decide that the accused is guilty of any charge, they shall again call upon the (now) unrepentant believer to repent of his/her sin, turn to Jesus for forgiveness, and to make reconciliation where needed.
 - a. If he/she confesses, repents, and seeks forgiveness where necessary, then the issue has been resolved and restoration has been achieved (Matthew 18:15d-e; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9).
 - b. All involved will respond accordingly from that point by graciously accepting true repentance. The repentant believer must then commit to accountability with an elder or one person selected by the elder team in a spirit of harmony and unity.
4. If the unrepentant believer still refuses to repent, the elders will "tell it to the church." (Matthew 18:17a) What is communicated to the Covenant Membership shall be presented, in writing, to the unrepentant believer.
5. The Covenant Membership will be informed of who the unrepentant believer is and any necessary information about the nature of the established charges.
 - a. The Covenant Membership will then be exhorted to, in love, pursue the unrepentant believer to call him/her to repentance and to make reconciliation where needed. In following the GBC Constitution, the Covenant Membership will be given at least 30 days to do so.
 - b. There will be a summary of the process that has thus far been taken (outlined above).
6. At the end of the time period given to the Covenant Membership to pursue the unrepentant believer, "if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matthew 18:17). This is excommunication.
 - a. The Covenant Membership can now no longer publicly affirm the unrepentant sinner's profession of faith and thus are to consider him/her to be an unbeliever.
 - b. As a result, the person is removed from Covenant Membership and may not participate in the Lord's Table.

- c. This is not forbidding the excommunicated person from attending the corporate worship services, though it may, depending on the seriousness of the sin. The desire is for everyone to come and hear and respond to the gospel. There is still hope for restoration at some point.
- 7. The final verdict shall be communicated to the excommunicated person in writing and then to the Covenant Membership, so that everyone can understand the full implications.