

Grace Church Mahomet

Mission: Love God, Love People, Reach the Lost and Make Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Vision: Build a Community to Reach a Community.

Strategy: We believe we will accomplish our mission and vision by maintaining our core competencies.

- *Worship:* We are committed to facilitating individual, family and corporate worship encounters with God.
- *Discipleship:* We are committed to establishing practical and biblical spiritual growth opportunities.
- *Missional Life:* We are committed to creating local and global gospel initiatives through our time, talents and treasure.
- *Community:* We are committed to intentional relationships to build a community to reach a community.
- *Family:* We are committed to ministries that foster healthy Christian families of all ages and stages.

Values: Who are we? What do we believe? These are defined in a clear confession of faith:

CONFESSION OF FAITH:

A confession of faith provides “what,” but it is important to understand “why.” A confession of faith is a set of doctrinal positions that help undergird a mission and vision. Doctrine clarifies why we do what we do the way we do it and helps define our worldview. Sadly, much of the world today is not bothered with sound doctrine or the theological questions with which our forefathers grappled, but we believe our worldview IS a big deal, for it creates the values by which we pattern our lives.

You may have heard, “*I just love Jesus*”. Such a statement does not resolve questions, but creates them. The Apostle Peter said he loved Jesus, but at times his actions did not align with Christ or His Kingdom. We look to Scripture to correct our assumptions about God and to align our minds and hearts with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A confession of faith is a collection of convictions, rooted in biblical doctrine, which outline how to live the Christian life. We do not always agree with each other or the voices of history, so we look to the Scriptures, strive to align our lives with doctrinal essentials, and extend charity to one another on secondary issues. Secondary issues are topics and concepts that do not impact the nature of God, the church, or the message of salvation.

The aim of a confession of faith is to provide clarity and unity; it states positions upon which we are dogmatic. We offer charity to those who disagree, but our confession of faith undergirds our values and each biblical conviction is offered to promote love and unity within the body of Christ of Grace Church.

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I. Creeds We Affirm:

➤ **The Apostles' Creed:**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

➤ **The Nicene Creed:**

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

II. What We Believe:

1. The Trinity: We believe in One God who exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit: We believe in one God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are all equally and fully God and carry out distinct but harmonious functions in the work of creation, providence and salvation. (Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jude 20, 21)

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a belief in multiple gods (*polytheism*); God clearly reveals Himself as being One God (*monotheism*). The doctrine of the Trinity greatly impacts our entire view of the Scriptures. Theologian *Wayne Grudem* states, “*The Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. To study the Bible’s teachings on the Trinity gives us great insight into the question that is at the center of all of our seeking after God: What is God like in himself?*” In Himself, in His very being, God exists in the Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet HE is One God. (Deut. 6:4)

The early church experienced doctrinal tensions on the nature of God because of heresy, not because the Bible or teaching of Jesus was unclear. For example,

- 1) *Adoptionism* taught Jesus was an ordinary man whom God adopted upon his baptism and gave supernatural powers, making him an exalted man, but not divine and/or eternal.
- 2) *The Arius controversy* taught Jesus was a created being, from misinterpretation of John 1:14 and Colossians 1:15. (Arius was a Bishop from Alexandria.)

Both of these views were condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 (Trinity was affirmed); Trinity was reaffirmed at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

Exodus 20:2, 3 (ESV) ² “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” ³ “*You shall have no other gods before me.*”

- LORD יהוה - *Jehovah*: noun, meaning self-existent or eternal one.
- God אלהים - *Elohim*: masculine plural noun, meaning God, gods, judges, angels. *Found more than 2600 times in the Old Testament.*
- God is Jehovah, our Elohim. *Elohim* is linked to *Jehovah*; God is the self-existent, eternal one who is plural in nature.
- Multiple names are ascribed to God in the Old Testament; the only self-given name is YHWH (Jehovah). Man has given God several names to express His attributes; these are in two categories:
 - Elohist - Creatorship names (Ex: *El Shaddai* = God Almighty.)
 - Jehovahistic or Yahwehistic - Redemptive names (Ex: *Jehovah Jireh* = LORD provides)

The Trinity in History:

- The Old Testament gives clear teaching on the Trinity.
- Christ’s teaching affirms the Trinity.
- Within 20 years of Christ’s death, the Apostles began writing the New Testament, affirming Trinitarian theology. There was no challenge to the teaching, as eyewitnesses were still alive to confirm it.
- All New Testament writing, which continued until the early 90’s AD, affirms the Trinity.
- Within 20 years of the conclusion of New Testament writing, Church Fathers began affirming the Trinity by affirming the Divinity of Christ:

- Ignatius: God Himself was manifested in human form. (AD 105)
- Clement: It is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God. (AD 150)
- Justin Martyr: The Father of the universe has a Son. And He... is even God. (AD 160)
- Irenueus: He is God, for the name Emmanuel indicates this. (AD 180)
- Tertullian: Christ our God. (AD 200)
- Origen: No one should be offended that the Savior is also God. (AD 225)
- Novatian: He is not only man, but God also. (AD 235)
- Cyprian: Jesus Christ our Lord and God. (AD 250)
- Methodius: He truly was and is... with God, and being God. (AD 290)
- Arnobius: Christ performed all those miracles...the duty of Divinity. (AD 305)
- Council of Nicaea (Nicene Creed) (AD 325)
- Council of Constantinople (AD 381)

Further Biblical Support:

Isaiah 43:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.* ¹¹ *I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.*

- We are not to put gods before Yahweh and are to worship only Yahweh. Yahweh alone is our God and Savior; no other God has ever been formed, nor will ever be formed! To consider Jesus a god different from the Father would make Him a separate God and go against God’s command.

John 20:26-29 (ESV) ²⁶ *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”* ²⁷ *Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”* ²⁸ *Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

- Thomas worshipped Christ! Jesus did not stop Thomas from doing it. By contrast, when Paul was to be worshipped in Acts, he stopped the men. Even an angel in the book of Revelation (22:8-9) refused worship from John. Christ receives worship!

Titus 2:11-13 (ESV) ¹¹ *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,* ¹² *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* ¹³ *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...*

- Jesus is called “...our great God and Savior...”

Christ is One with the Father; He is worshipped; He is called “Savior,” all confirming the consistent teaching of the Trinity in both Old and New Testaments.

The importance of the Trinity in perspective:

- 1) If Jesus is not God, He cannot take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29)
- 2) If Jesus is not God, we cannot be assured of our justification because only God justifies. (Rom 5:1)
- 3) If Jesus is not God, we should not pray to Him or worship Him. (Exodus 20:5)
- 4) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ONE! The three Persons of the Trinity are separate and unique, yet still perfectly one:

- Together all three make up the FULLNESS of God = THE GODHEAD

1. Father and Son are distinguished.

Genesis 19:24 (ESV) Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

- Notice the LORD rained sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. Jehovah (LORD) is used twice, revealed as being in two places and doing separate acts.

2. Spirit is distinguished from Father and Son.

Genesis 1:2 (ESV) The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

- The Spirit of God was hovering...doing His part in Creation, separate from God the Father.

3. Holy, Holy, Holy.

- Note repetition of “Holy” 3 times in Isaiah 6:3 and Rev. 4:8: Holy, Holy, Holy to Almighty God = Trinity
- Consider the words of the song, Holy, Holy, Holy, by Reginald Heber in 1826: “*God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity*”

2. God the Father: We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. He is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, without beginning or end. We believe He has revealed Himself through His creation, His Word, and His Son Jesus Christ. He involves Himself in everyday affairs of people and the earth, hears and answers prayer, and saves people from sin and eternal death through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. All those who come to Him by receiving Jesus Christ as payment for their sin will be saved. (Exodus 3:14; Leviticus 11:44, 45; I Kings 8:27; Isaiah 43:10, 13; Isaiah 44:6-8; Malachi 3:6; John 4:24; James 1:17; I John 4:8)

There are many Biblical statements recognizing God the Father; some New Testament references:

- **John 6:27 (ESV)** *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*”
- **Romans 1:7 (ESV)** *To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- **Galatians 1:1 (ESV)** *Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...*

3. God the Son: We believe in Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, who has exactly the same nature, attributes and perfections as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. We believe He is not only fully God, but fully man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We believe in His sinless life, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection, His ascension into Heaven, His high priestly intercession, and His personal, visible return from Heaven with the saints to rule on earth for one thousand years prior to spending eternity in Heaven. (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53: 4-6, 11-12; John 1:14; 5: 22-33; 8:58, 10:30; Romans 5:8; Colossians 1:15, 17, 19; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 20: 1-3)

There are many Biblical statements recognizing God the Son; some New Testament references:

Matthew 16:15-16 (ESV) ¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

John 5:18 (ESV) *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV) ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

4. God the Holy Spirit: We believe in the Holy Spirit, His personality, His work in creation, inspiration of the Scriptures, and in our regeneration, sanctification, and preservation. We believe each believer is baptized through the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at the time of salvation, sealed for eternity, and changed into a new person. We believe the Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, illumine and teach those who read God's Word, implement Christ's work of saving the lost through the conviction of sin, and empower believers with spiritual gifts for Godly living and service. (Genesis 1:1; Luke 3:16; John 3:5-6, 14:26, 16:13, 14; Acts 1:5; 5:3; Romans 8:14, 26; 12: 6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21)

There are many Biblical statements recognizing God the Holy Spirit; some New Testament references:

John 14:26 (ESV) *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

John 16:12-13 (ESV) ¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Act 5:3-4 (ESV) ³But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

5. The Bible: We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original writings, complete as the revelation of God's plan for salvation and the final authority for Christian faith and practice. (Ephesians 3:5; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21)

The Bible is the Living Word, transmitted from the Living God to us, His people, the living stones. When we study the Bible, we encounter theology and ascertain doctrines. Our theology is a relational theology: the product of studying God's Word is not just a transfer of information, but an acquisition of transformation. The goal is changed lives - interpretation without application is spiritual death.

These references support our conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God:

- **The character of the Bible is one of divine revelation:** The Bible affirms the divinity of God, the depravity of mankind and the remedy for man through God's love. It reveals creation, God's interaction with mankind throughout history, and the culmination of His divine story, eternal life.

- **The unity of the Bible:** The Bible was written by some 40 different authors over approximately 1600 years, yet is one unified book. The Bible contains cohesive accounts of doctrine, revelation and history, the harmony of which affirm that only God could have transmitted the Scriptures.
- **Prophetic Fulfillment:** Prophets were known mainly for forth telling but were also inspired to foretell. Forth telling is exhorting, reminding people of God’s covenant and to align their lives with God’s commands. Foretelling is inspired by the Holy Spirit and refers to future events.

Biblical prophecy may be direct revelation from God, given from angelic messengers, or spoken by prophets; whatever the method, the Bible contains a myriad of fulfilled prophecies that add to the validity and authority of the Scriptures.

- **From Josh McDowell and “More Than A Carpenter”-** *Of all the credentials Jesus had to support his claims to be the Messiah and God’s Son, one of the most profound is often overlooked: how his life fulfilled so many ancient prophecies. The Old Testament, written over a period of a thousand years, contains sixty major messianic prophecies and approximately 270 ramifications that were fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ. Using the science of probability, we find the chances of just forty-eight of these prophecies being fulfilled in one person to be only 1 in 10157. The likelihood of these prophecies and ramifications matching up with one man is further complicated by the fact that all these prophecies were made at least four hundred years before he appeared. Some might suggest that these prophecies were written down after the time of Christ and fabricated to coincide with events in his life. Is this possible? No, because the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was translated around 150–200 BC. This means there is at least a two-hundred-year gap between the recording of the prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ.*

The precise lineage of Jesus—from Noah to Shem (Genesis 9 and 10), from Abraham to Isaac (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8; 17:19-21; 21:12; 22:15-18), from Jacob to Judah (Genesis 28:1-4; 35:10-12; Numbers 24:17), from Jesse to David (Isaiah 11:1-5, NIV; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5)—fulfills God’s prophecies. God even defined the time period that would set this man apart. For example, Malachi 3:1 and four other Old Testament verses require the Messiah to come while the Temple of Jerusalem is still standing (see Psalm 118:26; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 11:13; Haggai 2:7-9). This is of great significance when we realize that the Temple was destroyed in AD 70 and has not since been rebuilt. A prophecy dating from 1012 BC also predicts that this man’s hands and feet will be pierced and that he will be crucified (see Psalm 22:6-18; Zechariah 12:10; Galatians 3:13). This description of the manner of his death was written eight hundred years before the Romans used crucifixion as a method of execution. These are merely three of the hundreds of details that identify Jesus as God’s Son, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Approximately forty men have claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. But only one—Jesus Christ—appealed to fulfilled prophecy to substantiate his claims, and only his credentials back up those claims.

- **Internal Witness from Scripture:** It is imperative that we worship the God of the Bible, not the Bible of our God. The Bible is the cornerstone of Christian discipleship; it is vital to lay a firm foundation with Biblical knowledge.

These verses affirm God as the source of the Bible and stress the importance of the Word for study and application to our lives:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV) *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

1 John 5:9-10 (ESV) *⁹If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.*

2 Peter 1:19-21 (ESV) *¹⁹And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) *¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

6. Humanity: We believe God created man, male and female, with a body and soul/spirit, in the image of God. We believe that, since the fall, man is a sinner by nature and choice. Therefore, mankind is spiritually dead until he/she repents of sin, trusts Christ personally as Lord and Savior, and is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6; Romans 3:10, 23; Ephesians 2:1-5; 4:18; Colossians 2: 13-14)

- **God created man:** The Bible teaches that God created man; humanity was created with dignity, worth, uniqueness, in the image of God. Man's original character was a mental, moral and social likeness to the Godhead.

Genesis 1:26 (ESV) *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

- **God created male and female:** God created man, male and female; He created them with intention and value. Both are his image bearers.

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

- **Constitution of man:** God created man with a *conscience* and a *will*.

- **Conscience:** Man has knowledge of self, based upon God's revelation; man is able to determine right and wrong because God revealed a clear moral standard. Our lives either align with God's standard or stand against it; our conscience bears witness to this.

Romans 2:15 (ESV) *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.*

- **Will:** Man has the power of choice, often referred to as "free will;" man can choose his/her words and actions to glorify God - or not. Our goal as Christians is to align our wills with God's and live obedient lives.

John 7:17 (ESV) *If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*

- **The fall of man:** God created Adam and Eve without sin and with free will. Man was free to choose obedience or disobedience to God's will; this is the dichotomy of morality verses immorality. The fall of man (the choice to disobey) created a binary state for God's creation: man lives as a child of God or does not. Today, man lives in a fallen state and cannot avoid sin (affirming mankind's need for salvation in Jesus Christ).

Genesis 2:15-17 (ESV) ¹⁵ *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...*

Genesis 3:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

Created in God's image, man willfully chose to disobey God's command; this corrupted man's conscience and resulted in separation between God and His creation. This separation is expressed via the fall (man fell out of proper relationship with God - Genesis 3:8). God judged man's disobedience/sin (Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 3:23) but He also provided salvation through His Son Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:15; John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Through salvation, man's will is realigned and his conscience purified (Hebrews 9:13-14; Romans 10:9-13) before the Creator (Col. 3:10) so that he may live for God's glory. (Matt. 5:16)

7. Salvation: We believe a person is saved by grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ. We believe this salvation lasts forever, is based upon the sovereign grace of God, was purchased by the shed blood of Christ on the cross, and must be received individually through faith (and apart from any human merit, works or rituals). We believe in bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost, and an eternal existence of all people, either in heaven or hell. We believe salvation will, through spiritual nourishment, growth and discipleship, result in a changed life, righteous living, good works, passionate love for others and an overall yielding of oneself to the Lordship of Christ. (John 1:12; 3:16 20:31; Romans 8:29, 11:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2: 8,9; 4:15; Titus 3: 5; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 5:11-13; Revelation 20: 11-15)

- The study of the doctrine of salvation is called soteriology. The study of salvation begins with God's perfect will; God has a purpose for His people and it unfolds through His plan.

Ephesians 1:3-4 (ESV) ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

- In love God chose us, affirming our value and worth, which were reaffirmed when Christ died for the sins of the world. (Romans 6:10) God was fully aware man would sin and become totally depraved, yet God chose man to display the immeasurable riches of His grace. Man cannot save himself; he needs God's unmerited favor to receive eternal life. God's grace is extended to mankind through His Son Jesus Christ, the sole conduit of salvation and eternal life.

John 3:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

- Christ's birth, life and death were never meant to condemn, but to save mankind. Christ saves man from condemnation (Romans 8:1), which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23) because of sin (Romans 3:23). Salvation saves man from himself, his rebellion against the Heavenly Father and His will/intent for mankind. Human perfection is not attainable; total depravity means no one can earn his way to heaven. Good deeds do not earn salvation; they are a product of salvation. Man is not saved by works (James 2:20) but only by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

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

- Jesus Christ provided salvation for all; He shed His blood as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Christ's sacrifice defeated sin and death and provided the Way, the Truth and Life (John 14:6).

1 Peter 1:18-21 (ESV) ¹⁸ *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

God provides salvation through Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12); all attempts to earn eternal life are futile. One must believe in God and receive the hope that comes from Christ, who shed His blood to redeem us and give us a spiritual inheritance. This challenges all mankind to embrace the Christian life and realize God saves us from condemnation to salvation. The Christian life is personified by faith in Christ and expressed by words and actions that reveal the love of God (Matthew 5:16). Moving from condemnation to fullness of salvation is called sanctification.

8. Sanctification: In salvation, a Christian leaves condemnation and moves into the kingdom of God. This process is sanctification (Rom. 6:19), which is characterized by becoming less like who you were before Christ and moving toward Christian maturity. The climax of sanctification is eternal life with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Life in Christ is about obedience to God, no longer conforming one's life to sinful passions that oppose God's desires but striving for holy conduct because God is holy.

1 Peter 1:14-16 (ESV) ¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

- Sanctification involves separation from self to God; this separation includes cleansing from unrighteousness (2 Cor. 7:1) and receiving Christ's holiness. (Romans 1:7) The goal is to be fully conformed to the image of Christ.

Romans 8:29 (ESV) *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.*

1 John 3:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

- Sanctification may be divided into act and process; one is sanctified in Christ (Act) and begins the Christian life, a journey to the fullness of eternal life (Process).

- **Act:** The clear act of sanctification is being born again, called a saint and not a sinner.

Hebrews 10:10 (ESV) *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

- **Process:** The saint is saved by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and begins a life led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). This is “putting off the old self and putting on the new self in Christ.” (Col. 3:8-13) Sanctification clarifies the difference between true converts and those who did not truly surrender to Christ. Spiritual formation/growth is an essential part of sanctification and is an outward expression of the inner change that comes from being Spirit-filled.

2 Peter 3:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.* ¹⁸ *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

9. Sacraments - Baptism and Communion: Grace affirms two sacraments: baptism and communion. Both sacraments are a sacred part of Christianity; Grace Church supports the views of believer’s baptism and memorial communion.

- **Believer’s Baptism:** Believer’s baptism represents the inward washing work of the Holy Spirit through salvation (Titus 3:4-7). Baptism does not save a person; only Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection save us.
- Believer’s baptism affirms the key component in baptism is belief (Romans 10:9-13). No one should be baptized unless he is a believer. It is important to be of an age at which one can both clearly understand and articulate the gospel (John 17:3). The conviction of Grace Church is not to baptize infants. We believe it is not the parent’s role to use baptism as a rite in faith for their children, but rather, the parent’s role is to instruct children in Christ, so the child will make a decision of faith (confirmed by baptism when the child is of age).
- One of any age should not take baptism lightly, nor use the sacrament in hopes of attaining and/or maintaining salvation. Baptism is a vital aspect of the church and a clear command from Jesus Christ; all Christians should be baptized in obedience. (Matthew 28:19-20)

- **The physical act of baptism does not save.**

1 Peter 3:21-22 (ESV) ²¹ *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* ²² *who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

- **Baptism is only for one who repents and believes.**

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV) ³⁸ *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* ³⁹ *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

- **Baptism symbolizes Christ's death and resurrection and aligns our lives with His.**

Romans 6:1-4 (ESV) ¹*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

- **Memorial Communion:** There are four main views of the Lord's Supper: transubstantiation (Roman Catholic), consubstantiation (Lutheran), the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper (Reformed/Anglican), and memorial/sign (Traditional Baptist). Grace supports memorial communion, but acknowledges the presence of Christ in communion; we embrace the rich history of Protestantism/Reformation and Baptist/Anabaptist.

- Communion is a powerful unique sacrament, in which man and God meet. It is our conviction that the elements (bread and juice) are memorials of Christ's body and blood; they are not Christ's literal body, nor do they become His body and blood. However, to deny that Christ is spiritually present is to deny the power of communion and miss the close association that exists between God and His worshippers via the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29 (ESV) ²³*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* ²⁵*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* ²⁶*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

- There are differing views on the frequency of partaking in communion: weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. It appears the early church celebrated communion on the first day of the week - Sundays or the Lord's Day. The historical witness confirms the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly. The frequency with which to celebrate communion is not explicitly defined; interpretation of "best practice" varies, but when Biblical, does not modify the goal. With charity, Grace leadership acknowledges while other churches celebrate with varying frequency, we celebrate communion on the first Sunday of each month and at other worship gatherings, as appropriate.

Luke 22:14-20 (ESV) ¹⁴*And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."* ¹⁷*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

- **There are three aspects of fellowship in communion:**
 1. Internal fellowship - make an effort to remember Christ's sacrifice
 2. External fellowship - proclaim Christ's life and death in deed and speech
 3. Eternal fellowship - commit to maintain close association with Christ and His church

- Grace Church has an "open table" approach to the Lord's Supper. This means one does not need to be a member of Grace Church to participate in communion with us, but must be a member of the body of Jesus Christ. We welcome regular attenders and guests, who are Christ followers, to participate in the sacrament of communion with us.

10. The Church: We believe the universal Church is a spiritual body, of which Christ is the Head. We believe the true Church is composed of all persons, who, through personal faith in Jesus Christ, have been made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit and are forgiven of their sin. We believe Christ will one day come and take the Church, His bride, to Heaven, apart from the wrath of God, to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to reign with Him on earth for one thousand years, prior to spending eternity with Him in Heaven. We believe in the priesthood of believers, that each child of God may come boldly and freely to God with requests, thanksgivings, confessions and petitions. We also believe this spiritual body expresses itself in local autonomous assemblies, whose members have made personal confessions of faith in Christ and have associated themselves together for worship, instruction, the making of disciples and service. Believers are to mutually submit to one another and to the Godly leaders established in the church. (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1: 22-23; 4:4; Colossians 1: 18; Hebrews 4:15, 16; 13:17; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 19:7, 8)

- The church is an organism, a living spiritual body, made up of Christians and Christ, the Living Son of God, the Head of the church. While there are organizational aspects to the church, it is vital not to lose sight of the biblical witness of being the church of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge Grace is a local church and express our mission and vision globally as well.

1 Peter 2:1-5 (ESV) *¹So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

- Grace is willfully aligned with the *CB North Central*, the local association of the Conservative Baptist. (<http://www.cbnorthcentral.org>) It is important to highlight Grace Church is willfully aligned; Grace Church is a sovereign body with its own constitution. Our mission, vision and doctrine are rooted in biblical revelation, with an acknowledgement to some Baptist distinctive. The *CB North Central* holds our 501c3, providing some benefits for our pastoral staff, and more importantly, a level of accountability if leadership ever deviates from biblical teaching or sound doctrine.

Matthew 16:13-20 (ESV) *¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are*

Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

➤ **Biblical witness of the church reveals structure, assembly and practice:**

1. **Church structure:** The modern church must be guardians of revelation, not seekers of relevance. The church is the household of God; Christ is our Cornerstone and the Apostles laid the foundation. Today, we each play a vital part in facilitating church growth and unity through personal and collective power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Grace strives to live out the call of the church within a modern context, but not at the expense of the traditional witness.

Ephesians 2:18-22 (ESV) ¹⁸ *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

2. **Church assembly:** The church assembled on the first day of the week, Sunday, also called the Lord’s Day; this day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Grace defends the importance of gathering on the Lord’s Day and believes there is also merit in additional gatherings to serve, fellowship, and study God’s word.

Acts 20:7 (ESV) *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.*

3. **Church practice:** Acts clearly reveals early church practices, to which we strive to adhere: unity, generosity, communion, fellowship, worship and devotion to sound doctrine. God honors this model with the addition of those being saved; Grace is committed to upholding the apostolic witness of faith and practice.

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV) ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

11. Unity in the Church: Grace Church believes a key characteristic of the church of Jesus Christ is unity. (Acts 2:42-27; Ephesians 4:3-4)

- A redemptive tapestry within the church reveals the wonderful diversity of our Creator. He created the universe and all the amazingly unique life within it. In the church, we have a collective, male and female, working together with a myriad of spiritual gifts, to reveal the body

of Christ. When we allow the variety of God's gifts to be seen as complementary, we find His grace expressed appropriately within the local and global church.

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

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (ESV) ¹² *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

- Focusing on essentials and being charitable to one another in non-essentials helps achieve unity within the church (local church body, area churches, global church). Essentials are doctrine and/or theology clearly revealed in the Bible; these are non-negotiable. Sound doctrine creates a clear sense of orthodoxy and provides a firm foundation for unity. Areas of interpretation which differ have created various schools of thought expressed in denominations, colleges, seminaries and institutions. While this creates various “camps” of thought, these non-essential differences do not have to be divisive; a healthy dialog may take place on non-essential issues with a focus to maintain unity.

There are correct views and incorrect views; Scriptures clarify the difference. When essentials do not agree, the Bible distinguishes between sound doctrine and heresy; the call to unity in the church is to maintain oneness with the church of Jesus Christ, not with those who maintain and/or espouse false doctrine. Our conviction is to do our best to build bridges, not walls, while maintaining sound doctrine and practice.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Ephesians 4:11-16 (ESV) ¹¹ *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

12. Priesthood of Believers: We believe each person in the body of Christ has equal status and direct access to God through His Son Jesus Christ. (Eph. 3:12; Hebrews 10:19; 22) God provides gifting to each believer in the priesthood of the saints for the announcement of the gospel and the advancement of the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 28:19-20)

- The priesthood of believers affirms each one has value and a place within the church; ministry is not solely for professionals, but for the entire priesthood to which each person belongs. God

calls each of us to serve; the expressions of our callings look very different. Some serve publicly, others privately; some exercise a level of authority; some teach. Each person is to be obedient to God's call, revealed through the Scriptures and affirmed by the Holy Spirit. Each of us is called to use our talents and gifts as spiritual sacrifices.

1 Peter 2:5 (ESV) *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

- Each person who is in Christ belongs to the royal priesthood; our identity is in Christ. Each of us has a responsibility to declare the “excellencies” of Christ with our words and deeds; our message announces we walk in the marvelous light of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV) *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

- The priesthood of believers affirms all Christians (those in Christ) belong and have a part to play in worship and evangelism.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 (ESV) *¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (ESV) *¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- With this call in mind, it is our conviction the gospel is meant to be “unleashed” in our lives through our words and actions. When we allow the gospel to be fully revealed in our lives, we step into the fullness of our call in Christ and allow the Kingdom of God to be palpable in our words and deeds. Living as priests of the church of Jesus Christ is sound stewardship and is partaking in the promise of Christ by making known the mysteries of God. Christians accomplish this by revealing God's power and presence through their lives, being light in darkness, and pointing people to our Heavenly Father. (Matt. 5:16)

Ephesians 3:1-6 (ESV) *¹For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ²assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

13. Obedience and Christian Conduct: We believe God's Word is the Christian's guide for thoughts, actions, and attitudes, and that God is the only true source for ultimate satisfaction and personal happiness. We believe every human is ultimately responsible to God, is free to worship according to the guidelines of God's Word, and must strive to avoid allowing preferences to influence obedience or conduct. Obedience is characterized by living in alignment with God's will and it contrasts one's life before and/or apart from Christ, for disobedience is not for the child of God. Christian conduct is of grave importance. It is a false teaching that man can willfully live in disobedience to the Scriptures or in conduct unfitting holiness and be a Christian; one cannot separate belief from actions.

- The starting point for Christian conduct is the command to love. This love is both spiritual and emotional, expressed in our love for God and toward mankind. Our conduct matters to God and begins with love as personified in our worship, words and deeds.

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV) ³⁴ *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

- Obedience to Christ's commands shows in our conduct. Conduct matters, for it reveals our alignment with the Kingdom of God and not ourselves, our flesh or this fallen world; freedom in Christ stirs the Christian to live and serve for God's glory, not to promote ungodliness, cheap grace, or live for self.

Galatians 5:13-15 (ESV) 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. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

- Appropriate conduct flows from a properly patterned life; one cannot look to the pattern of this world, (Romans 12:1-2) but must align his life with Christ by becoming an imitator of God. This choice of conduct is the decision to walk in love, flee from sin and the trappings of this world, and define our lives by God's love so the product of our lives is thanksgiving to our God and Savior amidst this broken world.

Ephesians 5:1-4 (ESV) *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

- Obedience in conduct is the Christian duty (Acts 20:28) and fueled by the belief that God's commands are for our benefit. (Eph. 2:10) It is by faith we approach God (Hebrews 11:6) and through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:16-21) live lives pleasing to Him, knowing He will bless His faithful servants. (Eph. 6:8; 1 Cor. 3:14) The motivation to obey is not a selfish focus on our blessing, but is one of love; obedience is the sign of our love for Christ (John 14:15) and this love is demonstrated in our willingness to have the mind of Christ and live a life that is pleasing to our Heavenly Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

1 Peter 2:12 (ESV) *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

14. The Family: We believe God ordained the family as the foundational institution for the physical, spiritual, and emotional growth of individuals, the church and society. Ideally, it is led by a Godly father and mother, joined together in holy marriage. We believe God intended for a man and woman to leave their parents, to become husband and wife, intimate in body, soul/spirit, forming a sacred and lifelong commitment to each other. We believe God commands: 1) a husband to be the servant leader of the family, loving his wife as Christ loves the church; 2) a wife to be her husband's helper, providing him love, respect and support; 3) husbands and wives to mutually submit to one another under Christ's divine headship, treating each other as equals before God and sacrificing self for the well-being and spiritual nurturing of the family. We believe children are commanded to obey and honor their parents. (Genesis 2: 24; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; Matthew 19: 3-9; 1 Corinthians 7: 1-5; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6: 1-4; Colossians 3: 18-21)

- The biblical definition of family is under assault in our culture. The vital ingredient of God's ordaining is missing from culturally defined "families." We cannot have a clear picture of "family" without aligning the definition and expression of it with God and His revelation via creation (natural) and the Scriptures (special).
- In the Bible, the clear, established order for a family is for one man and one woman to join in a spiritually and physically committed union for life, conceiving and raising children together, being fruitful and faithful to the call of God (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18; 21-25). This model was not faithfully followed throughout the Bible, nor is it completely followed today. However, our definition of family is not rooted in our human experience or sinful desires, but in God's ordained order for creation.

Joshua 24:15 (ESV) *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

- Based on biblical teaching on the structure of the family, we value committed marriages, believe in the importance of children and the sanctity of life.

1. **The Permanence of Marriage:** Grace adheres to the biblical institution of marriage. The union of husband and wife is a sacred covenant designed by God to model the love of Christ for His people and to serve both the public and private good for all mankind. While we desire for all marriages to experience love and joy, we believe marriage is more about our holiness than our happiness. Marriage is a covenant, meaning the union is to be a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman. Christians are called to defend this biblical definition of marriage and model it before mankind.

Matthew 19:4-6 (ESV) ⁴*He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* ⁶*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

2. **The Value of Children:** We believe children are a blessing from God and the legacy of a husband and wife. Parents are accountable to God for nurturing, shaping and educating

their children for service to the Kingdom of God as disciples of Jesus Christ. When husband and wife cannot conceive, we highly esteem adoption.

Malachi 2:15 (ESV) *Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.*

- 3. The Sanctity of Human Life:** We believe that mankind, male and female, is created with intention, and in the image of God. Each person, from beginning (conception) to end (death), enjoys dignity and worth; this includes unborn children, the elderly and the marginalized in society. Christians must be on the forefront of defending the sanctity or value of life.

Psalm 139:13-16 (ESV) ¹³ *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

15. Sexuality and Marriage: We believe God ordains both sexuality and marriage. This includes clear natural and supernatural (special) revelation about His purposes for each and clarification of man's role in upholding these blessings for God's glory verses perverting them to man's shame.

- **Sexuality:** We believe sexuality is understood in two ways: 1 - Gender (Male and Female) and 2 - Sex (within the institution of marriage).

- 1. Sexuality (Gender):** We believe God created man, male and female, and each with intent and purpose. Gender is confirmed in biblical and natural revelations. The Bible clearly communicates the difference between man and woman (Gen. 1:27) and God, not our feelings, defines our gender (Jeremiah 17:9). This ordination from God is supported by our biology (Matt. 19:5).

Christians must stand firm in the biblical and natural revelations that affirm the genders of males and females are different. The chromosomes are different; the brains are different; the anatomies are different; the reproductive systems are different. God created male and female fundamentally and comprehensively unique and different; these vast differences create the profound oneness/wholeness within the marriage covenant.

- 2. Sexuality (Marriage Covenant):** We believe God created man, male and female, and gave them a special blessing within the covenant of marriage: becoming one flesh, for it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Our view of sex is broken down into three convictions:

- **Conviction One:** Sex is between male and female within the covenant of marriage. Marriage is the only covenant in which sex is appropriate; sex outside this covenant is immoral.

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

1 Corinthians 6:15-18 (ESV) ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 (ESV) ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

Romans 1:22-27 (ESV) ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

- **Conviction Two:** Sex is meant for our pleasure and must include trust, love, respect and guardianship. Sex attains and maintains one flesh, promoting connection and communication that keep a man and woman attentive to each other’s needs.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (ESV) ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Ephesians 5:25-31 (ESV) ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

- **Conviction Three:** Sex is not only for pleasure, but also procreation; this affirms God’s design but does not stand alone. In other words, procreation is possible

because of sex, and clearly God ordains man and woman to be “fruitful and multiply.” (Gen. 1:28)

Man and woman may procreate, but lose a child; man and woman may have sex but never experience procreation. Both examples are painful and must not be minimized within the human experience; they also remind us not to reduce sex simply to procreation. A poor understanding of sex skews our interpretation and can impose man’s law over God’s Law.

We maintain the conviction that sex is for procreation, but first and foremost, for pleasure between a male and female within the marriage covenant; two unique and different people, together revealing the unified mystery of Christ and the Church. (Eph. 5:32)

Psalm 127:3-5 (ESV) ³ *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

- **Marriage:** The marriage covenant is sacred and not meant to be broken; it is a covenant between male (husband) and female (wife) and death is the only intended separation. The Bible asserts marriage is sacred, is designed to uphold the institution of the family, and God hates divorce.
 - **Marriage is sacred:** It is our conviction the decision to enter into marriage should not be made lightly; upon accepting the covenant of marriage, a couple must do everything possible to maintain a healthy, Christ-centered relationship. It is also our conviction that husband and wife are called to mutual submission within the uniqueness of their call before God, and together, their “one flesh” union is personified by love and respect. Marriage is sacred; it is the only institution that reveals the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. Marriage is a profound responsibility and must be taken very seriously.

Ephesians 5:22-33 (ESV) ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

- **Marriage upholds the institution of the family:** Marriage is the foundation for the family. A husband (man) and wife (woman) have the blessing of producing children, affirming the gift of sexual intimacy for both pleasure and procreation. Parents are

called to love their children (Matt. 7:9) and lead them well (Joshua 24:15). God designed husband and wife to work together to attain and maintain a home life that fosters an environment in which children grow (Luke 2:52). We recognize that two-parent homes are not always maintainable; we also acknowledge it is God's design, and the breakdown of the home begins with the breakdown of a marriage. In the institution of family, God has placed unique calls upon the husband, wife, and child or children; each call is given for the benefit of the household.

Colossians 3:18-21 (ESV) ¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* ¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.* ²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* ²¹ *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

- **God hates divorce:** We will not change God's words; He hates divorce. However, God also provides biblical grounds upon which one may seek divorce. It is vital these grounds are pursued as a last resort. Divorce is not meant to be an easy out; it is the breaking of covenant and exercising an option God hates. The following statements are the biblical grounds for divorce:

1. **Statement One:** Breaking of covenant through sexual immorality and an unwillingness to repent.

Matthew 19:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.* ⁹ *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

- In cases of unfaithfulness, divorce is not required, but is allowed. Reconciliation is God's desire. Sexual immorality is a sin from which one may seek repentance. While a challenging path, the journey is not impossible. It is our prayerful conviction that couples who face this devastation embrace repentance, find counsel and accountability, and seek the hope offered in Christ and faith community, to attain reconciliation.

2. **Statement Two:** When one spouse is not a Christian and he/she willfully/permanently leaves. One cannot stop another from making such a choice; such situations may exist when one comes to Christ after being married. The call of the Christian, when married to an unbelieving partner, is to love him/her and pray that the partner comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

1 Cor. 7:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.*

3. **Final thoughts:** The Scriptures are clear God does not endorse physical, emotional and/or spiritual abuse and a spouse should not tolerate nor enable such actions. He or she should seek counsel and find help to attain repentance and healing. 1 Cor. 7:15 declares God has called us to peace in marriage, as well as exhorting us not to be enslaved or in bondage; the idea conveyed by the original Greek in this verse is "separation." It is our conviction that couples struggling in abuse separate with hope of restoration; if healing and peace cannot be attained, one is not called to live in the bondage of emotional, physical or spiritual abuse.

1 Tim. 5:8 (ESV) *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

1 Cor. 7:15 (ESV) *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.*

16. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ: We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial (before the 1,000 year earthly reign of Jesus Christ) return of Jesus Christ. Christ will return, at a time known only by God, and we are called to live in expectancy as we seek to live out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40).

- **We believe Jesus Christ will have a bodily return, often called the Second Coming/Advent.**

Matthew 24:30 (ESV) *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 (ESV) *⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ 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.*

- **We believe in a premillennial return of Jesus Christ.**

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (ESV) *¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Revelation 20:1-6 (ESV) *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

- **We believe the return of Christ will occur at a time known only to God the Father.**

Mark 13:32 (ESV) *But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

➤ **We believe the return of Christ requires expectancy from the church.**

2 Peter 3:10-14 (ESV) ¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*

➤ **We believe the return of Christ calls believers to live out the Great Commission and Great Commandment.**

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV) ³⁷ *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Titus 2:11-15 (ESV) ¹¹ *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. ¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

III. Church Leadership:

1. Elders: Grace Church adheres to a “plurality of elders” leadership model. Other churches function with different ecclesiastical models; our biblical conviction is an elder led church. (Acts 14:19-23, 20:17; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14)

Elder translates “*presbuteros*” and means “any older man.” The New Testament appears to teach elder and bishop (overseer) as having the same level of authority and reserved for men.

ELDERS: WHO (Titus 1:5-9)

Titus 1:5 (ESV) *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*

- Paul directed Titus to finish the work of attaining order within the church. A church must have an established form of leadership; the three main ecclesiastical models are: elder led, pastor led and congregational. Grace strives for a model that combines the best of each, but overall, is an

elder led congregation. We are pastoral-directed, elder-protected, and the church body votes upon hiring of pastors, annual budget, constitutional changes and other major decisions.

- The Apostle Paul saw elders as an integral part of church leadership to maintain spiritual health within the local body; this was the direction of the church in Antioch, of which Paul was leader.
- Acts 20:28 reveals that choosing an elder is not done in the flesh, nor by any human metric. We do not consider worldly qualities, i.e. good leadership, stewardship of earthly wealth and/or other aspects of his worldly affairs. The choosing of an elder must always be led by the Holy Spirit.

Titus 1:6 (ESV) *⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*

- **Above reproach:** This is a legal term which indicates one could have no accusation placed against him, let alone evidence that would demand a trial. The idea is not perfection but transparency; it gives the image of being completely blameless. Elders must not have hidden actions or public behaviors that disqualify their character or commitment to God; they are to be faithful men who work hard and embody the call to be bond-servants for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- **Husband of one wife:** This qualification may be translated, “one woman man.” This does not exclude a single man, but explains the role of marriage for an elder. An elder is to be a faithful man, in actions, thoughts and desires; the elder is laser-focused on his wife. An elder must be free of adultery, fornication, divorce and/or remarriage (except widowed), illegitimate children and other such immorality that tarnishes his character and the leadership of the church. To install a morally bankrupt man into the role of elder incurs judgment from God. It also seems clear that an elder is married to a believer. (2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 9:5)
- **And his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination:** This qualification addresses family leadership; if one cannot lead his earthly family, how can he lead a spiritual family? It is necessary to evaluate how an elder candidate has led his family. Paul stresses that elders are men whose children are believers, are not drunkards and/or rebellious. This imagery is of generational faith; it does not require sinless perfection or that children maintain an unfair legalistic standard. The charge of debauchery or insubordination conveys a lifestyle or choice to be worldly and rebel against the parents and/or church leadership. We must not impose an unfair standard upon children, but rather consider the elder candidate: Has this man modeled godliness privately and publicly and both encouraged and exhorted his children as they work out their own salvation in fear and trembling? Church leaders are to function much like Paul did, in a parental model. Poor parental leadership will undermine the health of the church family, but strong, loving parental leadership will strengthen a church family and promote generational excellence.

Paul gives both positive and negative attributes for eldership; we consider both for elder qualification and disqualification.

Titus 1:7 (ESV) *⁷ For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,*

- **God's steward:** The elder is a good steward in God's house, manages the Master's household, but does not own the house or the contents. Elders are accountable to God and they serve HIM, using their gifts to steward all aspects of the Lord's household. (1 Tim. 3:5)

Negative Attributes:

- **Arrogant:** Elders are not self-willed; they are not serving for personal interests or gain. They are led by the Holy Spirit. Elders are grounded and mature in their faith; they are not to serve for self-glory or self-fulfillment. Elders are not to be men who have been "chomping at the bit" to fix the church. Elders are men who humbly serve by leading well. (Matthew 20:28)
- **Not quick-tempered:** Elders do not have short tempers and are not easily provoked; they are truly bondservants who personify Philippians 2:5-11. They are protectors, not provokers; they are not critical and do not seek to create factions or seek personal power, disguised as concern for the church. Elders extend love toward people and guard against hostility, resentment and anger, even when wronged; they embrace kindness and patience.
- **Drunkard:** This term may be interpreted "addicted to wine" or "wine is his companion." For simplification, in the context, consuming wine (or alcohol of any kind) is not the issue; getting drunk is. We must not impose man's law, but pay attention to what God's Word says with respect to elders. Elders must not drink in such a way as to impair their judgment and thus disqualify themselves from sound counsel or modeling godliness. Each elder is challenged to consider his consumption in both public and private arenas and make wise choices. One must operate with wisdom and godliness and not be a stumbling block, or completely abstain; leadership requires a higher standard.
- **Violent:** Pugnacious, stressing both verbal and physical abuse/quarreling. Elders are not brawlers; yet, words can hurt more than any swing of a fist. Elders embrace the challenges of Romans 12:18 and strive to embody the call to be peacemakers with words and actions.
- **Greedy for gain:** Elders are not men who seek financial gain by any means. Integrity cannot be maintained if motivated by love of money; one may attain wealth but not at any cost (Luke 10:7). Paul is not opposed to men making a living, nor is he against pastors/elders making a living in the ministry of preaching/teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). From the inception of the church, false leaders have crept in and abused people with the goal of personal gain (1 Tim. 6:5). The Apostle Peter reminds us that elders are called to shepherd the flock of God, willingly and eagerly, not for personal gain, but for the advancement of the gospel and our Lord's renown! (1 Pet. 5:2)

Titus 1:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.* ⁹ *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

Positive Attributes:

- **Hospitable:** Literally, an affection toward strangers. Elders must model Grace's commitment to "build a community to reach a community." Elders are quick to help both friend and stranger by sacrificing time, talents and treasure. (Luke 14:12-14) This quality exemplifies the choice to live the Christian life. (Gal. 6:10) Elders choose to "do life with people" and shepherd them well.

- **Lover of good:** Elders maintain a strong affection for what is good. (Phil. 4:8) Elders pursue good privately and publicly, and proclaim good, both personally and corporately. The standard of good is not found in the hearts of man or the whims of culture, but defined by God and outlined in His Word.
- **Self-controlled:** One who is self-controlled models the Christian life outwardly because of his devotion to God internally. This is not false righteousness or moral behaviorism, but one who is truly submitting to the Holy Spirit; being self-controlled means to continually embrace personal examination for the purpose of spiritual maturity. One who is self-controlled is not wearing a mask but is transparent and consistent in Christian character and conduct.
- **Upright:** “Just,” or “proper, right, and fitting.” Elders are righteous, which conveys fairness. Elders are committed to justice. As earthly representatives of God, elders embrace the heartbeat of God and pursue that which is just within the church. This includes embodying and encouraging others to live consistently repentant lives in their sanctification. (1 John 1:9)
- **Holy:** This term stresses being devout. Elders are to take ownership of God’s direction and purpose for them and the church, under the leadership and Lordship of our Great God and Savior. (1 Thess. 2:10) This is not a call to sinless perfection, but to honest and intentional devotion to God and the Christian life. Elders’ lives model devotion to God by being set apart in words and actions, being salt and light in this world.
- **Disciplined:** Elders must have the inner strength to abstain and avoid ungodliness by controlling appetites and passions. Elders have surrendered themselves to the Lord and embraced His ways as their own, with the goal of living Christ-centered lives.

ELDERS: THE WHY: Titus 1:10-16

Titus 1:10-16 (ESV) ¹⁰For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹²One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” ¹³This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

There were problems in Crete and Paul exhorted Titus to fix the issues by establishing elders. Understanding that elders were being established for a specific reason, the logical question is why?

- **There were many who were insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers:** There were people who were self-serving, divisive and arrogant influencers; they were disobedient to our Lord and had shallow words that were not lived out; their attitudes and actions were deceitful.
- **They must be silenced:** False teachers were upsetting whole families by teaching what they should not teach for shameful gain; they were destroying the very fabric of the church and needed to be silenced. Elders defend sound doctrine and remove those who teach ungodliness.
- **Example:** One of the Cretans spoke slander, a sinful generalization, about Cretans; their faith was unsound and deserved a sharp rebuke. These were not men of integrity who did not embody

the qualities needed to be elders; they devoted themselves to myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth:

- **Devoted to myths:** In 1 Tim. 1:4 Paul speaks to men who are not devoted to sound doctrine, but mysticism. These false teachers were influencing families with heretical and non-gospel teaching that directly contradicted the teaching of Jesus Christ.
 - **Devoted to commands of people who turn away from the truth:** Colossians 2:22 speaks of people following “human commands;” human commands reject God’s truth. Today, we see this heresy in doctrinal areas of salvation, sexuality, creation, ecclesiology, gender, finances, marriage and other doctrines devised by mankind. False leaders espouse and devote themselves to commands that turn people away from the truth, not only away from sound biblical teaching, but also from Jesus Christ.
- **To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled:** Jesus taught in Mark 7:15 that true Christianity is purity in the Spirit, not in externals. Paul creates a profound dichotomy: there are the pure, who are believers, and there are the unbelieving, who are defiled; the latter pervert the gospel and lead people astray, and the former are exhorted to silence such through sound doctrine, both privately and publicly. Belief is integral; the one with improper belief will have a perverted conscience, which in turn defiles one’s mind and actions.
- **They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works:** A clear sign of godly leadership is an alignment of public and private living with one’s words and actions; Godly leadership is not proven in profession but consistency in teaching and lifestyle. The personal lifestyles of ungodly shepherds defile and pervert their teachings because they utterly contradict the sound doctrine taught by the Word of God.
- **They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work:** This final statement from Paul is a brutal but appropriate assessment of false teachers. First, they are detestable, an acknowledgement of their hypocrisy, for they claim the need for godliness, but they are ungodly. Second, they are disobedient, teaching and living a lifestyle that disobeys God, and thus denying holiness. Third, they are unfit for any good work, which literally translates to being “rejected after being tested;” when tested, these false shepherds will be revealed as unfit and heretical.

ELDERS: TWO CATEGORIES:

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

Harmonizing Paul’s teaching on eldership from Titus and Timothy, there are two categories of elders: *Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders.*

1. The main focus of the teaching elder is shepherding by *teaching the church* (preaching, teaching, instruction), but he may also act as a Ruling Elder.
2. The main focus of the ruling elder is shepherding the people by *governing the church* (defending truth, protecting the church, supervising, administrating, casting vision, praying for the church, protecting the peace, and carrying out church discipline).

Ruling Elders lean on the counsel of Teaching Elders in matters of doctrine, theology, discipleship, and pastoral care. Teaching Elders lean on the counsel of Ruling Elders in matters of administration, organization, direction-setting, and formative or corrective church discipline.

There is necessary overlap of these two categories. Ruling Elders must be able/willing to teach but this does not mean it is a main focus or gifting. Teaching Elders must be able/willing to lead and govern but this does not mean it is a main focus or gifting.

2. Deacons: In the New Testament, deacons are servants of the Lord who focused on care ministry within the church. Care ministry includes benevolence, visitation of the sick, helping with spiritual needs of the church, promoting service, unity and the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the original language, the word “*deacon*” means “*servant*.” The title is descriptive and clear; a deacon is called to model service in both words and deeds. The word is defined in its various forms:

- “*Diakoneo*” and its derivatives suggest that one is a personal help to others.
- “*Diakonia*” means service at the table. (Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1)
- “*Diakanos*” primary meaning is “one who serves at tables.”

Some consider Acts 6 to have established deacons. We don’t make that dogmatic assertion, but do refer to the established model of “servant minded” leadership within the church.

Acts 6:1-4 (ESV) *¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*

The Apostles, the first pastors, established servants so they could devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word of God. The servants were given a specific duty that would be a blessing to the church body and allow the Apostles/Pastors to devote themselves to their callings before God.

Some believe this passage teaches deacons oversee the business of the church and/or function as elders. We believe the church is not a business, and elders and deacons have different roles. The deacons were entrusted with ministering to the needs of the people (so those in need were not neglected). Deacons may be entrusted with resources, but are not given authority over church resources (church budgets, etc).

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (ESV) *⁸Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 16:1-2 (ESV) *¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

- It is noteworthy the Apostle Paul refers to Phoebe as a servant (*diakonos*) in the church. It is the conviction of Grace Leadership that women are called to participate in the role of deacon.

3. Lay Leaders (The Gospel Unleashed): The Gospel Unleashed is a collision of our wiring and witness. Grace Church wants people to understand how God has wired them (talents, gifts, passions) and to find a place to participate in body life or create new ministries as they align with our core competencies. The vision is to have everyone enjoying serving our Lord together!

➤ The goals of the Gospel Unleashed are to:

1. Facilitate lay leadership roles within the body of Grace by overseeing ministry teams.
2. Create a culture that allows people to use their talents/gifts for the glory of God.
3. See each person within Grace Church have an active part in the mission and vision.

IV. Commitment to Grace:

1. Membership (Local): We have already addressed the local and universal church; here we specifically address our expectations concerning membership in the local body called Grace Church.

We believe membership is investment; members are those who join our local church family. A church is far more than an organization; it is an organism. Membership is a choice to be an active participant within the Grace Church family. Membership is NOT:

1. We belong to an exclusive club.
2. We belong to a casual club that does not involve commitment.
3. We have gained the right to vote. In other words, we have control.

We think of membership as a covenant with one another before God; a covenant is simply an agreement. Therefore, membership is an agreement to the faith, doctrine, conduct and practice of Grace Church.

Matthew 16:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Erwin McManus states, “*Becoming a member of (our church) is a declaration that you are moving from being a consumer to an investor; that you are joining not simply the community of Christ but the cause of Christ. The motivation behind becoming a member is not what can be received but what can be given. And yet on a deeper level, member is an invitation to genuine intimacy. When people become members they are saying that they submit their lives to the spiritual authority of this community and welcome genuine accountability in their spiritual journeys.*”

Our position at Grace Church is membership is the willful alignment with a local church to become a part of the body/family, affirm its faith and practice, and confirm this affirmation in both deeds and speech. The term “membership” is not in the Bible, but people who were committed to a local body gathered to study God’s Word, exercise their gifts, worship and fellowship, and provide our model.

Grace Church covenant (agreement) on Church Membership:

1. Grace Church is our regular place of corporate worship and Christian growth.

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

2. Church members are committed to carry out a plan of personal growth by intentional involvement via in-reach, outreach, body life, and other spiritual growth opportunities.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (ESV) ⁵ *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

3. Regular support of Grace Church through time, talents, and treasure.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV) ⁴ *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

- **Time:** Church membership is going to involve a sacrifice of time. It takes time to be vested in church ministry and do it with excellence. We hope you embrace the reality that we do not HAVE TO serve our Lord with our time, but rather WE GET TO.
- **Talents:** Church members use their spiritual and practical gifts in service to ministries, both on and off campus, at Grace Church.
- **Treasure:** There are various interpretations on giving within the context of the church; here is our stance on giving of our financial resources.
 - We glean three attributes of the giver in 2 Corinthians 8-9: one should give cheerfully, sacrificially, and regularly. Cheerfully because we can give, sacrificially as one giving to God, and regularly as one who has embraced discipline and gives God from first fruits.
 - C.S. Lewis states, *“I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities (giving habits) do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities (giving) expenditure excludes them.”*