

Our Journey Together

Exploring Membership and Mission at Redeeming Grace Church



We exist to bring glory to God by making, maturing and multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ

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Page | Page1

We exist to bring glory to God by Making, Maturing and Multiplying Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Exploring Membership and Mission

Greetings!

Thank you for the interest you have shown in Redeeming Grace Church! We are excited to get to know you better and to help you in your journey to find a church home. We want you to feel our care and know of our availability to help you in any way possible as you explore membership here.

The Membership Class is a basic introduction to our church family. Since we have members from many different backgrounds, this class is designed to clearly explain who we are, what we believe and how these beliefs find expression in this local church. We trust the material and teaching will result in a greater love and appreciation for Jesus Christ, the mission of the local church and the advancement of His glorious gospel. We hope to provoke a fresh commitment to participate in the Body of Christ through local church membership and to reaching our community with the gospel.

OUR BEGINNING

Redeeming Grace Church began in 2015 as a church plant of Sovereign Grace Church of Frederick. It had been on the heart and mind of one of the elders at Frederick for almost 13 years. A team of 34 people assembled for the first public meeting on January 26th with a burden and vision to plant a gospel centered church in the Smithsburg community. Envisioned was a church that taught the Bible, built authentic community around the gospel and engaged the local culture in order to relate, invite, connect and engage people to be transformed by the gospel.

The church's mission is straightforward and easy to remember- we exist to bring glory to God by making, maturing and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Redeeming Grace Church was started completely in faith that God would provide every need. No startup funds were requested, and God has been faithful to continue to provide all necessary funds from the start. Trav We continue to serve as bi-vocational pastors since the start of the church.

OUR AFFILIATION

Redeeming Grace Church is affiliated with The Gospel Coalition – a network of over 7,800 evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. You can read more about The Gospel Coalition at www.thegospelcoalition.org. We encourage you ask as many question as needed while exploring our membership process and learning about our mission to make, mature and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ. We're trusting God to provide you with clear direction as you pray and consider membership in Redeeming Grace.

All by Grace,

Trav Neumann, Pastor/Teacher
Brad Willock, Executive Pastor

Table of Contents

Session 1 (TAB 1)

1. The Beginning of the Journey: The Gospel.....4-13
2. Embarking on the Journey: Our Response to the Gospel 14-19
 - a. Addendum 1.1 The Functional Centrality of the Gospel20-22

Session 2 (TAB 2)

3. Progress on the Journey: Sanctification.....23-31
4. Strength for the Journey: Empowered by the Spirit.....32-39

Session 3 (TAB 3)

5. Together on the Journey: Relationships in the Church.....40-47
 - a. Addendum 5.1 Grace Groups Vision.....48-50
6. Participating in the Journey: Servanthood and Stewardship51-59

Session 4 (TAB 4)

7. Care Along the Journey: Pastoral Leadership.....60-70
 - a. Addendum 7.1 Biblical Qualifications for Elders71-73
 - b. Addendum 7.2 The Importance of Sound Doctrine.....74-79
 - c. Addendum 7.3 Biblical Responsibilities of Elders 80
8. Reaching Others on the Journey: Evangelism and Mission81-87

Articles (TAB 5)

- Why Church Matters, by Joshua Harris. Chapter 5, Choosing Your Church88-106

Appendices (TAB 6)

- Appendix A: Commitment to Complementarity:
The 10 Affirmations of the Danvers Statement 108-109
- Appendix B: Accountability and Church Discipline..... 110-115
- Appendix C: Redeeming Grace Church Bylaws..... 116-124
 - Statement of Faith 125-128
- Appendix D: Elder Accountability and Congregational Responsibility: How to
Biblically Bring Charges Against an Elder..... 129-136

Membership Application (TAB 7)



Exploring Membership and Mission

SESSION 1

1. The Beginning of the Journey

The Gospel

2. Embarking on the Journey

Our Response to the Gospel

The Beginning of the Journey

The Gospel

It comes as a surprise to many to learn how very different Christianity is from other religions; at its core, it isn't about morality, or philosophy, or self-fulfillment. Rather, it's about news—good news: the greatest news the world has ever heard. In fact, the word "gospel" literally means "good news," and it is this news that stands at the center of the Christian faith and should be the informing core of the Christian life. It is what the apostle Paul called a matter "of first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3). Around Redeeming Grace, we like to refer to it as "the main thing."

The gospel, the "main thing," stands at the beginning of our journey, for it is truly the beginning of any Christian's journey. What exactly is this "main thing?" What is this good news? In this lesson, we will seek both to understand and better appreciate the wonderful news of the gospel.

I. Man's Dilemma Before God

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

A. Man's Sinfulness

"A person must confront his own sinfulness in all its ravaging depths before he can enjoy the comforts of salvation." — Martin Luther

"Grace never ignores the awful truth of our depravity. In fact, it emphasizes it! The worse we realize we are, the greater we recognize what grace is! - Randy Alcorn

1. What is sin?

"Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."- Wayne Grudem

- a. Not just actions, but attitudes. Denying God's right to be God in your life.

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

¹ Some parts adapted with permission from "Starting Point – Our Journey Together", 2006, Covenant Life Church.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- a. Sin is the willful and selfish rejection of God's rule while choosing to live independently of Him.
- b. Sin is always fundamentally and primarily against God.

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

- 3. Sin's Universality. All people are sinners and stand guilty before God. Adam's sin brought sin and death to all men. All people sin because all are by nature sinners.

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

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

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

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

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

Romans 3:10-12: "...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

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

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

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

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

B. God's Holiness and Wrath

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

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

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

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

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

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

Isaiah 6:1-5: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

"The Cross speaks not only of our sin, but of God's holiness." -Jerry Bridges

2. Because God is holy, He must respond with fierce opposition to sin. This is the meaning of God's wrath.

- a. Wrath is God's holy response to sin: His personal, active antagonism to sin that derives from His settled opposition to every evil thing. It is therefore right and necessary for God to hate sin and all who practice it.

Habakkuk 1:13: "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong."

"The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations." —John Stott

"There is nothing between you and hell but air. It is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up." —Jonathan Edwards

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

Psalms 36:2: "He flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated."

"It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God." —R.W. Dale

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

- a. A broken relationship with God

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

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

2 Corinthians 4:4: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

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

John 8:34: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

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

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

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

How can we be saved from our sins and the righteous wrath of God? The answer is the gospel: the "good news" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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

A. The motive for the gospel: God's love and mercy

1. As we have seen, the holiness of God demanded that sin be punished. If God failed to punish sin, He would cease to be just. If He ceased to be just, He would cease to be God.
2. But the Bible teaches that, not only is God holy, He is also loving—love is essential to His very nature.

1 John 4:7-8: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

3. Even though we were deserving of eternal punishment, God, motivated by His infinite love, chose to take upon Himself in the person of His Son the full measure of divine wrath.

1 John 4:9-10: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

4. This is the glory of the cross: God saved us in such a way that, in one and the same act, He preserved His uncompromising holiness and expressed His fathomless love and mercy.

Romans 3:25-26: "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

"In a marvelous divine way He loved us even when He hated us." —John Calvin

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

B. The nature of the gospel: Grace

It is often said that "we are saved by grace"; and so we are. Perhaps the best one-word summary we could use for what God has done for us through Christ's work on the cross is "grace."

1. Grace refers to "God's free and unmerited favor." It is God freely bestowing His goodness to people who deserve only punishment. Notice the components of this idea:
 - a. God is in no way obligated to show kindness and mercy to anyone—least of all those who have rebelled against His rule.
 - b. We are completely unable to earn any merit from God; we stand condemned in the courtroom of God's justice.
 - c. Yet God resolves to extend mercy and favor to us in spite of our guilt.
2. It is this grace—this "merciful resolve"—that is the source of our salvation and characterizes what Christ has done for us.

Romans 3:23-24: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

3. Because we are saved "by grace" alone, we can never earn our salvation or contribute anything to it. For all eternity, God alone will receive the glory and credit for graciously giving to us what we could never merit on our own.

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

"Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to bestow it in the presence of human merit...Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit...Grace is treating a person without the slightest reference to desert whatsoever, but solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God."

—C. Samuel Storms

C. The substance of the gospel: the person and work of Jesus Christ

As stated earlier, the gospel is the "good news" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel; it is His holy history, the news of who He is and what He has done for us. The gospel includes Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming return.

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

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

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

See also Heb. 2:17; Phil. 2:5-8

2. Jesus' Sinless Life: Even though Jesus was subject to all the temptations to which we are all subject, He never once sinned in any way.

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

3. Jesus' Sacrificial Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

"At the cross, in holy love, God through Christ paid the full penalty of our disobedience Himself. He bore the judgment we deserve in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve. On the cross divine mercy and justice were equally expressed and eternally reconciled. God's holy love was satisfied." —John Stott

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

- Righteousness is a legal term: it speaks of a "right standing" before God
- God considers the righteousness that Christ achieved as belonging to us
- This declaration is a once-for-all, permanent event in our lives that nothing can change.

"We must above all remember this substitution lest we tremble and remain anxious throughout life in fear of God's judgment." —John Calvin

4. Jesus' Victorious Resurrection

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

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

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

5. Jesus' Triumphant Ascension

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

Matthew 24:30-31: "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. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Revelation 21:3-4: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'

D. The centrality of the gospel: "the main thing"

It is no mistake that this journey begins with an exploration of the gospel. It does not simply mark the beginning of the Christian life; the gospel is to remain at the center of the Christian life. It is

therefore to remain central to the life, ministry, and proclamation of the church.

"We never, therefore, move on from the cross of Christ—only into a more profound understanding of the cross."—David Pryor

At Redeeming Grace, our goal is to keep the gospel at the heart of all that we do. It will be the substance of our proclamation, the fuel for our adoration, and the source of our motivation. We will do all we can to ensure that our zeal for the gospel is never eclipsed by any other doctrine, teaching, or practice. Our commitment to you is that, with all our might, we will endeavor to "keep the main thing, the main thing."

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

Embarking on the Journey

Our Response to the Gospel

The gospel tells us that God has acted through the person and work of Christ to save us from our sins and remove the barrier that exists between God and ourselves. The gospel is therefore objective; it is a matter of history. It is what Christ did for us; no matter how we feel, the ground of our salvation never changes. We are therefore not to look inward for the reason why God saves us, but upward and outward—to the Savior who died for us.

However, salvation is not somehow "automatic." The gospel comes to us as news, and it is news to which we must respond. After Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to a group of believers in Jerusalem, thus giving birth to the church. On that day, in response to the preaching of the gospel by Peter, the hearers were pierced to the heart and asked the perceptive question, "What shall we do?" All who come to Christ must face this same question. And our answer to that question will determine whether we truly embark upon the journey of faith in Christ.

I. Our Response to the Gospel

The appropriate response to the gospel has two components, which are often summarized under the term "conversion."

"Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation." —Wayne Grudem

Although repentance and faith are spoken of separately, they always work together in conversion. There is no true repentance without faith, and no genuine faith without repentance.

A. Repentance

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

1. Repentance is a command of God. All people are commanded to repent and believe the gospel.

Acts 17:30: "...now he commands all people everywhere to repent..."

This repentance has three primary aspects:

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

"The New Testament word for repentance means changing one's mind so that one's views, values, goals, and ways are changed, and one's whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly...Repentance means starting to live a new life." —J.I. Packer.

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

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

B. Faith

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

1. What is faith?

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

Saving faith has three elements:

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

Romans 10:14, 17: "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

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

Hebrews 4:2: "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did

not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

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

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

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

3. Faith is a gift from God, not a work that earns us favor with God.

Acts 16:14: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

C. Water Baptism

1. We respond to the gospel with repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. Having been converted, believers are also to respond by obeying the command to be baptized.
2. Baptism is an obedient response of someone saved by grace. In baptism, we identify with the Lord who has saved us. Baptism cannot contribute to or bring about salvation. Baptism doesn't save us—Jesus saves us through faith.

Acts 8:12: "...when they believed...they were baptized, both men and women."

3. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work which has already taken place. Therefore, only those who have believed the gospel and repented from their sins (the *new covenant seal*- 2 Cor 1:21-22, Eph 1:13-14, Eph 4:30) should be baptized. For this reason, we do not baptize infants, but entrust them to God's special care.²
4. Water baptism is a *new covenant sign* and symbol of the believer's union with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6:4: "We 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."

² Scripture points to a special salvation for infants and of the weak, needy, afflicted and defenseless apart from the normal process of repentance and faith. Because of these truths, we can trust God, in his revealed mercy, and in his special love for children, to save them. See Psalm 9:12, Psalm 10:14, Psalm 12:5, Psalm 22:24, Psalm 68:5, Psalm 72:13, Psalm 82:3-4, Ps 116:5, Luke 18:16, Ps 22:10, Jer 1:5, 2 Sam 12:23).

We practice baptism by immersion, which vividly illustrates the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

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

II. What Makes Our Response Possible?

In the previous lesson, we spoke about the pervasive, corrupting effects of sin. Sin is not only what we do, but who we are: apart from God, we are sinners by nature. So if we're truly "dead" in our sins (Eph. 2:1) and powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing: God acts, so that we can act.

A. Chosen in eternity past

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

Eph. 1:4-6: "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

B. Effectively called

God's choosing of us eventually results in His calling us and drawing us to Himself.

1. God's drawing us to Himself is often called "effective calling". This occurs when God invites and draws sinners to Himself by His Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.
2. While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the "divine summons" of God brings about the response it requires.

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

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

C. Regenerated ("born again") by the Spirit

When God calls us, He then changes our heart so that we can freely respond. This change is called

"regeneration." In regeneration, God acts to change our inner nature and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are then able to believe the gospel and repent of our sin.

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

D. The supernatural nature of conversion

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

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

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

E. We must act, but God gets the glory

Recognizing God's grace does not eliminate our responsibility to repent and believe. All people everywhere are commanded to do this (Acts 17:30). However, when we reflect back on our salvation and recognize that it was God's prior actions that drew us to Him, we are humbled and exult all the more over God's amazing, undeserved, and glorious grace. We realize that, in the end, the difference between ourselves and someone who is unsaved is not our own superior goodness, intelligence, spiritual aptitude, or anything within ourselves at all. The only difference between us and them is the mercy and grace of God.

III. "Essentially Reformed"

These biblical teachings are often put under the heading of "Reformed theology".

- a. The Reformed view of salvation places emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.
- b. At Redeeming Grace, we refer to ourselves as "essentially Reformed." This means that we embrace the general, informing components of Reformed theology that we

- see as eminently biblical. Our loyalties are not to a man-made system of theology, but to the Scriptures. Our goal is to think biblically in order to know God truthfully, respond to Him appropriately, and glorify Him most fully.
- c. In calling ourselves "essentially Reformed," we imply that we do not necessarily hold to all of the doctrines that some Reformed churches do (for example, our view of water baptism, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc., differ from many who would call themselves Reformed).
 - d. We never want to focus on more narrow aspects of Reformed theology at the expense of biblical truths that are central, and that we share with many other Christians. The gospel itself is what unites all true believers, and it is the gospel that matters most.

ADDENDUM 1.1 The Functional Centrality of the Gospel

How should the gospel function in the life of the local church?³

A local church is healthy to the degree that:

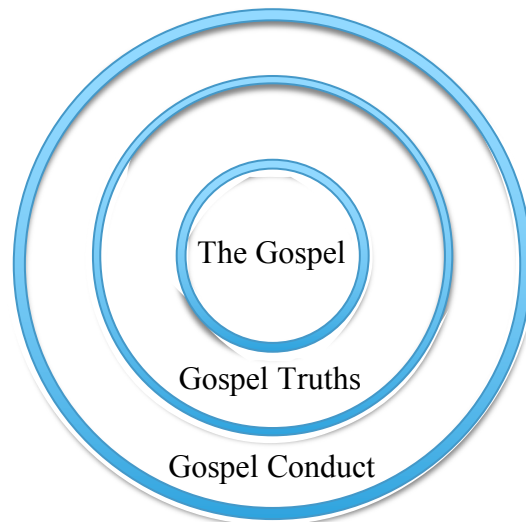
- 1) its pastor-teachers are able--accurately, effectively and broadly--to bring the gospel to bear specifically into the real lives of the people; and
- 2) its people have a deep personal understanding of and deep personal appreciation for the gospel so as to be able to live in the good of the gospel daily.

I call this the ***functional centrality of the gospel***.

Critical to achieving this aim is *making clear* the connections between the gospel and its doctrinal implications and between the gospel and its behavioral implications.

We could call these connections “gospel truths” and “gospel conduct” respectively.

Imagine three concentric circles:



FIRST CIRCLE - In the center is **The Gospel** itself, perhaps best represented by the words of I Corinthians 15:3—“Christ died for our sins.” This simple phrase speaks of the reality of our sin, the necessity of divine punishment, and the wonderful provision of salvation from divine wrath by God in Christ. Paul speaks of this “good news” as the matter of “first importance” and we know well of the priority given to this message in his preaching and writing (cf. I Corinthians 2:1-4). Hence, its centrality. But in order for it to have a *functional* centrality it must be *connected* to areas where people live their lives.

³ Sovereign Grace Pastor’s College, 2008, written Mike Bullmore, Senior Pastor, Crossway Community Church, Bristol, WI

SECOND CIRCLE- Which introduces the second circle, **Gospel Truths**. These are specific, concrete doctrinal implications of the gospel, or, as Paul puts it, “doctrine that conforms to (i.e., takes its shape from) the glorious gospel” (I Timothy 1:10-11). These gospel truths bring the gospel to bear on areas of lived experience, particularly in the mind. They are useful in the renewing of the mind so that our thinking is more and more shaped by the truth of the gospel.

As we might expect, the book of Romans is particularly rich in these gospel truths. Let me give three examples.

In Romans 5:1 Paul states, “*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Notice the logic of the verse. Something follows from the essential truth of the gospel. Our having peace with God is not the gospel itself but it is a powerful implication of the gospel—a “gospel truth”—and it will go a long way in renewing the thinking of a person who understands this truth so that their thinking conforms to the glorious gospel.

In Romans 8:1 we read, “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Again, notice the argument. Paul is not here presenting the gospel itself but something that is true “now” (i.e., *because of the gospel*). But the implication is stunning and when fully comprehended by a believer it will revolutionize their mental world and the Gospel will *function* powerfully for them.

Romans 8:32 is a favorite. “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.*” Notice those words “also” and “along with him.” They speak of something that grows out of the gospel.

When people see the connection between the truth of the gospel itself (“He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all”) and this gospel truth, this wonderful promise of God’s gracious provision of all that we need for our sanctification (cf. vv. 28- 29) the gospel will *function* for the strengthening of their daily trust in God’s provision.

THIRD CIRCLE - There is, beyond this shaping of our thinking by these doctrinal implications of the gospel, another level of connections that link the gospel to our conduct. Call it Gospel Conduct. In Galatians 2:14 Paul rebukes Peter for *conduct* that was “not in line with the truth of the Gospel” and in Philippians 1:27 he urges believers to “*conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.*”

In other words, one of the ways the gospel must function is by specifically informing behavior and we should read our Bibles with a special eye to detecting the connections it sets forth between the Gospel and our behavior. So, for example, when Paul appeals to the Corinthians to “flee from sexual immorality” he explicitly bases his appeal on the gospel—“you are not your own; you were bought at a price. *Therefore honor God with your body*” (I Corinthians 6:18-20). When he urges forgiveness, he explicitly references the gospel as both motivation and model (Ephesians 4:32). When he tells husbands to love their wives, he does so by linking his exhortation directly to the gospel (Ephesians 5:25). When he calls the Corinthians to an ongoing generosity, he explicitly reminds them of God’s generosity in the gospel (II Corinthians 8:7,9; 9:12-13, 15). Many more examples could be given. Ultimately, all Christian behavior should flow out of the gospel so, while working hard to avoid triteness, connections should be made to every area of life.

One of the greatest challenges, yet, I'm convinced, one of the most important tasks of the Pastor-Teacher is to clearly *show* these connections so that people can specifically and intelligently bring the gospel to bear on both their thinking and their conduct. Thus does the gospel become *functionally* central to the individual Christian and to the local church.



Exploring Membership and Mission

SESSION 2

3. Progress on the Journey
Sanctification

4. Strength for the Journey
Empowered by the Spirit

Progress on the Journey

Sanctification- Growth in Holiness

We embark upon the Christian journey when we respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ. No change could be more momentous—we are "born again" (John 3:3), we are "made alive" (Eph 2:5), we are transferred from the "domain of darkness" into "the kingdom of his beloved son" (Col. 1:13); we are risen with Christ, hidden in Him, chosen, holy and beloved, blameless and above reproach; we are forgiven our sins (Eph. 1:7), we are delivered from wrath (Rom 5:9), we are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18)—as Jesus put it, we pass "from death to life" (John 5:24).

As dramatic as this change is, this is only the beginning. God's purposes for us don't end when we become Christians. Rather, conversion sets us on a glorious path in which God will continue to work out His gracious purposes in our lives. What are those purposes? How are they worked out? In this lesson, we will explore what God has for us as we "continue the journey" of the Christian life. (See Illustration 3.1 throughout this section).

I. The Goal of Our Salvation: Holiness

Our salvation is much more than simply deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. When God saves us, He makes us His own, and begins the process of 'renewing us the image of Christ', maturing us and helping us grow in holiness. He knows us intimately and knows exactly what circumstances will help us grow.

"In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy." —J.I. Packer

A. The barrier to holiness: indwelling sin

Indwelling sin (Rom 7:17,20,23) not only hinders our growth; it mars God's good creation and darkens the display of His glory. He therefore desires to eventually eradicate the presence of sin and its corrupting effects from His creation. For the believer, salvation is the beginning of the process of removing sin and its effects from our lives.

- At regeneration, the power of sin is broken and we are made alive in Christ.
- In justification, the penalty of sin is removed as we are declared righteous in Christ.
- In sanctification, the effect of indwelling sin is progressively removed as we are made holy in Christ.

To be holy means to be set apart to God. This includes being set apart from all that is sinful and opposed to God. Holiness is God's goal for His people, and the Christian life involves the process of

reaching this goal throughout our lifetime. The New Testament is full of words that describe this process: transforming, renewing, conforming, maturing, and growing. Although we will never reach perfection in this life, we are called to make every effort to live a holy life for the glory of God.

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

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

B. The model for holiness: Jesus Christ

1. Jesus is our Lord, Savior, and example. We are to follow Him in attitude and action. Paul called this being "imitators of God." John used the phrase, "we ought to walk as Jesus walked." Jesus said simply, "Follow me."
2. More remarkably, God Himself has committed to making us like Jesus. The ultimate goal in sanctification is conformity to the image of Christ.

Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

C. The motive for holiness: Love for God for calling us through the gospel

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

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

*Phil 1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the **gospel** of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the **gospel**,*

II. The Battle for Holiness

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

A. The power of sin is broken

As unbelievers we were slaves to sin—we were unwilling and unable to resist sin. When we were

regenerated, we were freed from the power of sin—its ruling force in our lives was broken. We became willing and able to resist sin.

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

Why then do we still sin?

B. The presence of sin remains

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

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

C. The heart is the battlefield.

"Regeneration makes man's heart a battlefield where 'the flesh' tirelessly disputes the supremacy of 'the Spirit'." —John Owen

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

*Proverbs 4:23: Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

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

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

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

3. The Bible teaches that our sinful behavior is not caused by other people or our

circumstances, but comes from within by our own desires, cravings, longings, or lusts. Whatever rules our hearts determines what we do and say in response to people and situations.

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

James 4:1: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

Mark 7:20-23: "He said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within.

Luke 6:45 "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks".

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

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

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

III. The Process of Holiness: Sanctification

A. Sanctification defined

Sanctification is the ongoing and continuing work of God in the life of a believer from the moment we were saved (See Illustration 3.1). It is a progressive work in which we become more and more free from sin and 'renewed in the image and likeness of Christ" over our entire Christian life. In short, our actual lives are increasingly conformed and converging to our legal (justified) status before God. (Note in Illustration 3.1 the top line and the squiggly line representing our life of sanctification growing upwards).

1. *It is a process.* We don't start mature but immature. We don't become instantly perfect.

Rather, we become progressively more holy as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

2. *There is discernable and noticeable progress.* We actually do become more and more holy, overcoming various temptations and sin (lying, pride, selfishness, lust, slander, anxiousness etc.) and becoming more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.
3. *It is a work of grace.* Many make the mistake of thinking that we are saved by grace but that we then become holy by our own efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are justified by grace and we are sanctified by grace as well. Grace is necessary in both cases, and it is unmerited in both cases. The key difference is that in justification we are passive but in sanctification we actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit in receiving and responding to God's grace.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

This cooperative activity is vividly portrayed by the Apostle Paul:

Phil. 2:12-13: "Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

B. The Holy Spirit works

The activity of the Holy Spirit precedes any action towards holiness on our part and makes our actions possible. Although we aren't always aware of His activity, if we are becoming more holy it is because He is at work.

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

"The only good we do is what He does in us; it is not that we do nothing ourselves, but that we act only when we have been acted upon, in other words under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit." —John Calvin

C. We work

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

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

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

"Sanctification...is a thing for which every believer is responsible... Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for His praise." —J.C. Ryle

IV. Weapons for the Battle

God has equipped us with numerous aids for our battle with sin, and at Redeeming Grace we seek to equip every member to maximize the use and effectiveness of these aids.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- D. Other Christians are gift, help and blessing in our struggles. We all battle indwelling sin and suffer from some degree of spiritual blindness due to the deceptive nature of sin. Therefore, each Christian is encouraged to pursue and receive help from others in this struggle. This includes repenting quickly, confessing quickly, considering the input from others we trust, and asking for specific accountable help where we know we are weak.

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

At Redeeming Grace, the practice and encouragement of sanctification is woven throughout all facets of our church life together. Each member is encouraged to practice the spiritual disciplines—especially Bible reading and prayer—and through them to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). An essential part of our grace group ministry⁴ beyond fellowship and encouragement is the specific and personal application of God's word to our lives. Our emphases on building friendships and relationships provide countless contexts in which we join arms and help each other grow in godliness. The weekly preaching of God's word, in addition to personal bible study, group studies, courses and classes is a helpful means to our growth in godliness as a body. Through these avenues and more, we desire to live lives that increasingly experience the transforming power of the gospel and reflect God's character to a lost world.

V. The Heart of Sanctification

The intentional pursuit of godliness is a priority at Redeeming Grace because the grace of gospel trains and the Scriptures command it. In taking sanctification seriously, we are taking God's holiness seriously and the reality of our own indwelling sin seriously. We need to continue knowing the gospel, studying the gospel, learning to apply the gospel and disciple one another in the gospel to continue growing in holiness.

It is not uncommon to find some Christians who downplay the role of indwelling sin in their lives—such talk seems negative or counter-productive. However, few endeavors could be more exciting than the glorious pursuit of being renewed more and more like Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Far from making us self-centered or unhelpfully introspective, the pursuit of holiness intensifies our joy as we become more amazed at the power of the gospel, God's forgiveness, freer from indwelling sin in our lives, and more intimately acquainted with our God. We become passionate about what the gospel is accomplishing in our lives. Ultimately, our holiness brings God glory as His character is increasingly displayed in our lives. Such mercy and grace provides powerful motivation to cooperate with God's sanctifying work in our lives and so to "continue the journey" of the Christian life in the context of the local church.

⁴ Coming 2018

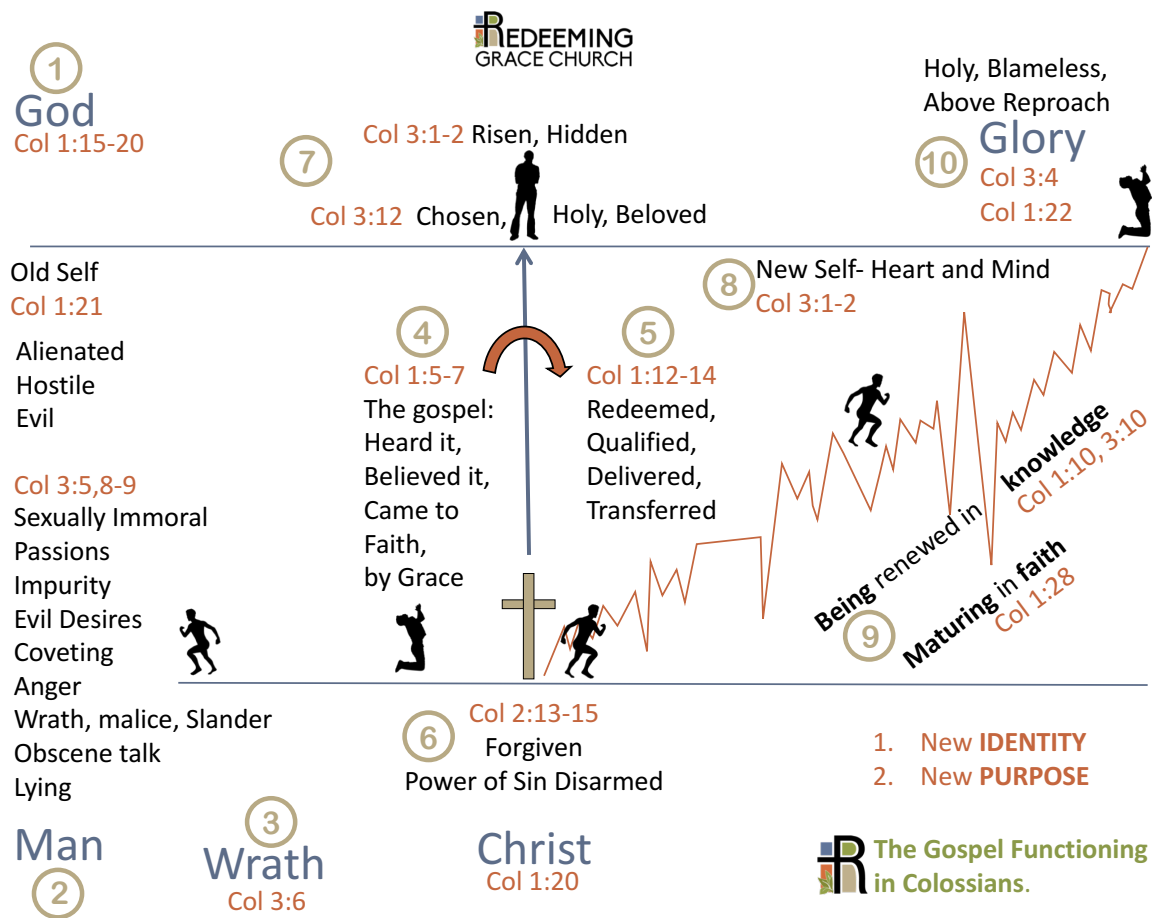


Illustration 3.1

Strength for the Journey

Empowered by the Spirit

In previous lessons, we've seen over and over our dependence upon the grace of God in the Christian life. The very plan of salvation is the story of God's gracious initiative to send His Son to die on the cross for sinners who were as yet in rebellion against God and incapable of responding to Him. Having responded to the gospel, Christians then learn that their ability to respond was actually rooted in God's gracious choosing and calling of them before the foundation of the earth. In our growth towards holiness, (see Lesson 3), we find that all our efforts have their start in the sanctifying work of God, who "works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). The Christian life is truly "all of grace, from first to last."

Because of this, God did not leave us to live out the Christian life in our own strength. Indeed, one of the great promises of Scripture comes at the very end of the book of Matthew, just after the giving of the Great Commission: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). In this lesson, we will explore more fully the source of strength for the Christian journey: the ongoing empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit: God's Active Presence

- A. While God is omnipresent (present at all places at all times with all of His being), He makes His presence known in different ways for different purposes. He can be present to bless, to sustain, to discipline, or to empower.
- B. God manifested His presence in various ways throughout history, but these reached a climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1, 14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

- C. In the church age, God's presence is primarily manifested in the world, and especially in the church, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

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

"The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church." —Wayne Grudem

- D. Christians have the great privilege, not only of trusting in God's omnipresence, but of personally experiencing His nearness.

Romans 8:15-16: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."

James 4:8: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

- E. God's active presence among His people accomplishes many things. It is not uncommon to focus too narrowly on the more dramatic aspects of this, such as miracles, healings, or prophecy. Scripture, however, portrays the Spirit's work as pervasive, ever present and multifaceted—what might be called "the broad work of the Spirit". To fully appreciate God's active presence, we need to recognize the countless ways in which the Spirit is at work in and among us.

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

II. The Holy Spirit: God's Saving Presence

The New Birth. The greatest miracle one can ever experience is the miracle of regeneration, in which the Holy Spirit changes our nature and imparts spiritual life to us. The Bible is clear that we do not have the ability in ourselves to respond to God apart from His regenerating work (John 6:44, 1 Cor 1:30, 8:7-8, Luke 10:21-22; John 6:65; 8:43; Rom 9:16-18; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4. Nothing can ever compare with this mighty work of the Spirit in our lives.

Titus 3:4-7: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

III. The Holy Spirit: God's Purifying Presence

1. *The Holy Spirit.* One of the Spirit's primary activities is to remove sin from our lives and to make us more and more holy, just as God Himself is holy.

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

See Lesson 3: Progress on the Journey—Sanctification

2. *The Fruit of the Spirit.* As the believer cooperates with the work of the Spirit in his life, the Spirit produces "fruit" in his life, consisting of godly attitudes and behavior. This supernatural work is the opposite of our natural tendencies, and is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the believer.

Galatians 5:16, 22-23: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

IV. The Holy Spirit: God's Empowering Presence

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. The inaugural experience of this empowering work is often referred to as being "baptized in (or with) the Holy Spirit". (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

- A. To be baptized in the Spirit is to be immersed in the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ, resulting in an awareness of God and empowerment for Christian life and ministry.

1. This "immersion" is foretold by John the Baptist in each of the four gospels (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 and John 1:33) and by Jesus (Acts 1:4-5). It is the "promise of the Father"—God's empowering presence for the new covenant age.

Acts 1:4-5, 8: "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

2. The purpose of this activity of God's Spirit is spiritual empowerment, both to stimulate consistent growth in godliness and to enable the believer to bear witness concerning the gospel and to serve the Lord with spiritual power.

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

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

- B. Baptism in the Spirit is only the beginning of a process of empowerment that God desires for every believer.

1. The New Testament envisions a process of repeated, continual *fillings* of God's Spirit throughout the believer's life.

Acts 4:8, 31: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

2. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer *continually* with increased power for Christian life and witness. Our responsibility and privilege is to live a life of dependence upon God, asking for His Spirit to continually fill us, to empower us, and to strengthen us to live lives for His glory.

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

"Being continually filled with the Spirit is, in fact, the challenge of a lifetime and the challenge of each new day." —Anthony Hoekema

"Here the Spirit is free to move again and again, as all of life is progressively scented with the presence and wonder of Almighty God." -- Rodman Williams

- C. There are differing views among Christians as to when a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit. Some believe it occurs at regeneration (which we do), while others hold that it is an additional experience distinct from regeneration. Transcending these differences are certain, clear truths of Scripture that all Christians can affirm: God promises the Holy Spirit to every Christian and desires every Christian to experience the Spirit's ongoing and empowering presence for life, godliness and witness.

At Redeeming Grace, we have found it possible to accommodate Christians who differ on this issue when these beliefs are communicated in humility and common values concerning the Spirit's ministry are cherished and applied. These common values are what is most important to us as a church, including:

- A recognition of the need for ongoing empowerment by the Spirit in the Christian life.
- A belief that Christians are to seek a life of being continually filled by the Spirit.
- A life of constant dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
- A faith-filled pursuit of those things that are indicative of being filled with the Spirit: a genuine love for God and others, a hunger for His Word, an increasing manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, a desire to worship God, a love for fellowship, growing in grace, a burden for the lost, and a boldness in Christian witness.
- A belief in the continuity of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, and an earnest desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.

"We are not left on our own as far as our relationship with God is concerned; neither are we left on our own to 'slug it out in the trenches' as it were, with regard to the Christian life. Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among us and in us." -Gordon Fee

D. Spiritual Gifts

In addition to giving us increased boldness and effectiveness in witness (Acts 4:31), prompting worship and thanksgiving in our hearts (Eph. 5:18-20; Acts 10:46), increasing our growth in godliness (2 Cor. 3:18), and strengthening our relationship with other believers (Eph. 5:18, 21), the Holy Spirit also imparts supernatural gifts for the edification of the church and for works of ministry in the world.

1. All believers have and receive spiritual gifts.

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

2. All of the gifts are supernatural. In Scripture, all of the gifts, from seemingly "natural" ones like mercy and serving to "supernatural" ones like healing, are viewed as being from God and empowered by the Spirit.

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

3. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today. Scripture suggests that the gifts are given to the church until Christ's return, and there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that any of the gifts were intended to pass away with the

early church. 1 Cor. 1:7-8: " so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." We hold to the orderliness as prescribed by Paul in the exercise of spiritual gifts in 1Corinthians 14 when the church is gathered.

4. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.

1 Cor. 14:1: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

5. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the glory of God and the edification of other believers.

1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

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

"Look at the New Testament Christian, look at the New Testament church, and you see it vibrant with spiritual life, and, of course, it is always life that tends to lead to excesses. There is no problem of discipline in a graveyard; there is no problem very much in a formal church. The problems arise when there is life...We must not interpret the Scriptures in light of our experiences, but we should examine our experiences in light of the teaching of Scripture." -- Martyn Lloyd-Jones

V. Pursuing God's Empowering Presence

Because God invites us to draw near to Him (Heb. 4:16; Jas. 4:8) and commands us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), we can have confidence that He will respond to our pursuit of Him.

A. Diligently practice the spiritual disciplines, especially the study of God's word, prayer, and worship.

1. Amazingly, God desires an intimate relationship with us, and the spiritual disciplines are means God has given us to commune with Him, receive His grace, and grow in godliness.

"The Spiritual Disciplines then are also like a channel of God's transforming grace. As we place ourselves in them to seek communion with Christ, His grace flows to us and we are changed. That's why the disciplines must be come priority for us if we will be godly." —Donald Whitney

2. The Bible is God's self-revelation to man. In it we learn what God is like and how we are to respond to Him. There is no more important activity for the Christian than reading and meditating upon the word of God.
3. Prayer is communication with God. It is the lifting up of our hearts, thoughts, and desires to God. When we pray, we communicate with God, and He communicates with us. For our part, we communicate our gratitude, confess our sins, submit our wills, present our requests, and pour out our worship. We also listen, allowing God to give us divine perspective on our lives, search our hearts for sin, illumine our minds with His truth, encourage our souls with His promises, and assure us of His love through Christ.

B. Recognize the value of the corporate gathering of the church for experiencing a fresh infilling of the Spirit.

While private devotions are crucial for the Christian life, God is pleased to reveal His active presence in corporate meetings in ways we don't normally experience when we're alone.

"God will manifest His presence to you in congregational worship in ways you can never know even in the most glorious secret worship. That's because you are not only a temple of God as an individual, but the Bible says (and far more often) that Christians collectively are God's temple...God manifests His presence in different ways to the "living stones" of His temple when they are gathered than He does to them when they are apart." —Donald Whitney

C. Our Sunday Celebration

In the life of this church, we cherish the importance of our Sunday morning gatherings. These times provide a context where we can worship God together, hear the word of God proclaimed and taught, and be built together in our mission as a church.

Each Sunday has three primary goals:

1. *Worship: Ministering to God.* There is no higher calling for the people of God than to worship and glorify Him together. Our Sunday meetings provide the opportunity to glorify God, to declare His perfections, to praise His name, and to adore Him together.
2. *Equipping: Receiving from God.* Although the main purpose of worship is exalting God, corporate worship is nonetheless a means by which we encounter God together and are refreshed by His presence, strengthened by His grace, encouraged by His promises, and transformed by His truth. These things occur as we worship God through song, encounter Him by gifts of the Spirit and through the preaching of God's word.
3. *Fellowship: Sharing our current experience with God.* Believers are given the privilege of caring for, encouraging, and building up each other. Each Sunday is an opportunity for us to be a means of grace through greeting, prayer, encouragement, prophesy, sharing Scriptures, and in a multitude of other ways.

D. Other Corporate Contexts

As Redeeming Grace grows, we anticipate a variety of other gatherings that will take place within various ministry spheres: Redemption Teen Ministry, Men's meetings, Ladies Meetings, various classes as well as serving opportunities. Grace Groups will also play a special role in our life together as a church. Each of these contexts provides opportunities for us to experience God's active presence together as we seek Him through worship, the teaching and application of God's word, and fellowship with each other.

VI. God's Active Presence: Our Privilege and Need

"For Paul, the Spirit as an experienced and living reality was the absolutely crucial matter for the Christian life, from beginning to end. For the Christian life can only be lived in and by and through the power of the Holy Spirit." --Gordon Fee

As believers, we should never be satisfied with anything less than the nearness of God—His active presence. He has promised to draw near to us, and He empowers us by the Holy Spirit to glorify Him and serve Him more effectively as He accomplishes His purposes through the church. To be a Christian is to be marked by the presence of God, and how gracious He is to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us for our lives, our service to Him, and our life together as a church. How desperately we need this. And how wondrous it is that we can pursue this in faith, and do so together.



Exploring Membership and Mission

SESSION 3

5. Together on the Journey
Relationships in the Church

6. Participating in the Journey
Serving and Stewardship

Together on the Journey

Relationships in the Church

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Ephesians 4:16

Up to this point we have reviewed many aspects of the Christian life that we typically think of as involving our personal relationship with God: our response to the gospel, our growth in godliness, our love for God’s word and sound doctrine, and our empowerment by God's Spirit. In this lesson, we examine a key assumption of New Testament teaching: all of these things—indeed, all of the Christian life—take place in the context of our relationships with other believers in the context of the local church.

Although we enter into a relationship with God as individuals, we nevertheless enter into something greater than our own individuality: the church—the community of God's people. We will find that, besides being woven into the very fabric of the Christian life, our relationships with other believers are a tremendous means of blessing, both for ourselves and others. God never meant for us to live the Christian life alone. Instead, He gives us the amazing privilege of traveling on this journey *together*.

I. The Foundation of our Fellowship: God's Community

To fully appreciate our identity as God's people, we have to recognize where in the unfolding drama of God's redemptive purposes we stand.

A. Throughout the history of redemption, God has been acting to create "a people for His own possession" (1 Peter 2:9).

1. God promised Abraham that He would make him "a great nation" and through him "all the families on the earth" would be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).
2. Carrying forth God's purposes, Abraham's descendants were formed into a nation. Their faithfulness to the covenant would result in their peculiar identity as the people of God.

Exodus 19:5-6: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

3. Christ's finished work not only provided forgiveness of sins, but it advanced God's work of

creating a people for Himself by bringing into existence the church.

Titus 2:13-14: "...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 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."

1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."(cf. Ex. 19:5-6)

B. Our true nature as the church, and as Christians, is *corporate*. God is saving a people, not an unconnected group of isolated individuals.

C. This is not merely theoretical. Our lives are to give expression to the reality of our existence as the people of God. To deny this by pursuing individualism or independence is to isolate ourselves from the express purpose of God. The local church is God's appointed context for this to take place.

D. What does this mean practically? What is God's intention for our lives together? Is it simply attending the same gathering on a Sunday? Is it merely acknowledging the same body of doctrines?

The biblical picture of the church (Acts 2:42-27) can best be described as community: a group of people, joined by a common life, united by common values and a common purpose, devoted to living out this life together within the larger society. This is the type of church life God calls us to—a life that shines as a testimony to His work in our lives.

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

Rom 12:10-14 "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

"Those first Christians of Acts 2 were not devoting themselves to social activities but to a relationship...They understood that they had entered this relationship by faith in Jesus Christ, not

by joining an organization. And they realized that their fellowship with God logically brought them into fellowship with one another. Through their union with Christ they were formed into a spiritually organic community... We must grasp the idea that fellowship means belonging to one another in the Body of Christ, with all the privileges and responsibilities that such a relationship entails." — Jerry Bridges

II. The Nature of Our Fellowship

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

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

A. What is fellowship?

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

1. Biblical writers took up this word to describe the relationship believers have with God through Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."
2. It was also extended to describe the relationship believers have with each other.
1 John 1:3: "...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."
3. Our fellowship with God is what makes our fellowship with others possible. This is human relationship at the deepest level possible, that only Christians can hope to experience.

Another pastor defines fellowship as "The communication of our current relationship with and experience of God Himself." Biblical fellowship is not merely "socializing"— it is sharing our common life in Christ: life that is rich, enduring, and eternal.

B. The biblical example of fellowship

The Bible is filled with things we are to do "to," "with," or "for one another." Here is a listing of 'one another's' we can do to position ourselves to experience true fellowship:

1. Be at peace with each other (Mk 9:50)
2. Love one another (Jn 13:34)
3. Be joined to one another (Ro 12:5)
4. Be devoted to one another (Ro 12:10)
5. Honor one another (Ro 12:10)
6. Rejoice with one another (Ro 12:15)
7. Weep with one another (Ro 12:15) \
8. Live in harmony with one another (Ro 12:16)
9. Welcome one another (Ro 15:7)
10. Instruct one another (Ro 15:14)
12. Agree with each other (1 Co 1:10)
13. Wait for one another (1Co 11:33)
14. Care for one another (1Co 12:25)
15. Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
16. Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
17. Be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)
18. Forgive one another (Eph 4:32)
19. Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)
20. Bear with one another (Col 3:13)
21. Teach, admonish each other (Col 3:16)
22. Encourage one another (1Th 5:11)
23. Build up one another (1Th 5:11)
24. Stir one another to good works (Heb 10:24)
25. Offer hospitality to one another (1Pe 4:9)
26. Serve gifts to one another (1Pe 4:10)
27. Be humble toward one another (1Pe 5:5)
28. Confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16)
29. Pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
30. Fellowship with one another (1Jn 1:7)

As we recognize our biblical responsibilities as members of the body, we position ourselves to serve others. In short, it's our joy and privilege to give ourselves to *purposeful involvement* in other's lives.

III. The Fruit of Our Fellowship

Fellowship that is truly biblical has both profound purposes and rich benefits in our relationships together in the church.

A. *Growth in godliness.* Sanctification often takes place in the context of fellowship- we need others! God never intended our growth to be accomplished in isolation or away from other Christians in the local church.

All genuine Christians have been given a Spirit empowered desire to grow in godliness, and God has designed our fellowship as a particular means of grace through relationships with other believers:

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

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

2. To help us resist temptations and sin so as to strengthen our resolve for godliness.

Heb. 3:13: "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

3. To help us see our hearts more clearly. Our hearts are deceived (Jer. 17:9) and we'll at times fail to recognize and see our sin for what it is – disobedience. Because of this, we need the questions, input, perspective and sometimes correction of others. This requires humility trusting God is at work in us through the gracious engagement and care of our brothers and sisters as a true expression of biblical love.

Galatians 6:1: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

4. To confess our sins in an appropriate, humble manner to others so as to weaken sin's power, focus on specific repentance and invite explicit accountability in a particular area. Trusting God is at work, this cultivates humility, weakens sin, and promotes fellowship. Thankfully, God purposes though this is for us is to grow into who we are in Christ (See illustration 3.1)!

James 5:16: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

B. Providing mutual "care". We live in a fallen world, and the effects and consequences of sin—our own and others'—are readily around us: pain, guilt, sorrow, sickness, death. God has promised to care for us, and a significant means of His care comes to us through other believers. Indeed, Christians are to be distinguished by their sacrificial love for one another.

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

honored, all rejoice together."

- C. Benefiting from the diversity of gifts.** The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to each Christian to build the church. But God has also made us so we are healthily dependent upon one another—no one person has all the gifts necessary. We need one another and the unique gifts each one brings to mature as a body.

Eph. 4:16: "...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

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

- D. Presenting a compelling witness.** Ultimately, our lives together are intended to present to the world a compelling witness of the grace of God in the power of the gospel. Our unity, love, and genuine care for one another is one of the most powerful testimonies we can give to unbelievers ultimately without hope apart from the grace of God.

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

IV. A Means of Our Fellowship at Redeeming Grace: Grace Groups⁵

One of the primary means of building friendships, relationships and cultivating biblical fellowship with each other at Redeeming Grace is through a network of small groups—what we call Grace Groups. While we are joined to all believers in the local church, Grace Groups allow us to relate more comfortably with a smaller number of people. They will provide an important context for accomplishing a number of helpful and essential biblical priorities.

"The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons and in it the benefit of relatedness cannot be missed nor its challenge evaded. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say, therefore, that small groups... are indispensable for our growth into spiritual maturity." —John Stott

A. Purpose of Grace Groups

1. Application of God's word to our lives.
 - a. Receiving biblical information does not always result in transformation- we must apply it to our lives to experience growth and fruitfulness. Grace Groups enable us to do this together. We seek to apply God's word in various ways: bible studies, topical

⁵ Our small group ministry is under construction as of 2/1/2018. Small group leadership training is in process. See ADDENDUM 5.1

studies, reviewing and discussing Sunday messages, discussing Christian books and articles, and using a variety of other resources (such as RightNow Media) all with the intention of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Pursuit of biblical fellowship.
 - a. Genuine and deepening fellowship is more practical in a smaller context of trusted friends. Grace Groups provide a place where we can build trust through friendships relationships, care for one another, and help each other grow in our relationship with God.
3. Ministry to one another.
 - a. God is pleased when the all of the body functions as designed, and Grace Groups provide a context where we can minister to each other with the gifts that God has given us. Meetings often include times of worship, prayer for one another, serving and opportunities for individuals to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of others. Grace Groups also provide meaningful context to introduce friends and guests to our life as a church.
4. Develop genuine friendships.
 - a. Friends are a blessing and gift from God. We can be introduced to other Christians in the context of small groups. It's difficult to develop meaningful friendships with everyone in a local church, yet small groups provide a unique way to meet people that we already have a common bond through faith in Christ that may then grow into sometimes life-long lasting genuine friendships.

B. Participation in Grace Groups

Since Grace Groups will be an important part of the ministry of Redeeming Grace, it's a helpful way to get involved in the life of this local church by considering participating in them⁶. As they become available, information will be on REALM or on our website with information about groups in your neighborhood. Doing life together isn't just about sound doctrine and good teaching, it's also about being in genuine friendships and relationship with one another. Grace Group participation is encouraged for all individuals exploring membership at Redeeming Grace.

1 Thess 2:8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁶ Coming 2018

C. Our responsibilities within Grace Groups

Each member is important to the group and is encouraged to contribute to the group's ministry. We ask everyone's consideration to:

1. Faithfully attend meetings and functions. We're much more likely to benefit if we are actually present!
2. Willingly participate. Come ready to engage, receive, to serve, to share, and to prayerfully share with others. When the group has an assignment (from a book, article or activity), be sure to complete it. Both you and others will benefit from your participation.
3. Build friendships and relationships with other members outside the meeting. Don't confine your investment to the Grace Group meeting—let this be the spring board to rich, enduring friendships and relationships.

V. The Christian Life: A Life to be Shared

The Christian life is not a matter of privatized belief. Jesus described the existence of believers in astonishing terms:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24).

As we see in the New Testament, this life is one that is to be shared with others. Just as the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of our eternal life in heaven (2 Cor. 1:21-22), so is the life of the church—with all its imperfections—to be a foretaste of our fellowship with the saints in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). May this amazing privilege be our ongoing experience as we "continue the journey together."

"By his grace, together we are being changed into the image of Jesus Christ through progressive sanctification. Together we are experiencing mutual care, genuine fellowship, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We no longer just see—we observe. We no longer simply attend—we participate. We no longer selfishly consume—instead we are carrying out God's purpose for our lives as we contribute to the building of the local church." —CJ. Mahaney

ADDENDUM 5.1 GRACE GROUPS VISION (January 2018)

Our vision at Redeeming Grace as a means of pursuing gospel centered friendships, fellowship and discipleship together.

We want our small groups to operate via a simple yet distinctive ministry structure that is biblically principled and with definition, but marked by significant flexibility. It can be a bible study that forms for a short season, or a small group that form for prayer and worship, or comes together to pursue deeper relationships and commitment.

We want small groups to form.

We want members to invite new people into their small group. There are 6 provisions to keep in mind:

- A grace group leader will be involved in ongoing Grace Group Discipleship Training
- A grace group will ideally be at ~ 8-10 individuals.
- Each grace group will have a Pastor assigned to provide oversight and additional care, and counsel.
- We will encourage each grace group member to embrace the vision and purpose of the group and prioritize meeting times and activity involvement.
- We believe it will be helpful for grace groups to commit to a group on a year by year basis, or as deemed wise, a season of particular study that the group is together. This provides flexibility to visit and or participate in other groups.

We want to Do Life Together

Envisioned is a small group passion that's not just another scheduled church event, but instead viewed as living every-day, normal life to the glory of the God in the power of the gospel.....together”.

We want to Witness Together

The Bible speaks of a collective witness to the gospel – by the community of believers as they live life distinctly worthy of the gospel with one another (John 13:33-35; 17:20-23). Small groups can be this kind of community. We hope our small groups will be a place where non-Christians can engage a lot of relationships that make up our church community, so they can see, and even experience to some degree, the difference that the gospel makes in everyday life.

We want to Serve Together

When God the Son became a man, he framed his coming – his mission – as being one where “he came not to be served, but to serve” and then he instructed those who intended to follow him to likewise become servants (Matt. 20:25-28). And so, it is a great opportunity for small group members to give themselves to serving both God and their neighbors, together in a variety of ways.

We want to Build Up

We believe that God the Spirit gives gifts to men and woman for the building up of the Church. And so, each member of a small group should seek the empowering presence of the Spirit in order that they might serve out of this gifting (Rom. 10:6).

It's primarily through Spiritual gifts that leadership (Romans 12:8) within small group contexts is viewed, identified and practiced. We would love to talk with you if you desire to be equipped to lead a small group.

We want to Multiply

Our passion is that small groups would be intentional to find ways share the gospel and carry out the mission of this church to make and multiply disciples by including others. A growing small group is good and a sign of health. It is here where every small group will be a part of carrying out its commission to eventually multiply. One small group can grow and become two or three small groups.

SO – If you have led a small group and are interested in leading one here, or if asking “How do I join a small group?” - They are on their way !

Participating in the Journey

Serving and Stewardship

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

The Christian journey is not one of observation, but participation. In this session we will explore two of the primary ways we are called to participate in this journey: through serving and stewardship (the faithful use of our resources) within the context of the local church.

"Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, our talents, and our energies in serving one another in the Body of Christ." —Jerry Bridges

I. Serving

A common metaphor in Jesus' parables is that of the servant—we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but to be great in God's eyes, which is - to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are "Well done, good and faithful servant." This is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion—it is a way of life, it is who we are.

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

1. The model of servanthood.

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

Philippians 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Mark 10:43-45: "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son

of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

2. The call to serve.

We can do nothing to earn our salvation- it is a gift (Eph. 2:8) – yet our salvation nevertheless ushers us into a life of following Christ, relinquishing our prerogatives and rights just as He did. A critical aspect of following Christ is following his example of serving.

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

3. The motivation of serving.

At the heart of all of our serving God and others starts at the foot of the cross. Because we stand forgiven, we are free to find joy in knowing and serving God. Because the Spirit indwells us, we find we have fresh affections for God and new desires to glorify Him. We do not serve God in order to be forgiven or to gain God's favor, but because we have been forgiven and have lavishly received God's grace as a gift. Gratitude and joy fuels our passion for serving God and others.

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

2 Timothy 2:4 "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."

"We should serve God not just because it is a duty, because serving Him is much more than that. We should serve God because it glorifies God. He is worthy of everything we can do for Him and His church. Wouldn't you agree?" —Donald Whitney

4. The freedom of serving.

One of the express purposes of our salvation is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve God:

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

Luke 1:74-75 "that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all of our days"

5. The qualities of serving.

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

- *Serving is God-centered.* When we serve other people, whether they are fellow Christians in the local church or non-believers in our lives, we are actually rendering service to God Himself. This reality helps purify our motives for serving, helping us to put to death the seclusion that comes from selfishness and the craving for others' approval that comes from pride.

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

- *Serving is others-focused.* When serving is motivated by grace, it will not be self-serving, but rather characterized by an authentic desire to glorify God and to meet the needs of others. Few things so distort our service than selfishness, but grace-motivated service actively places the desires of God and the needs of others above our own.

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

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

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

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

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

6. The opportunities of serving.

An important element of membership at Redeeming Grace is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others. Involvement in service can be through structured contexts or through needs that God reveals to you.

Spontaneous opportunities. As we do life together God opens our eyes to needs and ways to serve Him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and our cultivation of a servant's heart. It is essential that we respond to these unique opportunities as the Lord provides them.

If you have an idea, suggestion or burden for a particular area of ministry or service, let us know about it. It may be something the church can accommodate with administrative support, financial support and provide a communication platform to encourage others to join in.

Structured church ministries. These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as Ministry teams, Children's Ministry, small groups, outreaches, church sponsored events, mission trips, and mercy ministries. These ministries provide organized and strategic serving opportunities to meet specific needs. They are an enriching context for friendships as well as relationship building as we serve together. You can find out more about these opportunities through REALM or talking with a pastor or ministry team leader.

Ministry Teams:

1. Hospitality Team
2. Setup Take Down
3. Greeting / Parking Team
4. Communion Team
5. Children's Ministry Team
6. Nursery Team
7. Counting Team
8. Prayer Team
9. ProPresenter Projection Team
10. Sound Team

II. Stewardship

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

"Christian stewardship is the management of life and all its resources for the glory of God." — Murray J. Harris

1. The reality of stewardship.

The faithful use of our resources begins with this biblical realization: God owns everything! All that we have comes from Him, and therefore what we own is not really ours- we are merely stewards—overseers or managers—over the things that belong to God.

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

1 Chronicles 29:10-12 "Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours in the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand is to make great and to give strength to all."

2. The call of stewardship.

Scripture uses the term "steward" to describe our role in finances and possessions. The primary requirement of a steward is that he be found faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy."

Luke 16:10 "One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

3. The test of stewardship.

The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over finances—all of reveal that our trust is in money and not in the Lord of our money. In the same way, generosity

and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God—by such things we express and confess that God is the source of our life, not our possessions.

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

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

4. The resources of stewardship.

God is faithful to provide us with the financial resources for our physical needs (bread for food) as well as the needs of the church and the spreading of the gospel (seed to sow).

2 Corinthians 9:10 "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

5. Examples of stewardship.

Throughout salvation history God's work was supported financially by God's people. We see giving examples in the book of Genesis before the law of Moses, in the law of Moses, in the New Testament, and throughout church history.

The Old Testament-

God commanded his people to pay 10% of their income to support the Levites— the religious teachers of the day. There were additional tithes that averaged roughly 23% of their annual income. Beyond that was the temple tax and free-will offerings.

Pre-Law tithe: The practice of the tithe predated the giving of the Law.

Genesis 14:20 "...and Abraham gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of everything"

Genesis 28:22 "...and all that you gave me (Jacob) I will give a full tenth to you."

In the Law of Moses: The Law included three tithes:

- First was received for the maintenance of the temple and the provision of the priests and Levites who served there. (Num 18:24; Lev 27:30-32; Deut 14:22-24)
- Second tithe supported the cost of an annual festival in Jerusalem. (Deuteronomy 14:22-24)
- Third tithe was received every three years to support the poor and needy. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29 & 26:12)

The New Testament-

- Jesus commended the Pharisees for faithfulness in giving. (Matthew 23:23)
- When Jesus addressed the law he never lowered the bar, always raising it. (Matthew 5:27-28)
- New Testament giving always exceeded the tithe. (Mark 12:41-44; Acts 4:34-35; 2 Cor 8:1-5)
- Giving was to support those in ministry. (I Corinthians 9:13-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Special offerings were received to meet unique needs. (Phil 4:15-16; Acts 4:34,11:27-30)

Today, we have received so much more blessing in Christ than the Old Testament saints could ever have imagined. Many Christians assume that their responsibility starts and ends with a giving of 10% as a carry-over from the Old Testament. However, the word *tithe*- which means 10%- is only used 7 times in the New Testament yet - nowhere are we commanded to tithe. Similarly, in all the instructions to the churches in the New Testament, any apostolic teaching on tithing is absent.

Instead, we see Paul teaching the principle that generous giving is an "act of grace" and that we are to 'excel' (2 Cor 8: 5-7) in this grace in by looking to Christ in the gospel "for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich". (2 Cor 8:9).

This redemptive language reminds us that Jesus gave of himself generously for our sake. In doing so, we are to see the connection that the model and motivation of our giving is centered in the gospel functioning by giving generously of ourselves and our money. We are to give generously because we are recipients of the unimaginable generosity of Christ in the grace of the gospel.

But to better understand in practical terms how much you should give, let's look at what Scripture has to say about giving. What follows is a summary of Biblical principles about giving. If this is new to you, prayerfully look them up and ask God to give you insight and help you understand this area of faithful stewardship as a member of Redeeming Grace Church.

6. Guidelines for giving.

Giving Principles:

- Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to God (1 Chronicles 29:11, 16; Psalm 24:1-2; 50:10-12; 89:11).
- God entrusts creation as a stewardship to mankind beginning with Adam (Genesis 1:28, 2:15).
- Giving is an act of worship (Genesis 14:20, 28:22).
- Giving is an act of grace and informed by the gospel (2 Cor. 8:5-9)

- Jesus uses parables to illustrate stewardship truths, paralleling his disciples to managers of a household.

Jesus teaches in the gospels that we:

- Serve God, not money (Luke 16:1-15).
- Give inconspicuously, not publicly; our motive is key (Matthew 6:1-14).
- Invest in heavenly treasure, not earthly treasure (Matthew 6:19-24).
- God will provide (Matthew 6:25-34, Phil 4:19, Rom 8:32).
- Give in proportion to what we have (Mark 12:41-44).
- Opt for giving over receiving (Acts 20:35).
- May receive financial support (Luke 8:1-3).

Paul teaches us to give:

- Generously (2 Cor. 8:2-4; 9:6).
- Regularly (1 Cor. 16:2).
- Proportionately (1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor. 8:11-12).
- Sacrificially (2 Cor. 8:3-5).
- Willingly (2 Cor. 8:11-12).
- Voluntarily (2 Cor. 9:7).
- Cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7).
- Eagerly (2 Cor. 8:10-11; 9:2).
- With readiness (2 Cor. 9:2).
- In a way that we excel in giving (2 Cor. 8:7).
- Strategically (2 Cor. 9:12-15).
- Methodically (1 Cor. 16:3-4; 2 Cor. 8:18-21).

Paul teaches that the AMOUNT we are to give is:

- Proportional to our income (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:11-12).
- A generous amount (2 Cor. 8:2-3; 9:5-6, 11).
- A heartfelt amount (2 Cor. 9:7).
- A sacrificial amount (2 Cor. 8:3).

Paul's teaches us the benefits of gospel functioning, grace motivated giving:

- God's generous blessing (2 Cor. 9:6-11).
- The supply of people's needs (2 Cor. 9:12a).
- Praise to God (2 Cor. 9:12b-15).
- The support of pastoral ministry (1 Tim 5:17)

7. The heart of stewardship.

God looks at the heart and what we do with our money and possessions is always a reflection of our hearts. Grace is given to help address our motives and attitudes towards giving and the scriptures help bring that grace to encourage us in this endeavor.

8. Church Stewardship

The church, as a legal entity, also seeks to honor biblical stewardship principles in everything it does. The leadership takes the charge to wisely and carefully steward funds quite seriously and has a number of policies in place to ensure things are done with the highest fidelity. These include:

- The Sunday morning offering is always counted in the presence of two individuals who then must testify to the count.
- Funds are transferred in locked bags.
- The church treasurer provides a 3rd set of eyes to validate the counts are accurate and then deposits the funds.
- Checks from the church over a certain threshold require multiple signers.
- Checks to individuals are never signed by the recipient.
- Receipts are required for all transactions made against church accounts.
- The church commissions outside counsel biyearly to audit the financials of the church. The report is made available to the church, at large.
- The annual church budget is presented at the beginning of the year and available to any within the church who should seek to review it.
- We seek to have the budget reflect the priorities of our mission.

III. The Privilege of Participation

One of the great tragedies in much of western Christianity is the misconception that "church" is an ornate building or a service to be attended, rather than the community of God's people, saved by His grace. By definition, then, to be a member of the church is to be a participant in the life of God, with the people of God, made possible by the grace of God.

With this perspective in view, our participation in the life of the church is the call and responsibility of every Christian redeemed through gospel of grace. God has given us both time and money as resources to invest into his kingdom. Having been purchased by God, and now as stewards of these resources, we have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and all that we have to Him for His glory and the advancement of the gospel.



Exploring Our Mission and Membership

SESSION 4

7. Care Along the Journey
Pastoral Leadership

8. Reaching Others Along the Journey
Evangelism and Mission

Leadership and Care Along the Journey

Pastoral Leadership and Congregational Responsibility

We have explored how the journey of the Christian life is not to be merely an individual one, but a journey we undertake with others. Scripture is clear we are not to live isolated Christian lives and that we need the help and blessing that comes from relationships with other believers in the context of the local church. In addition to the normal relationships with others in the church, God provides another essential means of grace for our lives: clarity in the roles of pastors as well as that of the congregation.

To enable the building of His church and the advancing of the gospel, God has given leaders to the local church. Some may have experienced deficiencies in the importance and clarity of church leadership and the biblical role of pastors resulting in congregations not growing nor being as effective as they could be. Similarly, congregations may not grow as a result of not fully understanding their God given role.

God's desire, however, is for churches to experience ongoing maturity, growth, and fruitfulness in the application of the gospel that comes from biblically qualified and gifted leaders as well as faithful congregations embracing their responsibilities. In this lesson, we'll explore the pastor's leadership and the congregation's responsibility for the church to have a faithful gospel witness.

I. The Biblical Basis for Pastoral Ministry

A. Clarifying the terms

“Church government is a mixed government- part monarchy (rule of one: Jesus), part oligarchy (rule of a few: elders), and part democracy (rule of many: the congregation). Jesus is the King through His word; the elders or pastors lead; and the congregation has final say (humanly speaking) on certain crucial matters. And it is precisely the dynamic between the one, the few and the many that cultivates a culture of discipleship, and that guides immature church members toward maturity.”⁷

JESUS

Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:18).

He is the One building the church (Matt. 16:18), and the chief Shepherd who rules the church (1

⁷ Understanding the Congregation's Authority, J. Leeman, 2016, B&H Publishing, p7

Pet. 5:4).

Serving under Him then are elders, deacons and church members (Phil. 1:1).

ELDERS

Redeeming Grace is an elder-led church. Elders are the biblically qualified male leaders of the church. The New Testament church was led by a plurality of elders. Acts 14:23, 20:17, Titus 1:5

There are three different yet interchangeable terms used in the New Testament that to refer to the same office of elder:

poimen (Pastor, Shepherd)

presbuteros (Elder) and

episcopos (Bishop, Overseer).

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (*poimen*) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4.11-12).

Therefore, I exhort the elders (presbuteros) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God (1 Peter 5:1,2).

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (presbuteros) of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time . . ." (Acts 20:17-18).

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders (presbuteros) in every town as I directed you – 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.

For an overseer (episcopos), 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 (Titus 1:5-7).

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

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episcopos), to care for the church of God (Acts 20:28).

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers (episcopos), and deacons . . . (Philippians 1:1).

Scholars have long agreed that these terms, instead of indicating separate offices, are actually used interchangeably, giving us three different facets of the same office of elder. An elder biblically is a pastor, an overseer, a shepherd and a bishop.

Redeeming Grace embraces a complimentary view on the roles of men and women in the church. Men and women are equal in standing and dignity before God yet have differing roles. An elder in scripture is to be filled by biblically qualified men only.

** See Addendum 7:1 Biblical Qualifications for Elders

B. The imperative of a biblical perspective

It is increasingly popular for pastoral ministry to be pragmatically defined or culturally conditioned, rather than biblically qualified and scripturally determined. When this occurs, the role of the pastor is distorted, and the effectiveness the pastor leadership is weakened.

II. The Characteristics of a Pastor

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

A. A gift from God to the church

Unlike gifts such as prophecy, healing, and mercy, some gifts God gives to the church are actually people—the leaders God gives to serve the church.

*Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-14: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, **the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."*

B. An exemplary model for the church

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

1 Timothy 3:1-7: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he

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

C. Recognized by the church

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

"God, who drafts men and fits them for ministry, intends that His work in them be on display so brightly that the church is able to see it, and then able to confirm His call through their appointment to public ministry" —David Hegg

III. The Biblical Responsibilities of a Pastor

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

A. Leading the church

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

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

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

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

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

B. Teaching the church

God has ordained His word as the primary instrument for the nourishment and strengthening of His

church, and He charges pastors with the task of teaching the church with His word. Indeed, the health and future of the church depends upon its leaders faithfully teaching and preaching sound doctrine and biblical practice to others.

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

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

** See Addendum 7.2: Light for the Journey—The Importance of Sound Doctrine

C. Equipping the church for gospel ministry

The pastor is to be an equipper, teaching and training the church so that each member may be equipped for faithful gospel ministry in their lives and in the church. One sign of effective pastoral ministry is the extent to which people are equipped to then serve others as the gospel functions in their lives. In a healthy local church, leaders train—people fulfil their roles!

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

D. Protecting the church

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

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

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

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

Acts 20:28-31: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things,

to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears."

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

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

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

E. Serving the church

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

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

1 Peter 5:2-3: "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

The role of the pastor is to train you to fulfil your God given role as a member!

** See Addendum 7:3 Biblical Responsibilities of Elders

IV. Congregational Responsibility: The Biblical Response to Leadership in the Church

“Congregationalism requires you, the average church member, to take responsibility for other church members. It gives you this job. In order to do your job, you must know the gospel. You must study the gospel. You must protect the gospel ministry in your church. And you must work for the gospel’s progress in the lives of your fellow church members and with outsiders.”⁸

A. Actively identify your commitment to involvement in this local church.

The New Testament is clear that each Christian is to be identified (a ‘member’) with a specific local church and to the eldership of that church. This divine assignment results in numerous benefits:

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

1 Peter 5:2-3: "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

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

B. Exercise the responsibilities of membership.

1. Attend Church regularly
 - a. To gather regularly with the people of God in this church family for worship, preaching, prayer, communion, fellowship, and edification (Galatians 4:4-7; Hebrews 3:12-14, 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Isaiah 2:3; Psalm 99).
 - b. Attend members meetings for matters of church business and the necessary exercise of congregational authority (actively participating in biblically related member issues as well as any other issue that significantly impacts the integrity and viability of the church as a gospel ministry).

⁸ Understanding the Congregation’s Authority, J. Leeman, 2016, B&H Publishing, p5

2. Observe the sacraments
 - a. Be baptized as a believer in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) and participate in the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29).

3. Help demonstrate and preserve the Gospel witness of the body
 - a. To continue a life long journey of knowing, learning, studying, loving and living the gospel through all of the disciplines of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. To preserve the unity of the Spirit by loving others and pursuing peace with each other as it applies the family of God (Matthew 5:9; Ephesians 4:1-6, 32, 5:1-2; Galatians 5:13-15; Philippians 2:1-11; Hebrews 12:14).
 - c. To live a holy life in accordance with the death to sin and resurrection to new life, which one has experienced by faith in union with Christ (Romans 6:1-4).
 - d. Disciple other members of the church and live out the 'one anothering' commands with the help of the Holy Spirit.

4. Help affirm the Gospel fidelity of membership
 - a. To receive members into fellowship with a correct gospel profession of faith.
 - b. To pursue loving care and discipline of the members of this church if they stray with unrepentance from the word of Christ in the gospel (and submit to the same discipline should I live in clear unrepentance). (Matthew 18:15-20).

5. Support the Gospel ministry of the church financially
 - a. To give one's time, gifts, talents, and financial resources as God provides for the building up of this church, the relief of the poor, and the proclamation of the Gospel both here and abroad (1 John 3:16-18; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Acts 2:42-47).

6. Share the Gospel with outsiders
 - a. To maintain Gospel ministry for the salvation of all people locally, nationally, and globally as God provides opportunity (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:6-8).
 - b. To be intentional in sharing Christ within the bounds of one's gifting, conscience and obedience of the call to make, mature and multiply disciples of Jesus.

7. Follow your leaders
 - a. To follow the elders of this church as they follow Christ in his Word, considering their teaching and lives in light of Holy Scripture (Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
 - b. Follow the biblical requirements and due process for holding an elder accountable (1 Tim 5:19-21).
 - c. To notify the elders of this church if one decides to cease formal membership here (Hebrews 10:24-25).

C. Maintain a biblical attitude toward your leaders.

To our individualistic culture, the Bible's commands concerning leaders might seem antiquated or, perhaps, authoritative. Neither is the case. The authority of the elders is only by command of counsel in teaching and exhortation to obey God's word. Growing in faith towards God with understanding and faith-filled obedience will result in blessing for ourselves and for the church as a whole. This is helpfully should be characterized by:

3. Faith-filled submission.

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

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

4. A God-honoring appreciation.

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

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

The appeal to honor leaders can seem self-serving. Biblically, though, honor is an expression of humility and integrity. The biblical concept of honor exhorts us to recognize God's provision through another person, to cultivate gratitude towards God for this provision, and rightfully to appreciate and acknowledge those who have served and benefited us. In so doing, we are actually giving glory to God for His goodness to us through other people.

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

D. Support your leaders in their labors.

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

1. Joyfully participating in the life of the church.
2. Praying for your pastors.
3. Refusing to listen to slander or accusation against your pastors.
4. Understanding your congregational role and authority in holding the pastors accountable.

V. The Blessings of Leadership

God appoints leaders for the purpose of bringing about His intentions for the church, including health, growth, stability, and maturity.

Congregations that fulfil their God given role under the leadership of humble, faithful and biblically qualified leaders come are blessed by God for growth and gospel fruitfulness in making, maturing and multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ.

Pastors teach, equip, and lead – congregations fulfil their roles being taught, equipped and lead in gospel ministry.

Ultimately, the church's leaders and the congregation's followership are a primary means by which Jesus' discipleship is expressed. Pastors are merely under-shepherds, laboring on behalf of the Chief Shepherd—Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2, 4).

An elder led – gospel equipped congregation is a gospel powerhouse.

It:

- **Makes** disciples-
- **Matures** the Christian disciple equipping them for gospel ministry in all areas of life-
- **Equips** the congregation to love their neighbors better in word and deed-
- **Strengthens** the whole church-
- **Guards** the gospel-
- **Protects** the faithful gospel witness of the church-
- **Multiplies** disciples consistently in keeping with the great commission.

Addendum 7:1 BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

4 Areas: CALLING, CHARACTER, COMPETENCY and CONFIRMATION

1. CALLING- The desire for Eldership is Motivated by the Holy Spirit

- "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28).
- "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1).
- "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly" (1 Peter 5:2).

2. CHARACTER - Moral and Spiritual Character Requirements

A. A GOOD REPUTATION

- "Above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6)
- "Respectable" (1 Tim. 3:2)
- "Well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:7)

B. FAMILY LIFE: MARITAL AND SEXUAL LIFE

- "The husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6)

C. FAMILY LIFE: CHILDREN

- "Must manage his own household well" (1 Tim. 3:4)
- "His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (Titus 1:6)
- An elder must also be above reproach as a family leader. His children are to be under control with "all dignity" (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

D. PERSONAL SELF-CONTROL

- "Sober-minded" (1 Tim 3:2)
- "Self-Controlled" (Titus 1:8)
- "Not greedy for gain" (Titus 1:7)
- "Not quick tempered" (Titus 1:7)
- "Not quarrelsome" (1 Tim. 3:3)
- "Not a drunkard" (1 Tim. 3:3)
- "Disciplined" (Titus 1:8)
- Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, so this qualification is about having Spirit-controlled leaders.

E. RELATIONAL SKILLS WITH PEOPLE

- "Gentle" (1 Tim. 3:3)
- "Upright" (Titus 1:8)
- "Not quick tempered" (Titus 1:7)

- "Not quarrelsome" (1 Tim. 3:3)
- "Not arrogant" (Titus 1:7)

F. HOSPITABLE AND LOVING

- "hospitable" (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8)
- "a lover of good" (Titus 1:8)

G. PERSONAL INTEGRITY

- "Above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6)
- "Being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3)
- "Not greedy for gain" (Titus 1:7)
- "Upright" (Titus 1:8)
- "Hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught" (Titus 1:9)
- "Holy" (Titus 1:8)

H. SPIRITUAL MATURITY

- "Not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6)

3. **COMPETENACY**- Abilities

A. FAMILY MANAGEMENT

- "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive" (1 Tim. 3:4)
- "His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (Titus 1:6)

B. PERSONAL LIFE EXAMPLE

- "Being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3)

C. ABILITY TO TEACH and SOUND BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

- "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2)
- "trained in the words of the faith and good doctrine" (2 Tim 4:6)
- "command and teach these things" (1 Tim 4:11)
- "devoted to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13)
- "labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17)
- "teach and urge these things" (1 Tim 6:3)
- "follow the pattern of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13)
- "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15)
- "preach the word; reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2)
- "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" (Titus 1:9)
- "teach what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1)
- "Declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15)

4. **CONFIRMATION** - Examination of Potential Elders

- “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve...” (1 Tim. 3:10a)
- “The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden” (1 Tim. 5:24-25)

Scripture is not explicit in the pathway to appointing elders so there is a lot of freedom as to the mechanics of appointing elders. These include in varying forms

- Personal desire for pastoral oversight (1 Tim. 3:1, Acts 20:28)
- Meeting biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
- Public examination (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:24-25)
- Public appointment (1 Tim. 5:22, Acts 6:6)

At this point in our church life, potential elders who have been evaluated and found to meet all of the biblical qualifications move toward a process of being appointed in accordance with our bylaws as elders either for serving at the church or for service in some other context.

Addendum 7:2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE

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

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

I. What Is Doctrine?

Around Redeeming Grace, you will often hear talk of people's love for "doctrine" and the benefits of doctrine; you'll also hear of various books people are reading that are helping them in the Christian life—books about various aspects of doctrine. Before we look at the importance of doctrine, perhaps it will be helpful to understand what we mean by "doctrine." We will address this question in two ways.

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

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

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

a. The world, and history itself, is purposeful. It came about by God's will, and it proceeds in accordance with His will.

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

Hebrews 1:3: "[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

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

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

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

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

b. The fall brought with it judgment. Because God is holy, He must distance Himself from and punish all sin.

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

a. God chooses Abraham, reveals Himself to him, and tells him that He will have a special relationship with Abraham and his descendants. In addition, all the nations of the earth would receive God's blessing through him (Gen. 12:1-3; 18:18).

b. The story of Israel traces the outworking of this plan, as God gathers from Abraham's descendants a people for Himself, who would know Him and who would make Him known in the world.

c. Israel's history reaches a climax when, from this chosen people comes a Savior—Jesus Christ—in whom all of God's promises of forgiveness, redemption, and restored communion with God are realized.

d. The New Testament tells the story of the accomplishment of God's saving purposes through Jesus' life and death, the realization through the church of God's plan to have a people for Himself, and the extension of God's saving plan throughout the earth through the preaching of the gospel. It also foretells the consummation of all things when Christ will return to gather His people, to judge the nations, and to restore all things back under the rule of God.

4. Restoration. Far from being a confusing batch of data, the Bible's storyline illuminates for us the very nature of God—sovereign, holy, and loving—and the nature of mankind as well—isolated from God, corrupted by sin, and subject to His righteous wrath. It also reveals the grace of God—acting to restore all things back to Himself through His Son—and how we can find forgiveness and be restored to a relationship with God—through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Without this understanding, we can know neither God nor ourselves rightly.

B. Biblical Doctrine. In addition to the flow of Scripture's story, the Bible contains all that we need to know about God in order to know Him and live a life pleasing to Him. We refer to what the Bible teaches about various things as "doctrine."

"A doctrine is what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic." - Wayne Grudem

Doctrine is simply what the Bible teaches about various topics.

The study of doctrine is not opposed to the study of the Bible; it is the study of the Bible. To understand sound doctrine is simply to understand what the Bible teaches about various topics.

II. Why Do We Need Doctrine?

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

A. The Necessity of Doctrine

"The conviction that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important growth points of the Christian life." —Sinclair Ferguson

1. We cannot truly love God without loving biblical doctrine.

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

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

2. What we believe determines the way we live.

"However paradoxical it seems to our natural minds, it is one of the facts of spiritual reality that practical Christian living is based on understanding and knowledge." —Sinclair Ferguson

- F. Every Christian is a theologian.
- G. The real question is not, "Do we need sound doctrine?", but rather, "Is the doctrine I have sound?"

"No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian has a theology. The issue, then, is not, do we want to have a theology? That's a given. The real issue is, do we have a sound theology? Do we embrace true or false doctrine?" —R.C. Sproul

B. The Purpose of Sound Doctrine

1. Sound doctrine provides a right understanding of God's person and character.
 3. The only way for us to know God is for Him to reveal Himself to us. The only place He does this in such a way that we can have a relationship with Him is in His word.

2. Sound doctrine enables us to respond appropriately to God.

4. Wrong ideas about God produce unacceptable worship of God: idolatry.

Acts 17:23, 30-31: "...What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

3. Sound doctrine produces true and vigorous affections for God.

5. God's word is designed to produce godly affections in our souls.

Psalm 1:2: "His delight is in the law of the Lord."

Psalm 19:8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."

Psalm 119:16: "I will delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word."

Psalm 119:50: "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your promise gives me life."

Jeremiah 15:16: "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;"

John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full."

Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

"True spiritual and gracious affections...come from the enlightening of the mind in order to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ... False affections arise from ignorance rather than instruction... But the Scriptures are able to give to the saints spiritual and supernatural understanding of divine things." —Jonathan Edwards

4. Sound doctrine produces stability in the Christian life.

Ephesians 4:13-14: "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves..."

5. Sound doctrine protects us against false doctrine.

Ephesians 4:13-14: "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

6. Sound doctrine generates true love for God and others.

Philippians 1:9: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge..."

7. Sound doctrine produces in us true discernment.

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

8. Sound doctrine strengthens the church.

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

III. How Is a Commitment to Sound Doctrine Expressed at Redeeming Grace?

Since sound doctrine is a high value of this church, we seek to express this in a variety of ways.

A. A commitment to the authority of God's word

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

2. Because we believe the Scriptures are the word of God, they are the final authority for all that we do as individuals and as a church.

B. A commitment to the preaching of God's word

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

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

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

"For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life, as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the Church on earth." —John Calvin

C. A commitment to the singing of God's word

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

D. A commitment to the teaching of God's word to address every area of our lives

- Marriage/Parenting seminars
- Bible/Theology courses
- Children's/Youth/Singles ministry
- Biblical counseling ministry
- Grace group ministry
- In The Workplace
- Leadership development courses
- Evangelism Training

IV. "Impassioned Orthodoxy"

At Redeeming Grace, we are committed to holding together two things that are often viewed as being separate: a commitment to sound doctrine, and a passionate pursuit of the presence of God. A friend of Redeeming Grace once described this commitment as "impassioned orthodoxy" and 'never getting over the gospel'.

From our perspective, these are two things that go naturally together and should never be separated. The more we know of God and His manifold perfections, the more we appreciate His redemptive work through the gospel in Christ's death on the cross, the more our love for God should be enflamed. We should be affected by what God has done. Truth, pursued for the love of God and set aflame by the Holy Spirit, nurtures, deepens, and enriches our affections for God. Without understanding God's truth, our understanding of the journey of the Christian life will be hindered, and our gospel fruitfulness in it limited. Let us pursue God's truth together, and thus fulfill in an ever-increasing way Jesus' command: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (See Redeeming Grace Church's Statement of Faith.)

Addendum 7:3 BIBLICAL RESPONSIBILITIES of ELDERS

1. To care for the church (Acts 20:28) in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 5:9-11) under the rule of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4) by the power of the Holy Spirit, praying for the grace of God to be upon this church.
2. To teach and counsel the whole of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 2:1) and to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).
3. To hold fast to the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead (2 Timothy 2:8-10; Galatians 1:6-10).
4. To lead the church in worshiping Jesus Christ together and obeying him in the ordinances of Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27).
5. To steward the financial and material resources of this church with integrity to advance the mission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 8:20-21).
6. To shepherd the church with loving care and to discipline its members should they stray with clear unrepentance from following Christ (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
7. To guard the church against false teaching and false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Timothy 1:14; Titus 1:9). To uphold the Statement of Faith of this church in our teaching and our lives.
8. To be an example to this church for her well-being and edification and to lead in a gracious way as our God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

Reaching Others Along the Journey

Evangelism and Mission

Over this journey, we've looked at many essential topics that relate to our relationship with God and with other believers in the context of the local church. However, our study wouldn't be complete without giving attention the Lord's command to reach others with the gospel. We are not concerned only with our personal beliefs but been given the ministry of faithfully sharing Christ.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5: 18-20).

One of the songs of Revelation proclaims that Christ's death ransomed people for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). In this final lesson, we will explore the church's mission to glorify God through the proclamation of the gospel throughout the earth. As we will see, each of us has the great privilege and responsibility of 'bringing glory to glory to God by making, maturing and multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ' as we share our lives and the gospel with others, demonstrate the reality of the gospel functioning in our lives, and participate in the great mission of the local church.

I. Church with a Mission

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

- A. The plan commenced: God made a promise to Eve to reverse the effects of the curse. God's revealed more of that promise through His covenant with Abraham. In doing so, He promised not only to bless Abraham, but to in turn make him and his descendants a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Genesis 22:17-18: "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

- B. The plan continued: the promised birth, life and resurrection of Jesus rescued us from the power and penalty of sin, and fulfilled the promise of the Holy Spirit living within the believer. The Great Commission was given to all believers: He gave his followers a mandate to proclaim the gospel to all the nations. It is through the proclamation of the gospel call that God will gather His people to Himself, and thus fulfill His original promise to Abraham to bless "all the nations."

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

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

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

II. People with a Message: Evangelism

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

"Successful Evangelism is simply taking initiative to share the Gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God."—Bill Bright

- A. Who should evangelize? Every Christian!

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

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

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

B. What do we share? The Gospel.

We aren't merely calling others to live a moral life, or asking them simply to "believe in God," or trying to convince them that Christians are "nice people." Salvation comes only through trusting in the finished work of Christ on our behalf to give us His perfect righteousness and atone for our sins by His perfect death. As the apostle Peter said, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).*

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

As we saw in Lesson 2, the gospel is the "good news" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Communicating the gospel faithfully will help to preserve its power and protect us from distorting its truth.

C. The method of our evangelism: Sharing our lives and sharing the gospel.

1. The Great Commandment: Loving our neighbor

Mat 22:39 "You shall love your neighbor as yourself".

2. Sharing our lives:

1 Thessalonians 2:8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

The secular data is clear that 75-90% of Christians surveyed come to faith in Jesus Christ through a friend or family members. Therefore, sharing our lives builds trust and genuine friendships that create contexts for sharing Christ. We're to personally testify to the reality of the gospel by the way we live. The Bible describes believers as "...His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10). These good works include innumerable deeds of kindness and love that express God's love to people and give credibility to the message we proclaim.

3. Sharing the good news:

Romans 10:14-15: "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

"If you knew that a man was asleep in a blazing building, you would think it a matter of urgency to try and get to him, and wake him up, and bring him out. The world is full of people who are unaware that they stand under the wrath of God: is it not similarly a matter of urgency that we should go to them, and try to arouse them, and show them the way of escape." - J.I. Packer

Since the gospel is, by definition, "good news," outreach and evangelism always involves the knowing and sharing of this news. Every Christian is called to be an ambassador of the gospel, and at Redeeming Grace we seek to equip every member to share the gospel clearly, faithfully and joyfully.

The basic gospel message we encourage everyone to be ready to share is straightforward:

- a. GOD- Rev. 4:8,11
 - i. The gospel always begins with what God has revealed about Himself: He is holy.
- b. MAN- Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23, Heb. 9:27
 - i. The gospel also reveals what God has to say about man apart from the grace of God: we are sinful unable to be in relationship with God
- c. CHRIST – Rom. 5:6,8 1 Pet 3:18.
 - i. The gospel is what God has done to reconcile sinful mankind to bring them to God: God has provided a Savior.
- d. RESPONSE John 3:16. Eph. 2:8
 - i. The response to the gospel is believing – that is trusting Christ - “entrusting one’s self to someone or something with complete and unwavering confidence” (BDAG). The faith to do so is a gift from God: We are to believe on Christ.
- e. PEACE- Rom. 15:13
 - i. The result of believing is joy and peace so that the Christian may abound in hope all their days: We experience peace with God.

This demonstration of the gospel also takes place in organized corporate demonstration of community care, outreach, mercy work, connecting events, working with other organizations and so on. This provides our members opportunities to use their gifts, to care for others, connect with them relationally and open doors to share the gospel.

D. The context of evangelism

1. Personal.

We encourage everyone at Redeeming Grace to bear witness to Jesus Christ and share the gospel in the network of relationships and sphere of influence He sovereignly provides to each of us. These "fields of harvest" (see Matt. 9:38) include our family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, classmates—anyone whom God has sovereignly placed in your life.

2. Corporate.

We believe that God has a plentiful harvest for us to reap in Smithsburg and beyond. Therefore, we seek to reach those in the area in which God has placed us, and to provide contexts our members can utilize to reach out to those in their relational network.

3. Public

We believe that there are opportunities to share the gospel in the midst of our everyday lives, even as we shop for groceries, have coffee at a local coffee shop, or are out in a public place. We encourage members to serve others in public, carry invitations to upcoming events as they arise, invite people to a Sunday meeting and be available to speak to unbelievers in those sovereignly ordained moments about the grace available in the Gospel.

III. Our Broader Mission: Church Planting

Our broader mission includes partnership with other churches in the planting of new churches both domestically and internationally.

A. Purpose:

Just as Jesus has called his disciples to make disciples among all the nations, so we believe the church is participate in the broader ministry of planting new churches, both inside and outside the United States.

B. Practice:

We can participate in church planting by helping to raise up elders to plant churches, assist on newly planted churches, and sending teams of people to participate in new church plants. Our church is the result of a church plant in 2014 led by Pastors Trav Neumann and Brad Willock. Trav was also on the leadership team that planted Living Hope Community Church in 2006 which ultimately planted Redeeming Grace. It is our desire to support church planting efforts and to plant a new church as God raises leaders and resources.

IV. Our Specific Mission and You

- A. The Lord's command to love and reach others through sharing the gospel plays an integral role in our overall mission as a church. Earlier in this course, we introduced to you the mission statement of Redeeming Grace:

We exist to bring glory to God by making, maturing and multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ.

As the Scriptures teach and all genuine believers can attest, it is only through the gospel that we can be reconciled to God and by which our lives can be transformed by its power as it functions in our daily lives. It is therefore the gospel that we share with others, that we seek to live out by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that forms the basis for our relationships with the others in the context of the local church.

- B. As you explore membership and our mission at Redeeming Grace, the process of membership is straightforward:
1. A clear testimony of personal faith in Jesus Christ.
 2. Participating in the Exploring Membership and Mission class (or affirm you have read the membership booklet in its entirety).
 3. Support of the church's Statement of Faith.
 4. Fill out a membership form.
 5. A meeting with a pastor to discuss church membership.
 6. As lead by the Lord after prayerful consideration, become a member affirmed by the church during a Sunday New Members meeting.

Upon completion of these requirements, you will be welcomed into membership with other new members during the Sunday meeting. We consider these special Sundays as significant days in the life of our church.

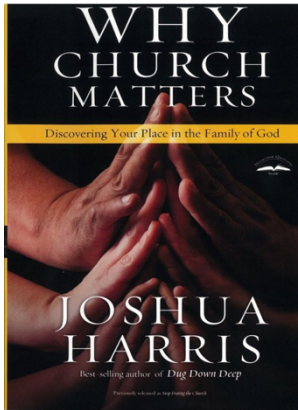
V. Next Steps on the Journey

We are so grateful that you have joined us for this "journey" of exploring membership Redeeming Grace. We trust that the past four weeks have been encouraging and informative as you seek to determine God's will for your life, especially with regard to your involvement in a local church.

What we have said before bears repeating: although we do hope that you will find in Redeeming

Grace a church home where you can thrive and pour your life into, our main burden is not that you become a part of this church, but that you become a part of some local church. It is our desire that you develop a biblical, enthusiastic conviction about the importance of active involvement in the local church, and with this conviction find a church home where you can worship God, grow in your relationship with Him, and serve in ways that glorify Him.

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



Chapter 5

CHOOSING YOUR CHURCH

The Ten Things That Matter Most

The first time Curtis saw the congregation at our church he wasn't too excited. "As a black man, I had always enjoyed the comforts of segregated churches," Curtis told me later. "When I walked in here, all these folks were singing and had their hands raised to God." Curtis paused and a playful smile spread across his face. "Man, there were so many white hands in the air, I thought it was snowing!"

In spite of his misgivings, Curtis stayed for the meeting. He even came back the next Sunday. He was drawn to the teaching and the depth of faith he saw in other singles at the church. He decided to stay and become a part of this fellowship.

Not that the choice was easy for him. “It had never crossed my mind to go to a church that was predominantly white,” he says. “When you’re black in this country, with all of the history of racism, apart from the saving knowledge of Jesus, your blackness is sometimes all you have left. It totally defines you. But God showed me that I was a Christian first and a black man second. The gospel had to define me. Being in a place that preached and lived the gospel had to be the priority.”

WHAT MATTERS MOST

If you’re ready to decide where to go to church—or not sure if the church you’re attending is where God wants you—you may be faced with difficult choices as well. A lot is at stake. Most of us have a lot of options. And most of us have a lot of preferences, too.

So how do we decide what matters most?

The wisdom you need to choose a church is a little like the wisdom a person needs to choose a spouse. For example, it’s not wrong for a woman to want to marry a man with blond hair who likes Italian food and hiking. But it would be foolish to place these preferences over the priority of his being truly converted and growing in godliness. In the same way, it’s not wrong to want a church

with a lot of people your age or to prefer a certain style of worship music—but these are secondary concerns. Curtis’s example is helpful. He chose a church based on the criteria God’s Word gives—not just on his preferences, or what felt comfortable or familiar to him.

In the same way, we need two different lists when it comes to selecting a church—a “must-have” list and a “that-would-be-nice” list of qualities in a church.

In this chapter, I want to help you with your “must-have” list.

TEN IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Use these ten questions to help you explore and understand a church you’re considering. They work whether you’ve been there for two weeks or ten years. This list isn’t exhaustive, and some of the questions will take time to process. But they can help you hone in on the issues that matter most.

1. Is this a church where God’s Word is faithfully taught?

“The kind of church you want to be a part of,” writes Donald Whitney, “is one where, when the Bible is read at the beginning of a sermon, you can be confident that what

follows will be built upon it. God made our hearts, and only He knows what we need most. And He made our hearts for the Word of God. Nothing nourishes us like His message.”

A God-glorifying church is governed by God’s Word. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Be careful here. At first glance, most churches will appear to teach God’s Word. You’ll see it printed in the bulletin, written on the walls, or sprinkled through the services. But these references to Scripture don’t necessarily mean a church is submitted to God’s Word.

Some teachers start their messages with the Bible, but it’s only a jumping-off point to share their own opinions. I should know—I used to be one of those teachers! I used to build entertaining messages around engaging illustrations, stories, or ideas I had. I always peppered my messages with Scripture. But Scripture wasn’t the meat of the message; it was only the seasoning.

Since then, God has mercifully helped me to grow in my understanding of faithful preaching. I’ve learned that the best thing I can do for my church is to build a message on the teaching of a particular passage of Scripture—to draw my points and emphasis from the points and empha-

sis of the passage. This approach, often called expositional preaching, can be expressed through many different personalities and presentation styles (and it doesn't have to add up to long, difficult, or boring sermons!). The driving principle is that God's Word has the authority. The preacher's task is simply to unleash what it has to say to God's people.

So your first priority is to look for a church whose teaching is driven by a confidence in the authority of Scripture.

2. Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?

Acts 2:42 says that the first believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” Today we have the apostles’ teaching passed down in the Bible. *Doctrine* may sound like an intimidating word. But it simply means what the Bible teaches about any given subject. Therefore, a church in which doctrine matters is one that values biblical truth, knows what it believes, and is guided by these beliefs in the way it functions.

Sound doctrine is always under attack. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 4:3–4 that “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

These days, doctrine is often derided by people who view it as divisive and unnecessary to living the Christian life. Some people pride themselves on not being concerned with the specifics of what they believe about salvation, sin, the work of the Spirit, and other doctrinal issues. A friend who attended a large conference for youth workers told me that the host started the event by walking onstage and declaring, “It’s not about doctrine! It’s about Jesus!”

I consider this a sad and misleading statement. We don’t have to choose between caring about doctrine and loving Jesus. The two pursuits are not opposed to each other. In fact, they are inseparable! We can only grow in our love for our Savior as we learn more of who He is and what He has accomplished for us. A concern for truth doesn’t take us away from a deeper relationship with Him. It leads us closer to Him, in greater worship, adoration, and obedience.

I agree that you can find churches that hold to their doctrinal positions arrogantly or unwisely. Or that use secondary doctrinal issues as a way to be exclusive or condescending toward others who disagree with them. I hope you’ll never fall into this kind of attitude. We can love truth deeply without being unkind or proud.

Look for a church that clearly knows and defines what it believes—a place where the statement of faith actually

makes a difference. If this is the church home for you, you should be able to agree with this statement on its major doctrines.

If you're looking for a book that can add insight to your Bible study on doctrine, I highly recommend *Bible Doctrine* by Wayne Grudem. This book covers all the major doctrines—of God, man, Christ, salvation—in a way that's easy to understand. Shannon, who often uses it in her devotions, has found that Grudem's teaching infuses her heart with love for her Father in heaven. A helpful teaching tool like this can also clarify your own doctrinal convictions as you look for a church home.

3. Is this a church in which the gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?

The gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ's perfect life, sacrificial death for sinners, and glorious resurrection and ascension. It's the story line of all of God's Word—a holy God has mercifully made a way for sinners to be forgiven and accepted through the cross of Christ.

I grew up in a Christian home, but for many years of my life the gospel wasn't a central focus. In fact it was all rather fuzzy. I knew Jesus loved me. I knew He wanted a personal relationship with me. I knew He wanted me to be a good person.

It wasn't until God brought me to a church that clearly proclaimed and cherished the gospel that I learned how the work of Christ for me functioned practically in my daily Christian life. I could only relate to God on the basis of His grace. My good works didn't earn my standing before God; Jesus had earned my standing before Him. I wasn't just a lovable guy in need of a personal relationship; I was a sinner who needed to be rescued from God's just wrath by the death of Jesus. Focusing on this sweet truth made grace truly amazing. It helped me when I was struggling against sin. It helped me to readily forgive others.

About choosing a church, Charles Spurgeon once said:

Do not go where it is all fine music and grand talk and beautiful architecture; those things will neither fill anybody's stomach, nor feed his soul. Go where the gospel is preached, the gospel that really feeds your soul, and go often.

C. J. Mahaney, the pastor and friend who has coached and trained me in ministry, has taught me the primacy of the gospel in my personal life and in leading a local church. He has taught me that the gospel isn't just for getting

saved—it's the defining reality we need to live in every day of our lives. That's why I highly recommend his book *The Cross Centered Life* to help you understand what it means to cherish and live in the good of the gospel.

And for help in understanding how a focus on the Cross shapes a church's approach to ministry, I recommend D. A. Carson's outstanding book *The Cross and Christian Ministry*.

4. Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the gospel?

Jesus commissioned every follower to go and make disciples (see Matthew 28:18–20). So make it a priority to look for a church that not only celebrates the gospel, but also reaches out to the unsaved in the community with this same Good News.

Without an emphasis on evangelism, a church becomes selfish and ingrown. Some churches can become so preoccupied with being relevant to the surrounding culture that they lose all distinctiveness. But the clear message of the gospel should never be altered to make it more marketable. People separated from God by their sin are never served when a church places relevance above its mission of faithfully proclaiming the gospel.

5. Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?

On my twenty-first birthday, my dad wrote me a special letter in which he encouraged me to find men I wanted to be like. "Then sit at their feet and learn from them," he wrote. It's good advice. No pastor is perfect, but when it comes to evaluating a church's leaders, you want to find men you can trust and whose example you can follow.

First Timothy 3 lists the qualifications for pastors: A leader in the church must be a man who is above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. Notice that the qualifications relate mostly to the quality of his life. It's been said that pastoring is a character profession. No amount of skill, leadership ability, or communication skills can replace godly character. Look for a church where personal character is of higher importance than title, position, or outward success.

I've found that the most effective leaders view themselves first as servants. And leaders with integrity keep themselves accountable. They don't view themselves as being immune to sin, but build safeguards around themselves financially, morally, and in every other category to keep themselves from compromise. They see themselves

as servants of the Great Shepherd—and live in light of their accountability to Him.

6. Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?

No church can claim to live out God's Word perfectly. What's important is to look for a church that is seeking not only to believe rightly, but also to live rightly. It's possible for a church to be doctrinally sound but have a culture of total apathy when it comes to applying the truth of God's Word in everyday life.

Our faith in God and our desire to honor Him with obedience and holiness will affect everything—from how we conduct ourselves at work to how we speak to our children at home. If it doesn't, something is wrong.

That means that the church you're looking for will seek to build a culture and community of both hearing and obeying God's Word (see James 1:22). It will seek not only to win converts, but to make disciples by helping them to mature in godly living in every area of life.

7. Is this a church where I can find and cultivate godly relationships?

We all need relationships where we can receive encouragement, accountability, and care. And an essential part of

living out God's Word is being connected to other Christians.

Does the church you're considering provide settings where you can enjoy biblical fellowship, mutual encouragement, and application of Scripture? This will look different at different churches—some have official small-group structures; others don't, but achieve the same purpose through other means. What matters is that godly relationships happen. And of course, these kinds of relationships usually take time to develop.

Finally, think about whether you'll be able to invest adequately in the relationship opportunities the church offers. No matter how great the church, if you live two hours away you'll be very limited in your ability to be a meaningful part of the community. The local church you choose should indeed be *local*.

8. Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?

Pastors are not supposed to be paid professionals who do ministry in place of their members. Ephesians 4:12 tells us that pastors are to "*equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*" That means you should look for a church that equips its members to serve and minister, and then challenges them to do so.

I want to caution you about how you apply this criterion. I've met people who evaluate opportunities to serve in a very self-centered way. For example, they're motivated to serve, but only in their preferred way. If you don't make this opportunity available, they leave in a huff. When you think about it, that attitude is funny: True service means giving cheerfully to meet someone else's genuine need—and the most important need probably isn't the server's need to serve in a particular way!

My advice, then, is to make sure you're not evaluating a church primarily by its capacity as a stage to showcase your gifts. Look for a place that will challenge you to care deeply about the needs of others. Then be ready to do whatever it takes to meet those needs.

9. Is this a church that is willing to kick me out?

This priority might sound old-fashioned to you. But there's a hard, important truth here. When a person who claims to be a Christian lives in a way that blatantly contradicts all that it means to be a disciple of Christ, a faithful church's responsibility is to begin the process of removing that person from membership and to treat him or her like an unbeliever in the hope that he or she will repent and ultimately be restored (see 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2). This is not harsh or abrupt. This practice is called church

discipline and was instituted by Jesus (see Matthew 18).

Why should you be excited about the potential of being expelled from a church? I gain a wonderful sense of protection in knowing that if I committed a scandalous sin and showed no repentance, my church wouldn't put up with it. They would plead with me to change. They would patiently confront me with God's Word. And eventually, if I refused to change, they would lovingly kick me out.

Remember that the purpose behind church discipline is first to restore. Four hundred years ago Menno Simons wrote: "We do not want to expel any, but rather to receive; not to amputate, but rather to heal, not to discard, but rather to win back; not to grieve, but rather to comfort; not to condemn, but rather to save." So church discipline is an expression of love. It's a way to try to restore a sinning brother as well as a way to protect the witness of the church.

After all, the power of a church in a community starts with its example. As our generation knows too well, hypocrisy destroys a church's witness and leaves its message discredited. A church committed to glorifying God and reaching the lost world will not only have membership, but will clearly define what that membership requires. It will want to be able to answer clearly anyone who asks who is truly part of the church and who is not.

Discipline is also important when someone begins spreading false teaching. In these cases, discipline guards the church against the damaging effects of heresy.

So look for a church that will not only welcome you into membership, but will lovingly hold you to your commitments as a Christian—a church that will love you enough to put you out of fellowship for the good of your soul.

10. Is this a church I'm willing to join "as is" with enthusiasm and faith in God?

I've often advised men and women not to marry someone if their unspoken plan is to change them "into the person they ought to be." Ask anyone who's been married more than a year. It just doesn't work.

In your church quest, ask yourself, "Can I joyfully and fully support this church's leaders, their teachings, and the direction they have set?"

Please don't join a church because you think God has called you to overhaul it! Humbly recognize that you have your own sin to deal with and that you won't succeed anywhere as a self-appointed leader.

Find a church you can be excited about. Of course, you'll want your church to grow and improve (as you yourself hopefully will!). But if it's the one for you, you should be ready to join it "as is"—that is, join it with faith that God

is at work. Leave your gripes and complaints at the door. Those attitudes will only detract from your experience, limit your involvement, and weaken the church's unity.

YOUR ATTITUDE COUNTS

Let me encourage you not only to ask the right questions about the churches you visit, but to ask them with the right attitude. Approach every church you visit with humility. Pray for every church you visit. Ask God to help you see the good in each church. Even if it's not the right church for you, remember how much God loves the work of a church even when it's being carried out imperfectly.

And don't get stuck in church-hopping, church-shopping mode. Do your best to find a good church as quickly as possible. If you're feeling overwhelmed by too many points, boil them all down to three:

- You want a church that *teaches* God's Word.
- You want a church that *values* God's Word.
- You want a church that *lives* God's Word.

These are the nonnegotiables.

You won't find any church that perfectly meets all the qualifications we've discussed (you certainly won't find

“perfect” at my church!). But be encouraged. Churches that are committed to growing in the right ways do exist. They are out there. They’re not confined to one denomination or worship style. God is at work around the world. And these churches need committed and selfless men and women to join them in their mission for Christ.

TOUGH SITUATIONS

This chapter was difficult for me to write. I don’t want anyone—least of all a fellow pastor—to think I’m setting myself up as a judge of other churches. At the same time, the foundational elements that we have explored are scriptural and truly important. If they’re completely missing, a church isn’t merely imperfect; it’s disobedient and dishonoring to God.

The sad fact is that bad churches are out there. These are churches that have abandoned the authority of God’s Word or who selectively apply it. These are churches that have neglected the gospel or added to or distorted it.

It grieves me to say it, but there are some churches I would strongly encourage you to leave. I want to say that clearly because the last thing I want is for this book to be used to convince any person to stay in a bad church. We are called to be committed to the church. But sometimes that commitment involves leaving an unbiblical church.

What should you do if you're in a bad church and need to leave?

My encouragement is to make a priority of leaving humbly and as helpfully as possible. Refuse to participate in gossip about members or the leaders in the church. If you're a member, communicate your concerns to the pastor and your points of disagreement. Look for ways to point out examples of grace and to encourage them. Ask to hear their perspective. Your goal should be to leave in a way that is gracious and honoring to God.

What if there aren't any good churches near you?

First, pray that God would strengthen and refine the churches in your area. And don't let your situation excuse you from participation. Find the best church you can, and then throw yourself into learning and serving there. Again, don't set yourself up as the "long-awaited bringer of change." Serve humbly. Serve the leadership. Ask God to use you.

If you're still in a setting where you don't feel you're growing, it may be time for you to move to another area to find the right local church. People pick up and move for a higher paying job without anyone questioning their decision. Why shouldn't we consider moving to place ourselves and our families in a local church where we can reap invaluable, eternal spiritual benefits? I don't

encourage this lightly. It's a decision that will take a lot of patience, prayer, counsel, and consideration. But I can speak from personal experience that moving for the right church is something you won't regret. In fact, many people I know who have moved for the right church only regret that they didn't do it sooner.

If it's impossible to move, then trust that God can grow you and use you right where you are. Participate in the best church you can find; then if necessary supplement your spiritual diet with biblical preaching from other sources—on-line or on CD or tape. Read good theological books like the ones I've recommended throughout this chapter.

Commitment to Complementarity

The 10 Affirmations of the Danvers Statement

In December 1987, the newly formed Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) met in Danvers, Massachusetts, to compose the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. As a church, we agree with the following statement.

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

- Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18).
- Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14).
- Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen. 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).
- The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16). In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

- The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity, which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28). Both the Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).
- Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).

- In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission - domestic, religious, or civil - ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan. 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet. 3:1-2).
- In both men and women, a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim. 2:11- 15, 3:1-13; Tit. 1:59). Rather, biblical teaching should remain and authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
- With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or women who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor. 12:7-21).
- We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

Appendix B:

Accountability and Church Discipline

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

The principles and practices described below apply to all the people who attend our church (both members and attendees).

A. ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINE ARE SIGNS OF GOD'S LOVE

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

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

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible always present discipline as redemptive and restoring. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, encouraging and redemptive. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "church discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, fellowship and countless other disciplines of grace that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

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

B. 6 BASIC STEPS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE ⁹

Church discipline makes sense when you understand what the church is. If the church were a building, then discipline might involve better property management. If the church were just an institution, then discipline might be about organizational restructuring. If the church were merely a weekly show, then discipline might require better event planning.

While those things play into our experience of church, the New Testament is clear that the church is fundamentally a people, a congregation marked by their commitment to Christ and to one another. Therefore, when the Bible talks about church discipline, it involves the spiritual care of people. It's the process by which members of a church guard one another from the deceitfulness of sin and uphold the truth of the gospel.

Church discipline largely takes place informally, as Christians speak the truth in love to one another and point each other to the grace of the gospel. However, in this fallen world, there will be times when informal discipline will not be enough; there will be times when those who belong to the church refuse to repent and continue down the path of sin. It's for these situations that Jesus provides instructions for church discipline:

Matt. 18:15–17 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”.

Every single step of this process is an expression of Christ's loving and wise rule over his church, and therefore every step ought to be followed.

STEP #1: HAVE A PRIVATE CONVERSATION.

It all begins with private confrontation (Matt. 18:15). As mentioned above, this happens regularly in the life of the church in all kinds of contexts. The member who knows of unrepentant sin is to go to the one who has sinned and, in love, call him to repentance. Rather than fostering gossip and division, Jesus commands his people to speak privately first, “just between the two of [them].” And in God's grace, so often this is the means by which God works repentance among his people.

But what happens if that initial confrontation is rejected? What does it look like once we get beyond that informal step? Though

⁹ <https://www.9marks.org/journal/church-discipline-medicine-for-the-body/>

details will vary depending on the church and the circumstances, below are five steps that church leaders should generally take in the process of church discipline:

STEP #2: TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS ALONG (MATT. 18:16).

The next step widens the circle of involvement, while not yet involving the church as a whole. Jesus instructs the members to take one or two others along to confront the one caught in sin. If the elders have already been notified, it might be appropriate for one of the elders to go along with the member making the charge. It's also worth considering whether there might be another member of the church—perhaps a trusted friend—to speak into his life. Ideally, this step would happen in a personal meeting, but in certain situations, a phone call, voicemail, or perhaps even written correspondence may have to suffice.

Those involved up to this point should evaluate the response of the one caught in sin and determine if there's evidence of genuine, lasting repentance. Of course, the goal isn't perfection but rather a heart that's broken over sin and clinging to Christ, evidenced by humility and a willingness to follow wise counsel. In many cases, this step may take weeks, or months, or even longer. Often, it's here that God brings about repentance and reconciliation. But in some cases, it will become evident to those involved that there's no genuine repentance and, in obedience to Christ's instructions, the church should proceed to the next step.

STEP #3: INVOLVE LEADERS OR ELDERS BY INFORMING THEM OF THE SITUATION.

Somewhere around step 2, maybe before, maybe after, a Christian should consider involving a few elders or other leaders of the church (like a small group leader). This might begin with a conversation, but eventually the elders should have a way of formally receiving charges (for example, the elders might require that the charges be made in writing or they might invite the person to meet with one or two of them). Jesus does not speak of the involvement of elders in Matthew 18, but given the responsibility over the church that the apostles assign to them in other passages, it makes sense that elders would be involved in the process of church discipline at some point. In more difficult situations, the elders will need to be involved sooner rather than later.

Here, the leadership has the responsibility to consider the nature of the charges. Is the sin concrete and serious enough to warrant taking the next steps of church discipline? Are there extenuating circumstances that the member might not know? Are there other members who might better speak to the one caught in sin? How do we care for those who have been wronged? The leaders of the church will need to think through these and other important questions, and prayerfully shepherd those involved in the following steps.

STEP #4: GIVE ADEQUATE NOTICE TO THE ONE CAUGHT IN SIN.

Before making the matter public, the elders will want to make formal contact with the one caught in sin. This is especially in cases where there has been minimal contact with the elders, as when communication has been rejected or most of the information has been communicated secondhand. The goal of this contact is to explain the charges and express their love and concern. If the person remains unrepentant, then it's necessary to notify them of when this will be shared with the congregation. Given the need for clarity and precision in communication, the initial contact should probably be some form of written communication, followed up by a phone call or a personal meeting.

If none of the elders have met with the one being confronted, they should make clear that they want a chance to hear his side of the story. If meeting with all the elders is too intimidating, they can offer to send a smaller group of the elders. The goal in this step is to give the unrepentant member a chance to meet with the leaders personally and make sure there is no misunderstanding.

If after this step it's clear there's no misunderstanding and there's still no repentance, then the elders should proceed to the next step.

STEP #5: TELL IT TO THE CHURCH (MATT. 18:17).

At this point, Jesus commands the member to "tell it to the church." Though "church" has been interpreted in many different ways, Jesus seems to understand the church to be a gathering of disciples in his name (Matt. 18:20, see 1 Cor. 5:4). The church is the congregation. In this step, the elders will communicate what's taken place to the congregation.

Given the sensitive nature, it makes sense that the elders would present this at a regularly scheduled members' meeting, rather than a public worship service. The elders need to think through carefully what and how much to communicate about to the congregation.

They want to communicate enough so that the congregation understands what has taken place and the need for church discipline.

However, they should not communicate so much that it makes returning upon repentance difficult because of public shame, embarrasses family members, or causes weaker sheep to stumble.

Given the need for carefulness and precision, it's generally wise for the elders to craft a letter to be read at the meeting, rather than trying to explain it extemporaneously. In some cases, the elders may want to involve the member who initially brought the charges in crafting the letter. After the elders read the letter, they should allow for questions from the congregation, and invite people to talk to them privately if they have further questions. In more difficult cases, the elders might consider holding a forum for members of the church to bring questions.

Having been apprised of the situation, the congregation should be instructed to pray. Those in the church who have a personal relationship with the one caught in sin should be encouraged to reach out prayerfully. The elders will want to give the congregation enough time to participate in the process of confrontation. This period may be the time until the next members' meeting, or longer if needed. However, in certain cases, the church may need to act more quickly, perhaps even right away, if the church feels confident about a lack of repentance (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

STEP #6: REMOVE THE UNREPENTANT PERSON FROM MEMBERSHIP (MATT. 18:17).

After following all the previous steps, if the individual continues to refuse to listen "even to the church," then the elders should update the congregation on the situation, and bring a formal motion for the congregation to remove him from the membership of the church. If the vote passes, then the church needs to understand that they no longer affirm this person's profession of faith. They are to relate to him no longer as one who belongs to the church but to the world, like "a pagan or tax collector."

Following the removal, the elders should instruct the congregation on how to interact with the individual. As someone under discipline, the goal is not to shun him or to cut off all relationship. Rather, members should relate to him as someone in need of the gospel, yet who is self-deceived. In that sense, interactions are more complex than relating with non-Christian friends who know they are non-Christians. Any interactions should be used to call the person to repentance and to remind him of the hope of the gospel. Members should encourage him to attend the services of the church and to sit under the preaching of the Word. And yet, at the same time, they must avoid relating to him casually as if nothing has changed.

After the meeting, the elders should send a written communication to the individual, informing him of the act of discipline, and expressing their love for him and their desire for his repentance and restoration. The elders should also continue to follow up with the congregation in different settings (Sunday School classes, small groups, etc) to see if there are any concerns or questions about what has taken place. Church discipline can be a difficult time in the life of a church, and yet it can also be used by God to bring about maturity and growth. Elders should shepherd the congregation wisely both throughout the process and after.

C. ADDITIONAL MATTERS RELATED TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's

ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be given effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

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

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

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

D. CONCLUSION

Church discipline would be easier if the church wasn't made up of people. But Jesus didn't come for buildings or institutions or events. He came to save a people for himself, sinners like you and me. It's this reality that makes church discipline a wonderful gift. The church is a gathering of those who through repentance and faith have received the hope of Christ's salvation and are helping each other persevere in that hope. To neglect church discipline is to fail to love one another in that way. So, as we labor to follow Christ's instructions for the purity of the church, we cling to the hope of the gospel both for ourselves and for those around us.

It is hoped that the biblical steps of church discipline outlined above will result in repentance on the part of the sinning member.

- Church discipline at its core is about love, restoration and redemption. The Lord disciplines those he loves (Heb. 12:6). The same is true for us.
- The first purpose of church discipline is restoration of the person disciplined.
- The second purpose of church discipline is the protection of the faithful gospel witness of the church.

Redeeming Grace Church Bylaws

Smithsburg, MD



The Bylaws of Redeeming Grace Church

REDEEMING GRACE CHURCH

BYLAWS

Adopted December 20, 2014

Section 1 GENERAL

1.1 Incorporation and Purpose of Redeeming Grace. **Redeeming Grace Church** (“Redeeming Grace”) is a local church that is organized and operated exclusively as a nonprofit, religious, educational, and charitable organization dedicated to glorifying God by building a community of disciples who love Jesus and are equipped for Gospel mission. Redeeming Grace is incorporated as a nonstock corporation in the State of Maryland to do, among other things, lease and/or own and maintain a place of worship; receive, hold and disburse gifts, bequests and funds; and license ministers of the gospel for civil purposes.

Section 2 STATEMENT OF FAITH

2.1 Statement of Faith. Redeeming Grace and each of its directors, officers, and employees shall annually support and subscribe to the Church’s current statement of faith in full, which is attached to these Bylaws.

2.2. Religious Practices of Corporation. To be consistent with its religious mission, Redeeming Grace shall not:

2.2.1 Establish any public or private policies or positions that conflict with the Statement of Faith.

2.2.2 Elect or appoint any Board member or officer who has not subscribed to and affirmed the Statement of Faith.

2.2.3 Accept or recognize any person as a member of Redeeming Grace who has not subscribed to and affirmed the Statement of Faith.

2.2.4 Hire or continue to employ any employee who, upon request, refuses to subscribe to the Statement of Faith, or who has acted in a manner inconsistent with the Statement of Faith or the religious mission of Redeeming Grace, and has not fully and properly repented of such action.

Section 3 OFFICES

3.1 Registered Office and Agent. Redeeming Grace shall continuously maintain a registered office and registered agent within the State of Maryland.

3.2 Principal Office. The principal office of Redeeming Grace shall be located at 12923 Bradbury Ave, Smithsburg, Maryland 21783, or such place as shall be determined by the Board of Directors as described in Section 4.

3.3 Additional Offices. Redeeming Grace may also have offices at such other places as the Board may determine and the business of Redeeming Grace may require.

Section 4

BOARD OF DIRECTORS / BOARD OF ELDERS

4.1. Elders as Directors. Redeeming Grace's elders shall serve as Redeeming Grace's Board of Directors ("the Elders" or "the Board").

4.2 Number and Term. The Elders shall determine the appropriate number of Elders based on the ministry need of the church and the number of qualified candidates. . The term of a Elder is indefinite. Elders may request to step down or be removed from office; either confirmed by a two thirds vote of the remaining Elders.

4.3 Qualifications: Elders must unreservedly subscribe to the tenets of faith as set forth in the New Testament and expressed in the Statement of Faith contained in the Appendix to these Bylaws, be an active church member in good standing, and possess or have the potential to possess all the qualifications of an Elder as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-8 and other relevant teachings of the New Testament.

4.4 Appointment. The initial Board shall be as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation. Subsequent appointments of Elders may be made by a vote of a two-thirds majority of those Elders present at any regular meeting of the Elders, or at a special meeting convened for that purpose. This vote will follow a documented evaluation process to assess the candidate's character and qualifications where the members will have an opportunity to provide support or submit concerns regarding the candidate's fitness on biblical grounds.

4.5 Powers. The government of the Church is vested in its Elders, who shall provide oversight in the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Church. The Elders shall exercise all such powers of the Corporation and do all such lawful acts and things that are not prohibited by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or by these Bylaws. For the purposes of any law or rule relating to members of this nonstock corporation, the Board of Directors of the Corporation shall also constitute the members of the Corporation, and when meeting as the Board, may exercise the rights and powers of members.

4.6 Committees. The Elders may appoint two or more persons from among its own number to serve as special and standing committees, such as the Board may determine are necessary, which shall have such powers and duties as shall be prescribed by the Board. All members of such committees shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. The delegation of authority to any committee shall not operate to relieve the Board or any member of the Board from any responsibility imposed by law. Unless otherwise provided in the resolution of the Board designating a committee or in rules that the Board subsequently adopts, a majority of the committee members shall be necessary and sufficient to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business of the committee, and the act of a majority of the committee members present and voting at a duly constituted meeting of the committee shall be the act of the committee. Other rules governing procedures for meetings of any committee of the Board shall be established by the Board, or in the absence thereof, by the committee itself.

4.7 Transactions with Interested Parties. A contract or other transaction between Redeeming Grace and one or more of its Board members, officers, or family members thereof (hereinafter "Interested Party"), or between Redeeming Grace and any other entity, of which entity one or more Elders, officers, or trustees are also Interested Parties, or in which entity an Interested Party has a material financial interest -- shall be voidable at the sole election of Redeeming Grace unless all of the following provisions are satisfied:

4.7.1 Redeeming Grace entered into the transaction for its own benefit;

The Bylaws of Redeeming Grace Church

4.7.2 The transaction was fair and reasonable to Redeeming Grace, or was in furtherance of its exempt purposes at the time Redeeming Grace entered into the transaction;

4.7.3 Prior to consummating the transaction, or any part, the Board authorized or approved the transaction, in good faith, by a vote of a majority of the Board members then in office, without counting the vote of any interested Elder, and with full knowledge of the material facts concerning the transaction and the Interested Parties' interest in the transaction, even though the disinterested Elders are less than a quorum; and

4.7.4 Prior to authorizing or approving the transaction, the disinterested members of the Board, in good faith and with ordinary care, determined, after reasonable investigation and consideration, that either Redeeming Grace could not have obtained a more advantageous arrangement, with reasonable effort under the circumstances, or the transaction was in furtherance of Redeeming Grace's tax-exempt purposes.

Common or interested Elders may be counted in determining the presence of a quorum at a meeting of the Board (or a committee thereof) which authorizes, approves, or ratifies such contract or transaction.

Notwithstanding the above, no loan shall be made by Redeeming Grace to any of its Elders, Officers, or Staff, as provided further in Section 8.6 of these Bylaws.

4.8 Conflict Resolution. The Board will adopt and maintain a policy on how conflict resolution will be handled in circumstances where unresolved issues exist between members, members and Elders, and between Elders. In all cases, reconciliation will be handled with expediency towards the goal of restored relationships.

Section 5 MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

5.1 Notice. Regular, annual, and special meetings of the Board may be held within or outside the State of Maryland without formal notice at such time and place as shall be determined by the Board, except for meetings at which the Board shall consider the removal of an Elder.

5.2 Waiver of Notice. Whenever any notice is required to be given by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or these Bylaws, a waiver thereof in writing signed by the person or persons entitled to the notice, whether before or after the time stated therein, shall be deemed equivalent thereto. Attendance at a meeting by a person entitled to notice shall constitute a waiver of proper notice of such meeting, except where attendance is for the express purpose of objecting to the transaction of business because the meeting is not lawfully called or convened.

5.3 Quorum. A majority of the Board shall be necessary and sufficient to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, and the act of a majority of the Elders then in office at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present shall be the act of the Board, except as may be otherwise specifically provided by statute, the Articles of Incorporation, or these Bylaws.

5.4 Action without a Meeting. Any action required or permitted to be taken at a meeting of the Board or by a committee thereof may be taken without a meeting, provided a written consent setting forth the action so taken is signed by all of the Board or of the committee, as the case may be, and is filed with the minutes of proceedings of the Board or the committee.

5.5 Participation by Electronic Conference Equipment. The Board or of any committee designated thereby may participate in a Board meeting or committee meeting by means of a conference telephone or other communications equipment whereby all persons participating in the meeting can effectively communicate with

one another at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at such meeting. When such a meeting is conducted by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment, the minutes recording any action taken at such meeting, shall also note who participated in person, and who participated by alternative communications.

Section 6 CHURCH MEMBERS

6.1 Membership Universal and Local. The Church follows the New Testament concept of church membership: that each person regenerated by the Holy Spirit and responding in repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ is a unique and indispensable part of the organism which is Christ's body and all such persons are members of the universal body of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2). Membership in this body of Christ is the grounds for fellowship between Christians. Additionally, the Bible identifies local churches as those Christians in a locality who by the leadership of God and common agreement join together under recognized local leadership and governance for the purpose of worship, instruction, mission, and fellowship. Church membership in this local church does not confer any rights and responsibilities as corporate members

6.2 Qualifications for Church Membership. As a local expression of the universal body, the Church will have the following standard for initial and continued membership:

6.2.1 Evidence that an individual has repented from sin and believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Head of the Church (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; John 3:16,36; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 10:9-13; John 1:12, 13; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23).

6.2.2 Evidence of a consistent Christian life or a willingness to live a consistent Christian life (Romans 6:4, Romans 8:1-4, Romans 13:13-14, Ephesians 4:17-32, Ephesians 5:1-2, 15, 1 John 1:6-7).

6.2.3 A tangible commitment to the purposes and members of the Church (Heb. 10:24; John 13:34, 35; Romans 12:5; Matt. 28:19).

6.2.4 A recognition of a need for personal pastoral care and leadership and a willingness to receive the grace provided by the Elders in their leadership of the Church (Hebrews 13:17, I Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31, Ephesians 4:11-12, I Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

6.2.5 Evidence of subscribing to the tenets of faith as set forth in the New Testament and expressed in the Statement of Faith contained in the Appendix to these Bylaws.

6.2.6 A willingness to contribute regularly to the financial support of the Church according to ability (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

6.2.7 A commitment to submit to and respect the process of Church discipline, as outlined in Section 6.4, both for themselves and others if behavior inconsistent with the above or other unrepentant sin persists after a process of loving counsel, correction, and admonishment.

6.2.8 Because of the responsibilities and accountability involved with church membership, members must be at least sixteen (16) years of age. For applicants who are under the age of eighteen (18) and who have parents that are members of this Church, an elder will consult with their parents to aid in evaluating the qualifications for membership.

6.3. Reception of Members. The following is the procedure for the reception of members:

The Bylaws of Redeeming Grace Church

6.3.1 Persons desiring to become members will make such desires known to the Elder or Elders who will examine the applicant according to the standards for membership.

6.3.2. The Elders [and congregation]¹⁰ will render [a] final decision on the reception of a member based on satisfactory evidence of all criteria of Section 6.2. All persons who have met the membership requirements and have been passed on favorably by the Elders will be received into the membership of the Church.

6.4. Church Discipline. For the Church to remain under God's blessing and fulfill God's intentions, at times it becomes necessary, formally and corporately, to confront sin or false doctrine in a Church member.¹¹

- While all Church members should accept the responsibility to correct informally an erring Church member, when a Church member refuses to repent after sufficient informal confrontation, his case will be brought before one of the following at the discretion of the Board: (1) the full Board of Elders, (2) one or more of the Elders, or (3) a subcommittee of Elders assigned by the Board for this task.
- If the facts of his or her sin or error are confirmed, and he or she remains unrepentant upon examination and appeal for change, the Board will notify the appropriate circle of fellowship (up to and including the entire Church membership when either the leadership responsibility of the unrepentant individual or the notoriety of his sin would so warrant)—through a meeting of its Church members or private correspondence—the nature of that Church member's sin and his refusal to repent.
- Included in this notification, will be a call to corporate prayer for the Church member and to appeal to him to repent.
- During this time, the Church member under discipline might not be eligible to participate in the Lord's Supper or in small groups that gather for the purpose of fellowship. If after a period of appeal, the Church member continues in his sin, he or she will be removed from Church membership, and the members of the Church (or the appropriate circle thereof) will be notified with instructions to continue withholding fellowship and with an entreaty to treat him like an unbeliever, calling him to repent and to believe in the gospel.
- Once the Board makes a sin publicly known, they commit as well to inform the entire membership of the Church (or the appropriate circle thereof) of his repentance and restoration to fellowship and Church membership as appropriate to the situation and the good of the Church.
- The Board in its sole discretion may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the Church member proves to be factious, disruptive, or leading others into sin or error.

6.5. Resignation of Membership. A Church member may resign from his Church membership by submitting a written communication to one or more of the Elders at any time, which shall be effective upon formal acceptance by the Elder(s). However, if such resignation is an attempt to avoid the process of Church discipline, the Board will not accept the resignation until that process is completed as outlined in Section 6.4. Though generally such resignations by Church members not under discipline shall not be formally announced or published, such information is treated as public and available to any Church member or inquiring Pastor from another local church.

¹⁰ To be ratified at a future board meeting

¹¹ Scriptural instruction and precedent for this practice appear in Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1-2; Acts 20:28ff; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

6.6. Removal from Roll. When a Church member resigns his Church membership or he is removed from Church membership due to unrepentant sin or doctrinal error, the Elders(s) will remove his name from the Church membership roll. Members may also be removed by the Elders for protracted non-participation.

6.7. Confidentiality. Though every reasonable effort shall be made to protect confidential communications, especially those received in a pastoral counseling context, there will be times when to properly fulfill their spiritual and leadership responsibilities, the Elders may as they deem necessary or appropriate share such confidential information with one another or Church members or others they deem may be part of the solution or problem. They may do this for the purpose of counsel and prayer or the purpose of protecting others from the effects of a Church member's sin, or to assist one another in providing spiritual care to the people of the Church.

6.8 At-Large Committees: The church body is comprised of many gifts and it is the Elder's desire that those gifts are stewarded well and used to their fullest potential. As such, the Board may appoint two or more persons from among the church members to serve as special and standing committees, which shall have such powers and duties as shall from time to time be prescribed by the Board. All members of such committees shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. The delegation of authority to any committee shall not operate to relieve the Board of or any member of the Board from any responsibility imposed by law. Unless otherwise provided in the resolution of the Board designating a committee or in rules that the Board subsequently adopts, a majority of the committee members shall be necessary and sufficient to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business of the committee, and the act of a majority of the committee members present and voting at a duly constituted meeting of the committee shall be the act of the committee. Other rules governing procedures for meetings of any committee shall be established by the Board, or in the absence thereof, by the committee itself.

Section 7 OFFICERS

7.1 Number and Positions. The officers of Redeeming Grace shall be the President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Board may appoint such other officers and agents as it shall deem necessary, who shall hold their offices for such terms and shall exercise such powers and perform such duties as shall be determined from time to time by the Board.

7.2 Term of Office. The Board shall elect officers of Redeeming Grace, who shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. Any officer elected or appointed by the Board may be removed at any time by the affirmative vote of a majority of the Board members then in office at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present, whenever, in their judgment, the best interests of Redeeming Grace will be served thereby. If the office of any officer becomes vacant for any reason, the vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the Board. In case of the absence or disability of an officer of Redeeming Grace, or in any other case that the Board may deem sufficient reason therefore, the Board, a majority of the Board at a meeting duly called for that purpose and at which a quorum is present, may delegate for the time being any or all of the powers or duties of any officer to any other Elder, officer, or any other person.

7.3 President. The President shall exercise the powers typical of a chief executive officer and as the Board may otherwise prescribe. The President must be chosen from among the members of the Board.

7.4 Secretary. The Secretary shall record all votes and the minutes of all proceedings of the Corporation and other duties as assigned by the Board. It is not required that this person be a member of the Board. If he or she is not a Board member, then a Board member will be assigned responsibility for holding the Secretary accountable and ensuring the successful completion of this office.

The Bylaws of Redeeming Grace Church

7.5 Treasurer. The Treasurer shall oversee the management of the financial books of the Corporation and other duties as assigned by the Board. It is not required that this person be a member of the Board. If he or she is not a Board member, then a Board member will be assigned responsibility for holding the Treasurer accountable and ensuring the successful completion of this office.

7.6 Qualification. The qualifications of each officer will be determined by the Board and may be modified by a majority vote of the Board. An individual may hold multiple offices at one time if the need arises. Unless otherwise specified, an Officer does not need to be an Elder or a member of the Board and being an Officer does not confer membership on the Board.

7.7 Work Plan Execution. Each member of the Board, officer, and staff member of the church shall have a job description which defines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of their performance in that role or office. The Board will be responsible for the evaluation, accountability, and satisfactory execution of these job descriptions and may change them at any time by majority vote.

Section 8 FISCAL MATTERS

8.1 Deposits. The Board shall select banks, trust companies, or other depositories in which all funds of Redeeming Grace not otherwise employed shall, from time to time, be deposited to the credit of Redeeming Grace.

8.2 Checks. All checks or demands for money and notes of Redeeming Grace shall be signed by such officer or officers or such other persons as the Board may from time to time designate.

8.3 Fiscal Years. The Board shall have the power to fix, and from time to time to change, the fiscal year of Redeeming Grace. Unless otherwise fixed by the Board, the fiscal year shall commence on January 1 and shall conclude on December 31 of the same year.

8.4 Designated Contributions. Redeeming Grace may accept any designated contribution, grant, bequest or devise provided it is consistent with Redeeming Grace's (1) mission and spiritual priorities as determined from time to time by the Board, (2) budget process and fiscal restrictions, (3) full ownership and control of the funds or assets, and (4) tax-exempt purposes, as set forth in the Constitution. As so limited, donor-designated contributions will be accepted for special funds, purposes or uses, and such designations generally will be honored. Redeeming Grace shall reserve all right, title and interest in and to, and control of such contributions, as well as full discretion as to the ultimate expenditure or distribution thereof in connection with any special fund, purpose or use.

8.5 Books and Records. Redeeming Grace shall keep correct and complete books and records of account, the complete copies of its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, the activities and transactions of Redeeming Grace, minutes of the proceedings of the Board and any committee of the Board, and a current list of the directors and officers of Redeeming Grace and their residence addresses. Any of the books, minutes, and records of Redeeming Grace may be in written form or in any other form capable of conversion into written form within a reasonable time.

8.6 Loans to Directors and Officers Prohibited. No loans shall be made by Redeeming Grace to its Elders, officers, or staff. Any Elder, officer, or staff member who assents to or participates in the making of any such loan shall be liable to Redeeming Grace for the amount of such loan until it is repaid. Nothing in this section shall bar any Elder, officer, or staff member from receiving approved compensation in their employee capacities,

or approved payments from Redeeming Grace's benevolence fund in accordance with the policy and procedures governing such a fund, provided they do not participate in the decision to grant such benevolence.

8.7 Benevolence Fund. Consistent with Biblical teaching to share with those who are in need, Redeeming Grace may establish a benevolence fund to meet material and financial needs of Church members and others. This fund shall be administered under a policy which sets forth the funds' purpose, procedures for administration, and objective criteria for selection of recipients for financial assistance.

8.8 Accounting and Fiduciary Guidelines. The Elder, officer, or staff member of Redeeming Grace shall conduct their affairs with integrity in the sight of God and men, and shall to that end maintain prudent and responsible control and accountability over all funds they receive and ensure that all funds are dedicated to Redeeming Grace's tax-exempt purposes. Toward that end, the Elder, officer, or staff member shall implement practices, procedures, and / or policies that position Redeeming Grace to be a model of faithful stewardship and quality internal accounting controls and procedures.

Section 9 AMENDMENTS

The Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws may be amended, altered, or repealed by a two-thirds majority of the Board then in office at any regular meeting of the Board, or at any special meeting of the Board if notice of the proposed alteration or repeal is contained in the notice of such meeting or notice is properly waived as outlined in Section 5.2 of these Bylaws.

Section 10 INDEMNIFICATION

Any person made or threatened to be made a party to any action or proceeding, whether civil or criminal, by reason of the fact that he or she is or was an Elder, officer, employee, or agent of Redeeming Grace, may be indemnified by Redeeming Grace, and Redeeming Grace may advance his or her related expenses, to the full extent permitted by law. Redeeming Grace may purchase and maintain insurance to indemnify: (a) itself for any obligation which it incurs as a result of the indemnification specified above; and (b) its directors, officers, employees, and agents.

Section 11 SEAL

Redeeming Grace may have a seal in the form determined by the Board. Said seal may be used by causing it or a facsimile thereof to be impressed or affixed or otherwise reproduced, or by writing the word "SEAL" beside the signature of an authorized officer of Redeeming Grace.

Addendum #1 – Statement of Faith¹

1. The Triune God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

2. Revelation

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

3. Creation of Humanity

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

4. The Fall

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan's temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

5. The Plan of God

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

6. The Gospel

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is Christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is: “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is Biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

7. The Redemption of Christ

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

8. The Justification of Sinners

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

9. The Power of the Holy Spirit

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the “other”

The Bylaws of Redeeming Grace Church

Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced².

10. The Kingdom of God

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

11. God's New People

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

12. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

13. The Restoration of All Things

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust— the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

1. Taken from The Gospel Coalition's Confession Statement
2. The last two sentences this of paragraph are taken from Sovereign Grace Churches' Statement of Faith
<http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/about-us/what-we-believe.aspx#empowered>

Appendix D:

Elder Accountability and Congregational Responsibility: How to Biblically Bring Charges Against an Elder

Introduction: It is the charge and responsibility of the congregation to hold elders accountable. This congregational authority must be exercised with biblical due process to maintain the faithful gospel witness of the church. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:19-21, “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.”

Preamble:

Nine Ways Church Elders are to be Held Accountable¹²

Each year we see new stories of Christian leaders who get entangled in scandalous sin. Our experience tells us that this has happened before and will happen again. Often, we ask, “Who was holding this man accountable?” And, “If I can’t trust this seemingly godly man, who can I trust?” It is very common and very appropriate to also ask, “How are we supposed to hold leaders accountable?” If they are local church elders, the Bible speaks directly to the question. The Bible gives a very clearly defined method for dealing with sin in church elders.

How does the Bible say that church elders are held accountable? How do you confront elders in the church?

1 Timothy 5:19-21 gives us the answers. In this passage, God prescribes a system precisely for these circumstances. The apostle Paul issues direct commands for how the church must deal with an elder who is caught in sin. He says, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”

Following are nine ways that 1 Timothy 5:19-21 shows how church elders are to be held accountable.

1. Personal responsibility

Paul makes it clear that church members have a very specific role. Every church member has the divinely appointed right and responsibility to bring a charge against a church elder when it is necessary. It is remarkable that woven into the very relational and sociological fabric of the local church is the

¹² <https://ncfic.org/blog/posts/nine-ways-church-elders-are-to-be-held-accountable>

assumption that at no time should elders be above the evaluation of the people they serve. Every person in the pew has this responsibility.

Many church members are not aware that the Bible explains that they have this role in dealing with sin in their elder's lives. As a result, in our modern church environment, this is one of the most ignored aspects of local church life. This is especially unfortunate since church members are intimately connected to one another as family. This connection in Christ obligates them. There are several levels of this relational obligation. One of the most obvious of these relational obligations is that, as brothers and sisters we are called to fulfill over 50 "one anothers" in Scripture. As family members, we are accessible enough to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 25-26; Luke 17:3-4; Galatians 4:16; Matthew 5:23-24; Colossians 3:13). However, it must be performed in an orderly and biblically prescribed manner.

2. A stricter judgment

It is immediately evident from 1 Timothy 5:20 that the Lord has designed His church to have a very specific set of rules for dealing with church elders when they sin. These procedural commands are obviously focused on elders, not the wider church. Eldership carries with it greater risks for a greater number of people, and therefore they are subjected to a "stricter judgment," (James 3:1). James makes it clear that those who teach the Word of God are under a magnifying glass of a higher power. In this sense, church elders are treated differently, and even more severely, than those in the general congregation. With greater responsibility comes greater accountability, and greater vulnerability to public rebuke.

3. Multiple witnesses

Holding church elders accountable requires two or three witnesses, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses." Notice how the Lord has commanded that there be a careful process that includes the following elements. First there must be a personal witness. Then in order to bring an accusation, that person is obligated to bring a minimum of one other witness. This language implies a vigilant examination and verification process.

This procedure is designed to protect the elder from trivial, false or evil accusations. It also protects him from accusations based on rumors, gossip or internet slander. It is part of the territory: Church elders are often targets of criticism since they are all imperfect in their life and doctrine, and the best of men can be picked apart. Furthermore, elders are often subjected to unrighteous criticism because the standard to which they are held is often higher than any elder is able to meet.

All elders have flaws and make mistakes as Ecclesiastes makes clear, "For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."

1. It is common for church members to fall into merciless criticism, because elders are sinners and have weaknesses and inadequacies. However, the process commanded by God in 1 Timothy 5 protects elders from unnecessary accusations by immature, unnecessarily offended or envious parties. Alexander Strauch explains, We should live by the principle, "No judgment without the facts." We shouldn't believe any story, even from our most trusted friends, until we have all the facts from all the people involved.

2. The requirement Paul outlines here is obviously only for flagrant, public, or scandalous sins. If the sins are private and lesser in nature, then the rebuke should be less severe and spoken in private between brothers. However, if a public rebuke for serious sin is to be delivered, it must be upon the testimony of two or three witnesses. These witnesses are evaluated and if found to be truthful then the rebuke is required. The foundation for Paul's command is found in Deuteronomy

19:15, where Moses communicates the law of witnesses: “One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.” Thus, Paul establishes a careful and orderly environment where hard evidence is gathered (not rumors), and testimony is examined.

Notice also that the sin is not in bringing the accusation. Rather, the sin is to “receive” it without two or three witnesses. In this way an elder is protected from random accusations where no one is standing behind the charge.

4. Partiality avoided

Paul makes it clear that there must not be any partiality, “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.” Partiality has many faces. Sometimes it expresses itself when there is a very gifted elder and because of his charisma, persuasiveness and position, people actually hold him to a lower standard when they should be holding him to a higher one. It may be manifested in a desire to continue seeing the benefit of his life. We may think that he has done so much good, and that it will all be lost. Sometimes partiality is promoted by thinking that “Many people will be hurt so I will not say anything.” Or, “It will be so hard on his family, it’s better to keep it quiet.” Some people may even fear reprisal, rejection, or a forever broken relationship. They often feel that the worst thing that can happen is that their relationship with the elder is broken. This kind of partiality often occurs when church members have a low view of sin, a high view of themselves and an unhealthy affection for outward appearance. They feel that it would be too damaging to expose the sin, when in fact the worst thing that could happen is to be disobedient to the Word of God so that the sin continues to grow in the darkness, unconfessed. Partiality is one of the great dangers to the proper fulfilling of Paul’s commands because it is one of the sins in the church that facilitates elders who continue in their sin.

5. Accountability for what happened

Paul is advocating accountability for the sin, in the phrase, “Those who are sinning rebuke...’ This phrase presents an exegetical challenge. As William Mounce observes, “What appears initially to be a straightforward verse actually has many exegetical problems.”³ There are some who maintain that an elder should only be rebuked if he persists in the sin. The use of the present active participle “sinning” (tous hamartanontas) is used to advance this view. This Greek participle does, in fact, indicate continuing action. In other words, the argument is this: an elder must be rebuked only when he continues in a particular sin (or sins); but if he has stopped that sin there is no need for rebuke. While this interpretation is possible, it appears to be at odds with the purpose of the command. Further, this interpretation renders a rebuke, an extremely rare occurrence when an elder sins. It makes the command nearly pointless for its lack of usefulness, and almost unemployable as a command except in the most rare cases. In the case of sins of a financial or moral nature, for instance, the very act of getting caught almost always brings these sins to an immediate stop.

For example, if an elder is caught embezzling funds from his church, the ability to embezzle is taken away the moment he is found out. He is therefore no longer continuing in his sin. Does this mean that he should not be rebuked? Or if a man is caught in adultery, he usually stops. Does this mean there is no need to rebuke him? To maintain that rebuke is only in order when the sin persists renders Paul’s command almost irrelevant. In order to avoid a rebuke, all an elder has to do is to stop the sin for a while. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 5:20, George Knight explains it this way:

“Although the note of persistence may be intended by Paul, the more probable understanding is that the accusation is found to be true and the present tense is used to designate present guilt (TEV and NEB: “those who commit sins”). It is the committing of sin that is at issue”⁴ (emphasis added).

In order for there to be a public rebuke, there must be the act of biblically defined sin regarding morality or doctrine. The elder must truly be guilty of the sin. The issue is not if he is continuing in the sin, or whether he is sorrowful over the sin, but rather that he is guilty of sinning. In doing so he is no longer above reproach, as Paul requires (1 Timothy 3:2).

What if the man says he repents: does he then escape the rebuke? This passage gives no indication that repentance suspends rebuke. In fact, there is no mention of repentance in the text. Paul's instructions are very clear. The purpose of this rebuke is not to produce repentance in the elder—important as that may be—but to cause all “to fear.” The issue here is not excommunication (whether that happens or not). The issue is the public exposure and reproof of one who holds a high office. No one gets a pass in Christ's churches when it comes to sin, especially not its elders. While true repentance is a critical matter in the elder's relationship with the Lord and His church, it is important to remember - the explicitly stated purpose of the rebuke is not repentance, but the causing of fear. There is also a practical reality that must be considered. In almost every case, when men are caught in serious sin, they confess to what can be proven and profess to be repentant. Most often, they weep and sorrow for their sin. They will almost always ask to be forgiven, apologize, and go to great lengths to communicate how profoundly they regret their sin. As a pastor, I have been witness to many tearful confessions, only to find out later that there was no true repentance as evidenced by a changed life (see 2 Co. 7:11; Psa. 51). If repentance suspends the need for rebuke, then the command would be very rarely put into practice. It would mean that the command to rebuke would only be applicable if the elder was wanton, belligerent and willfully continuing in public sin. But if he was living an immoral life or embezzling, even in the recent past, and was found out, and stopped, the sin would be covered up. This is most likely why Paul does not figure repentance in to the equation of rebuke when an elder is guilty. This perspective is carried out every day in our courts of law. Because many of our laws here in America are based on the Bible, we use this same principle applied in the civil realm. When someone steals, they are held accountable regardless of their repentance. This is the same treatment Paul is prescribing for an elder.

However, if the elder is hard hearted and/or willfully continuing in his sin, then he is a candidate for excommunication, a discipline far more severe when compared to a simple rebuke. Paul's point then is this: when an elder's sin is discovered and verified by witnesses, he must be publicly rebuked in order to produce in the hearts of his fellow elder(s) and his congregation, a holy fear of sinning against Christ (which may or may not bring the sinning elder to repentance).

6. A rebuke

If the accusation brought by multiple witnesses establishes that the sin is real, a rebuke is required. The investigation process must reveal that the sin was not trivial. It must verify that the accusation was for serious sin, not the result of pickiness, harshness, personal vendetta, envy, or a critical spirit in the hearts of the accusers.

The rebuke is designed to expose and bring the sin to light. The word that Paul uses here speaks of exposing, convicting, disapproving or punishing.”⁵ The rebuke should be delivered according to wisdom. It should be measured according to the severity of the sin and the disposition of the offender. There could be a simple public rebuke, or temporary removal, or even excommunication depending on the many factors involved. The punishment should be delivered according to wisdom.

7. A public rebuke

The rebuke is to be delivered before the whole congregation, “...in the presence of all.” There is the tendency in many situations like this to try to protect people from hearing. Sometimes, in an attempt to express sympathy or to act out of a sense of misplaced kindness, there is a private meeting for the

church members only, or a subset of the church. It is difficult to see how these approaches are appropriate applications of the scriptural language. The Bible says that the rebuke takes place “in the presence of all.” I understand this to mean the entire congregation, and not before the elders only, as some maintain. Matthew Henry explains it this way, “Those that sin before all rebuke before all, that the plaster may be as wide as the wound, and that those who are in danger of sinning by the example of their fall may take warning by the rebuke given them for it, that others also may fear.”⁶ If an elder has a national or international presence it may be necessary for the rebuke to go beyond the local congregation to cover the reach of his ministry. Therefore, Paul’s use of the term “all” should be defined by the scope of influence, with the rebuke extending across the full range of the elder’s influence. It follows that if a local church elder is also a national leader, it is up to the local church to deliver a national rebuke.

8. The courage to cause fear

In today’s church environment, church elders and members often prefer a positive, upbeat church life; free from guilt, repentance or fear. In contrast to this, Paul’s stated purpose of the rebuke is so that “the rest also may fear.” Paul uses very strong language to communicate this. The word he uses to communicate the desired result indicates “alarm” and “fright.” Paul desires that there be a fear of sin in the congregation. The good that comes from an elder’s rebuke is that it causes all to search their own hearts and lives for ongoing sin. In this sense, the elder’s rebuke is also their rebuke. It heightens godly fear of sin and restrains wickedness (Psalm 97:10-12; Isaiah 55:7; Jude 23; Luke 12:13; Ephesians 4:22; Hebrews 12:1; 2 Thess 2:12; 1 John 1:9; James 4:17).

In order for congregations to have the courage to obey the Lord in this, there must be an understanding in the congregation that this kind of fear is actually a good thing and that it accomplishes godly purposes. Fear causes repentance and fleeing from sin. Turning from sin ultimately brings about the well-being and happiness of the believer and the whole church, for a holy church is a happy church. It is in this spirit that James Denney writes, “The judgment of the Church is the instrument of God’s love, and the moment it is accepted in the sinful soul it begins to work as a redemptive force.” The question is, do you or does your church have the courage to cause fear?

9. Trembling at the seriousness of the matter

The requirement to rebuke must be regarded with utmost seriousness. The gravity of handling the matter properly is identified by an unusually sober warning, “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.” It should startle us that nothing less than God, the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy angels are watching how churches deal with sin in their midst. These matters are spectacles to the heavenly hosts. This is why John Calvin underscored the seriousness of this issue, declaring that to ignore this is to “promote the entire dissolution of the church.” He said, “As the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so discipline forms ligaments which connect the members together, and keep each in its proper place. Whoever, therefore, either desires the abolition of all discipline, or obstructs its restoration, whether they act from design or inadvertency, they certainly promote the entire dissolution of the Church.”⁸ Baptist theologian, John Dagg expressed this same sentiment in these words, “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”⁹

THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

Undoubtedly, dealing with such things will always be heartrending. However, the pain should not keep us from faithfulness. Blessings always flow when Scripture is obeyed. It causes the power of gospel repentance to be known and seen. It causes sin to be purged in both elder and congregation. It diminishes love for the world and increases love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It heals. It warns. It restores. King David called it, “excellent oil.” He was the direct beneficiary of a man who came and confronted

him in his sin. He said, "Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it" (Psalm 141:5). Job made it clear that it causes happiness, "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole" (Job 5:17-18). While people may wonder how church elders are held accountable, it is a great comfort to know that the church is not left to figure it out on her own. God provides us with 1 Timothy 5:19-21, which describes an orderly and healing process for how a sinning elder is held accountable and set free by loving witnesses dedicated to his restoration and the purity of the church.

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

Some very important questions must be considered: Is your church afraid to expose sin? Is there partiality? Are you personally reluctant to play your role for an elder trapped in sin? If so, the consequences can be terribly harmful for the purity of the church and the elder entrapped in sin. It easily blemishes the public reputation of the church as "pillar and ground of the truth." It can muffle the proclamation that God saves and sanctifies sinners. In the presence of God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, it hides an important expression of the redemptive power of the gospel itself.

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DUE PROCESS

In all matters involving sin, including the sins of an elder, unity in the church (Ps. 133:1; John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:2-3), love for each other (1 Cor. 13), and holiness (1 Peter 1:16, 2:9-10) are to guide our actions for the protection of those involved, and the preservation of the faith witness of the gospel.

With these principles in mind, this addendum provides the procedure for bringing charges against an elder.

Process: Not all accusations are to be admitted as we are not to admit a charge against an elder without just cause. Some may be personal matters handled according to basic forgiveness and reconciliation, or according to Matthew 18:15-20 if necessary. Some charges can be refused because they are not matters sufficient to disqualify an elder from office. A charge may also be refused if it does not meet the requirements of 1 Timothy 5:19-21 and appears to be a malicious attempt to harm the

elder or the church. A charge is admitted when it qualifies according to Scripture, relates to the elder's office, the biblical qualifications of that office and is weighty enough to require a formal process.

Charges can be brought against an elder in matters involving the teaching of false doctrine or for any of the disqualifying sins referenced in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-16 (see qualifications for eldership in Addendum 7.1). In all matters involving an allegation against an elder, Scripture is to govern the process by which the charges are brought and formally settled. In most situations, the one bringing the charge and the elder should resolve the situation privately, or among the local eldership. The process below is only necessary when such efforts have not brought satisfactory resolution.

1. Bringing a Charge

- a. Members in good standing may bring a charge with one or more additional witnesses. Witnesses are not required to be members of the church.
- b. The Member shall submit the charge in writing to a church elder who is not being charged. The written charge should indicate a serious breach of sound doctrine, a question regarding the elder's character qualifications for office, or a failure to execute the office of elder consistently with biblical requirements. The written charge should include sufficient evidence and be in accordance with Scripture. The written charge should include the following at a minimum:
 - i. (1) identification of the sin or point of doctrine or failure to execute the office that is being charged against the elder;
 - ii. (2) any names, dates, and details necessary to substantiate the charge;
 - iii. (3) any Scriptures that relate to the charge being made; and
 - iv. (4) a description of any efforts made to make the elder aware of this deficiency and the response to those efforts.
- c. The non-implicated elders will decide if the charge is to be admitted or dismissed or whether it is one better handled as a matter of personal reconciliation, or some other appropriate process in accordance with Scripture. If the decision is made not to hear a charge, the elders will respond to the Member in writing with a clear and biblical rationale explaining the reason for their decision.
- d. If the elders decide that the charge is to be admitted, the matter will be scheduled to be heard by an Elder Panel, the one bringing the charge and all relevant witnesses. If the elder is found not guilty of the charge, the matter is essentially a private matter between two Christians and not to be discussed inappropriately in order to avoid the sins of gossip and slander. If the elder is found guilty of the charges, the matter will be made public in accordance with Scripture.

2. The Adjudication of a Charge

- a. A three-man panel of members in good standing and trusted character in the church will hear the case. Any individual called to serve in this capacity may recuse himself if he is unable to fairly adjudicate the charges, or as a matter of conscience.

- b. The process of adjudication is to be handled by the Panel in an expeditious manner and as quickly as wisdom will permit given the facts of the case and the schedules of all parties. Following the hearing, the Panel will have up to thirty (30) days to obtain any additional clarification or evidence necessary to decide the matter and inform the one bringing the charge of their decision. If a decision by the Panel is not possible within the thirty (30) day period, the panel will notify the one bringing the charge.
- c. There are three types of decisions the Panel may make, all of which are binding:
 - i. the elder is cleared of all charges; or
 - ii. the elder is formally rebuked with accompanying consequences in accordance with Scripture; or
 - iii. the elder is removed from office.

(1) If the panel finds that there is not clear and convincing evidence to support the charges, the elder will be cleared of the charges. In that case the matter shall remain strictly confidential and shall not be made public, including the charges, process, and the testimony.

(2) If the elder is formally rebuked or terminated, the matter will be addressed by the Panel in a meeting of the members of the church in accordance with Scripture (I Timothy 5:20).
- d. All parties involved in the process will maintain strict confidentiality in accordance with Scripture and for the protection of the elder, the one bringing the charge, all witnesses, and the church. The elder(s) who are not charged, along with the Panel, will be responsible for securely maintaining records, written and/or audio recordings and any other tangible evidence related to the charge against the elder.
- e. All communication in this process should be conducted either face to face or in writing by certified mail marked "Personal and Confidential." E-mail, texting, and any other form of electronic communication is not acceptable.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

We're excited about you're doing this! This information will give the pastors an opportunity to know you better and know how they can to serve you. We want to you to be comfortable going into the membership interview, so we'll simply follow the format of this application. Thanks for being in faith to take this important step of membership here and we look forward to meeting with you.

Date:

Section 1: General information

1. Full name:
2. By what name do you prefer to be called?
3. Address:
4. Phone number you are most easily reached.
5. E-mail address:
6. Employer name:
7. Birthdate (year not necessary!)

Section 2: Previous church information

1. Have you ever been a member of another church?
(If no, then skip to Section 3)
2. Church to which you last belonged.
3. When did you last regularly attend this church?
4. Approximately how long were you a member of this church?
5. Did you leave the church in good standing? (i.e. not under church discipline or less than ideal circumstances?) If an explanation is needed, please use the other side.

_____ Yes _____ No

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

6. Public identification with Jesus Christ in water Baptism.

I have been baptized by immersion since becoming a believer in Christ. Please indicate where and at what age:

I have never been baptized, but now as a believer, I am willing to be baptized by immersion.

I was baptized as an infant, but now as a believer, I am willing to be baptized by immersion.

If you were baptized as an infant and hold to paedobaptist convictions, would you be willing to examine those beliefs with the pastors? _____ Yes _____ No

Section 4: Present Involvement

1. I am presently involved with a ministry team. _____ Yes _____ No

Team(s): _____

2. If 'NO', what area of the church would you like to serve? (see Ministry Team Listing)

3. Please list any special abilities, gifts or interests, which you hope to use in service to the church.

4. Is there anything in your past that would keep you from working with children?

Section 5: Church Commitment

1. Have you read through the church membership manual? _____ Yes _____ No

2. Do you have any questions?

3. Are you in agreement with the Statement of Faith? _____ Yes _____ No
If No, please explain:

SUMMARY

If God leads you to become a member here, you're principally taking the commitments that the Bible calls you to make to other Christians and affirming you're making them to a gathering of Christians in the context of a local church led by elders – that is - the Christians who gather at Redeeming Grace Church.

In short, you're continuing in what the Apostles encouraged the early church to do:

"When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,"
Acts 11:23

And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.
Acts 13:43

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.

Act 14:22

We see this as commitment in Acts 14:23 when a new church was established:

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

At Redeeming Grace, we call this an **Affirmation of Commitment**.

It is a summary of the commitments we make to the Lord and to each other when we join a local church.

Similar to our Statement of Faith, which is a summary of what the Bible tells us to believe, this affirmation is a summary of how the Bible calls us to live out our faith together in the context of local church membership.

In affirming your commitment to membership in this local church, you're fulfilling 3 elements of membership we see in scripture:

1. Biblically identifying to the elders you're committed to this local church;
2. Identifying yourself to other members of this church, and
3. Committing to the biblical and congregational responsibilities of membership.

In summary, you're promising with God's help to obey all that he's commanded you about living life together in community with other believers.

A. Affirmation of Commitment

Every Christian, having been brought by sovereign grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, is commanded to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1).

In that calling, all the encouragements, exhortations, commandments and warnings are embodied in God's gracious and authoritative rule as recorded in Holy Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17). There is no intent to supersede or superimpose upon what God already calls all Christians to do.

Therefore, having prayed and been led by the Spirit of God, I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord (John 1:12). I have been born again through the Holy Spirit (John 3:6,7; 1:13) and have publicly confessed my faith by word and by believer's baptism (Romans 10:8-10, 6:3-5). I subscribe to the Articles of Faith of my church and do now with other members of Redeeming Grace Church affirm and commit myself as a member of this local expression of the body of Christ to:

8. To gather regularly with the people of God in this church family for worship, preaching, prayer, communion, fellowship, and edification (Galatians 4:4-7; Hebrews 3:12-14, 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Isaiah 2:3; Psalm 99).
9. To serve faithfully in a ministry of the church according to my spiritual gifts and abilities (Romans 12:4-8; James 1:22-24; 2:18) taking care to assume only such duties as can be

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

effectively performed (1 Corinthians 4:2), and to improve my service by prayerful study of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

10. To observe the sacraments of believer's Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20), and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29).
11. To walk lovingly (John 13:34,35) and humbly with my brethren (1 Peter 5:6; Romans 12:3), pray for them (James 5:16), and separate myself from such practices that would be contra the faithful gospel witness of the church, my Christian character, and to my brothers and sisters in Christ (Titus 2:12; 1 Corinthians 8:1-9, 9:23).
12. To preserve the unity of the Spirit by loving others and pursuing peace with each other as it applies the family of God (Matthew 5:9; Ephesian 4:1-6, 32, 5:1-2; Galatians 5:13-15; Philippians 2:1-11; Hebrews 12:14).
13. To pursue loving care and discipline of the members of this church if they stray with unrepentance from Christ, and submit to the same discipline should I stray with unrepentance from Christ. (Matthew 18:15-20).
14. To exercise biblical congregational authority as it relates affirming new members, church discipline, selection of elders, holding elders accountable per biblical due process (1 Tim 5:19-21), and anything else that significantly impacts the integrity and viability of the church as a gospel ministry.
15. To follow the elders of this church as they follow Christ in his Word, considering their teaching and lives in light of Holy Scripture (Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
16. To maintain a personal gospel ministry for the salvation of all people locally, as well as participate as able for the advancement of the gospel nationally and globally as God provides opportunity (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:6-8).
17. To give regularly, generously and cheerfully to the church as God prospers me for the support of its ministries (2 Corinthians 9:6,7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), for the relief of the needy (Proverbs 19:17), and for the spread of the Gospel both here in Smithsburg and over all the earth (Matthew 28:19,20).
18. To notify the elders of this church if I decide to cease formal membership here (Hebrews 10:24-25). (See ADDENDEUM below).

Do you affirm your commitment to the biblical responsibilities as summarized in the Affirmation of Commitment?

_____ Yes _____ No

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

B. Biblical Responsibilities of Elders

In addition to affirming your commitment to membership, I affirm the commitment of the elders of Redeeming Grace Church to fulfil the following responsibilities:

9. To care for the church (Acts 20:28) in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 5:9-11) under the rule of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4) by the power of the Holy Spirit, praying for the grace of God to be upon this church.
10. To teach and counsel the whole of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 2:1) and to equip the saints for the work of gospel ministry in all areas of life and practice (Ephesians 4:11-12).
11. To hold fast to the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead (2 Timothy 2:8-10; Galatians 1:6-10).
12. To lead the church in worshipping Jesus Christ together and obeying him in the ordinances of Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27).
13. To steward the financial and material resources of this church with integrity to advance the mission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 8:20-21).
14. To shepherd the church with loving care and to discipline its members should they stray with clear unrepentance from following Christ (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
15. To guard the church against false teaching and false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Timothy 1:14; Titus 1:9). To uphold the Statement of Faith of this church in our teaching and our lives.
16. To be an example to this church for her well-being and edification and to lead in a gracious way as our God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

ADDENDUM: How to Leave a Church Well

You may be joining Redeeming Grace from another church in which you were either a member or heavily involved. In addition, the time may come when it's necessary for you to leave Redeeming Grace Church to join a local church elsewhere. Because we value commitment and investment in the local church, we believe strongly that the transition from one church to another is a significant event.

We've put together the five steps below to help you walk through the transition process well for the sake of your own soul and the health of the body.

1. Have a good reason for leaving.

Before you go, evaluate whether your reasons are good, legitimate honoring to God. The reasons that people leave churches are many. Some are good, some are bad, and some are hard to discern. Pursue humility in the decision. Ask yourself whether you are running from conflict or reacting to unrealistic expectations. If your reasons are good, go. If not, stay and trust God He's at work in some unique way. If you are unsure, it would be wise to seek good counsel from godly friends or church leaders who can help you think through the process.

2. Communicate your decision to leave with the appropriate leaders.

If you're an active part of the church, leaders will need to know you're leaving. If you are serving, communicate it to your ministry team leader. Communicate your decision to leave to the elders. Personal communication is preferable to written communication, but make sure you communicate.

3. Tell these leaders the truth about why you're leaving.

If you have legitimate reasons to leave then you have nothing to hide or worry about. If the reasons for leaving will 'sting' church leadership, deliver it in the spirit of Proverbs 27:6, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Scripture commands us to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), which means you shouldn't couch the real, sometimes difficult reasons in broad and non-specific spiritual terms. God may use your reasons for leaving to help the church or its leadership. "Exit Interviews" can be immensely helpful to leadership, who are accountable to receive truth with gentleness and humility. Whatever you do, don't just leave without telling your leaders.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

4. Appropriately transition or conclude your ministry commitments.

If you've been an active part of ministry, your role will need to be transitioned. Hopefully you've been training and developing somebody to take your place anyway. But if you haven't, give your leaders an appropriate time to find others to serve in your capacity. This period shouldn't drag on, but you also should not just drop everything on the people you've been committed to.

5. Leave graciously.

Guard against gossip, slander and divisiveness. God is over your transition and He calls you to trust Him for not only to where He's called you to, but also why He's called you from a particular church.

Conclusion

If you've read this material and the Spirit is drawing your attention to realize that you didn't leave a church well in the past, it might be wise to talk about and consider why God is stirring you. In some situations, it may serve everyone involved circling back to seek forgiveness and possible reconciliation. In other situations, it may involve theological differences or preferences/practices disparities within which you have biblical convictions that prevent you from continuing in that local church. In the end, remember that Jesus loves the church you're leaving and the one you're going to — his blood was shed for both. Both churches are part of his bride. Do his bride the honor of leaving well.