

PREAMBLE

We, the members of *Grace Bible Community Church* do humbly ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

ARTICLE I

Name

The name of this church shall be Grace Bible Community Church (aka "Grace in Halsey" or "GBCC").

ARTICLE II

Affiliation

Section 1. We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture. The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities are subject to the authority of Holy Scripture.

Section 2. The church may cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church.

ARTICLE III

Purpose

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. We are "committed to making disciples for Christ's kingdom" as our motto affirms. Therefore, we joyfully proclaim the glorious gospel of His grace to those in our community and throughout the world and are ready to defend "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

ARTICLE IV

Articles of Faith

1. CONCERNING THE BIBLE. We believe the Bible (the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments) to be the verbally-inspired Word of God, written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, inerrant in the original manuscripts, an infallible, complete, and sufficient guide for belief and behavior, and having been preserved by God through the ages, is our only and final authority.

2. CONCERNING THE TRIUNE GOD. We believe in one God, eternally-existing in three Persons: *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*, all having the same attributes and perfections, yet so as there are not three Gods, but One, each having the whole of the divine essence, yet distinct from one another, so that the Persons are not to be confused nor the substance divided. God as to His Being is spirit, self-existent, eternal and invisible; as to His Character is most-holy, righteous, just, merciful and loving; as to His Nature, is all-present, all-powerful, all-knowing, infinite and incomprehensible, sovereignly-ruling the universe He has made according to the good pleasure of His will, for the praise of His glory and the good of His creation.

3. CONCERNING THE SON OF GOD. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is fully God, possessing all of His attributes and perfections. At the appointed time, He became fully man, without ceasing to be God, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, so that the two natures, the human and the divine, while remaining distinct, were inseparably joined in one person.

We believe that, though subject to all temptations that are common to men, He lived a sinless life, perfectly keeping every detail of God's law without failure, thus fitting Him to be the perfect

sacrifice for sinful men. In due time, He yielded Himself up to die on the cross in order to purchase redemption for God's elect, dying in their place and bearing the punishment for their sins in order that they might receive eternal life. He was buried, and rose again on the third day, according to Scripture. He ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as our Intercessor and Advocate, which work He shall continue until He comes again to receive us unto Himself.

4. CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT. We believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, the third member of the Trinity, and being fully God, He possesses all of His attributes and perfections. Having been sent by God the Father and God the Son to execute their will in relation to man, He is the effective agent in applying to the elect the salvation which was planned by the Father and purchased by the Son.

Thus, the Spirit convicts and regenerates sinners, indwells, seals and sanctifies believers, spiritually baptizing them into the Body of Christ and imparting to them spiritual gifts for the service of their King.

The Spirit who inspired the written Word of God guides us into all truth by illuminating that Word to our minds and hearts, in order that we might know the mind and will of God to obey it.

5. CONCERNING MAN. We believe that man is the direct and immediate creation of God. God created man in His own image, free from sin, or any tendency toward sin, and endowed him with intellect, emotion and will. Furthermore, God made man morally responsible for his actions and gave him opportunity to exercise that moral responsibility by placing before him a test of his obedience to the law of God. Adam and Eve violated that law by eating the forbidden fruit, and thereby fell from that state of innocence in which they were created.

The result of Adam's sin of disobedience is that he incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death and became subject to the wrath of God. The effect of sin upon Adam was such that he became totally depraved, completely unable and unwilling to remedy his condition, or of choosing or doing that which is pleasing to God.

We believe that Adam was the representative and head of the entire human race, and that when he fell, we fell in him according to Scripture, and thus the guilt of his sin is imputed to all his descendants, and the corruption of his nature is transmitted by birth to them, our Lord Jesus Christ being the sole exception.

From this inherent depravity of nature issue forth sinful thoughts, motives and actions, so that we are sinners both by nature and by choice.

6. CONCERNING THE ELECT OF GOD. We believe that before the foundation of the world the Father chose, apart from any merit or foreseen faith in them, those whom He, according to the good pleasure of His will, purposed to save, and that this people, called "the elect" throughout Scripture, are saved solely on the basis of the merit and work of our Lord Jesus Christ alone, who shed His blood to redeem them from their sins.

Such people are saved, when by God's sovereign initiative, they are called by the Father into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ, and are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, thereby enabling them to turn from their sins, and place their trust in Christ alone for their salvation. Those thus saved by God's free grace are empowered by Him to live a holy life, which is the inseparable attendant of true salvation, and will ultimately and without exception enjoy eternal bliss in the presence of God their Maker and Redeemer.

We believe that all men without exception are to be exhorted and commanded to repent and believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that all are responsible to do so. Furthermore, believers are obligated by divine love and command to make every effort to employ God-ordained

means to bring men to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus. We reject any attitude or argument that would seek to promote an apathetic or fatalistic spirit in the area of evangelism, obedience, or service as unbiblical and God-dishonoring.

7. CONCERNING THE CHURCH. We believe that the Church is composed of all those who trust in Christ Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and that this universal Church of all believers finds its visible expression in local churches made up of believers from a limited geographical area. We believe that each church is to be self-governing, and self-propagating, and while it may and should cooperate with other churches of like precious faith, it should also be committed to separation from all apostasy and heresy. It shall be directed and ruled by no external authority, but by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, through the Word of God, as it is administered by elders and deacons elected from within each local church. We believe that the ordinances of the Church consist of the Lord's Supper, which is memorial in nature, and water Baptism, which is by immersion.

8. CONCERNING ETERNAL LIFE & ETERNAL DEATH. We believe that physical death involves the separation of the material body and the immaterial soul. The body sees corruption, but the soul, which neither ceases to exist nor sleeps, in the case of the redeemed, immediately passes into the presence of God, to await in conscious bliss the reuniting with and resurrection of its body at the Return of Christ Jesus; and in the case of the condemned, immediately passes into conscious torment until the resurrection on that Great Day of Judgment in which it will be reunited with the body for both judgment and sentencing, and finally cast into eternal conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

9. CONCERNING THE RETURN OF OUR LORD JESUS & THE KINGDOM OF GOD REALIZED. We believe in the visible, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ to the earth at the end of this age, to judge the living and the dead with finality, and to usher in the fully-realized Kingdom "of Christ and of God", the "home of the righteous", in a universe renewed and forever-free from sin's terror.

(For a fuller expression of our doctrinal statements with accompanying Scripture verses, see *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*.)

ARTICLE V

Membership

Requirements for Membership. Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon the profession of his faith, who expresses agreement with the doctrines and aims of this church, and is willing to submit to its government, shall be eligible for membership.

Procedures in the Reception of New Membership. A person who desires to become a member of the church may apply to the elders and request to be interviewed by them. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person has a credible profession of faith in Christ, has been scripturally baptized, is in substantial agreement with the doctrines of the church, and intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry and submit to its authority.

Any person who requests membership shall have their request made publicly known to the congregation on the Lord's Day, in order to provide opportunity for any member to comment upon the applicant's qualifications for membership. The elders shall take any comments made into consideration when evaluating the qualifications of the prospective applicant for membership. If it is determined in the judgment of the elders that the applicant for membership meets the requirements for membership, he shall be received into membership by public announcement on the following Lord's Day.

Termination of Membership

By physical death. When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall automatically be removed from the membership roll.

By transfer. When it is so requested, the elders may grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of dismissal to the fellowship of another church. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is in their judgment disloyal to “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

By exclusion. If a member habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders. Also, any member who personally so requests may after due admonition be excluded from the membership. In such cases no congregational approval of the action shall be needed; the elders shall simply announce to the congregation that such a person is no longer a member. If an excluded member applies again for membership, the procedures set forth in “Procedures in the Reception of New Members” will again be followed.

By excommunication. According to the teaching of Holy Scripture a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine or who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matthew 18:15ff). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in the “Church Discipline” section of this Constitution.

ARTICLE VI

Church Discipline

Formative Discipline. Every disciple (follower of, student) of Christ Jesus must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction through His written word), which is administered to each one through the church, according to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and other passages. Mutual submission to one another and to the elders (overseers) whom the Lord has set over His church (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

Corrective Discipline. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases, reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given to us in Matthew 18:15-16 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective discipline. When admonition is not heeded, corrective discipline will be applied.

Restoration. It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to full membership a discipline person who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance and reformation (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

ARTICLE VII

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

General Statement. There are two ordinances of special significance which our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of Baptism or the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are intended to be aids to the faith of believers who

participate in them, not a means of imparting grace through engagement in the physical act of participation.

Baptism. Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for Baptism, and all such persons should be baptized (Acts 2:28). Believing that Baptism is the God-ordained door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized in the biblical manner, which is by immersion.

The Lord's Supper. Whereas Baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Corinthians 11:26). While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper are and remain only symbols of the broken Body and the shed Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated by the church on a regular basis.

ARTICLE VIII

Office Bearers

General Statement. Our Lord Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), and He governs His Church through office bearers whom He appoints and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Office bearers in local churches are of two kinds, Elders (also called "Bishops" in Scripture) and Deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office bearing, and after formally recognizing such by common consent, to set them apart by united prayer, and then to submit to their authority.

Elders. Scriptures indicate that normally there should be a plurality of elders in the local church (Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1). These are also called "bishops" (meaning "overseers") because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are the "pastors and teachers" given to the church "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

Elders are responsible for the spiritual administration of the church, the implementation of church discipline, and the oversight of the souls of the church's members "as those who will have to give an account" to God (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). While every elder should be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2), some will be more engaged in pastoring (that is, private teaching and admonishing) and governing. Gifted men who are not recognized as elders may engage in public preaching and teaching, provided they are godly in character and walk, but the exercise of their gift must be under the direction and control of the elders, as all ministries of the church shall be.

While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder as an individual is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

The church should endeavor to discover and formally recognize those men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces of an elder, but only such men. Thus, when men have been ordained to this office, the church will have the confidence that it has recognized the overseers whom the Holy Spirit has set over it (Acts 20:28). It is evident, therefore that neither the number of elders nor the length of their term of office can be fixed by the church.

The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Deacons. Deacons are responsible to administer the business, secular affairs, and benevolent concerns of the church so that the elders may devote themselves without distraction to their responsibilities (Acts 6:3-4). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and in subjection to the elders.

Neither the number of deacons nor the length of their term of office shall be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office.

The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Appointment of Office Bearers. The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible to appoint men to the offices of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord Jesus Christ is calling him to the particular office, and the church should recognize that call as it observes in the individual the evidence of the gifts and graces which Scripture requires for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance, a careful consideration of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a dispassionate evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as a whole.

Nominations to the office of elder and deacon shall be made by any member of the congregation in good standing who desires to do so and submitted to the elders in writing prior to the Annual Business Meeting. All nominations received shall be screened by the elders in accordance with the standards of Scripture for such office and those who meet those standards shall be submitted to the entire congregation for a vote of approval. No less than *a three-fourths majority* of the members present and voting shall be necessary for the election of an office bearer. The elders may, at their discretion, ask for the nominations at other times of the year to elect office bearers.

Following the recognition of an office bearer by vote of the congregation, he shall be publicly ordained to his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the church and the laying on of the hands of the elders.

ARTICLE IX

Congregational Business Meetings

General Statement. There shall be an Annual Business Meeting of the church for the hearing of reports, the election of officers, and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

Notice of Meetings. Notice of all congregational business meetings shall be given at regular worship services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to the meetings. However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each regular member by mail of the time, place, and the purpose of the meeting.

Meetings for the hearing of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the congregation may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

Quorum. The regular members present at any properly-convened congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Voting. All members who have reached the age of eighteen years and are in good standing in the church, may vote on any question properly brought before the congregation. While recognizing that Scripture nowhere expressly stipulates an age requirement or limitation on voting, and that

there is the distinct possibility that there will be members in good standing under the age of 18, nevertheless, the nature of voting, which is to express what the mind of Christ is understood to be in particular situations, and the maturity required to discern that mind, both by way of understanding the situation and Biblical principles with which to apply it, preclude, under ordinary circumstances, a person of younger years from being able to vote in a responsible manner due to lack of experience, judgment and wisdom (1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20).

Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall, at all times, be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than *a two-thirds majority* of the members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid.

ARTICLE X

By-laws

The elders shall draft and amend from time-to-time, with the advice of the deacons, such by-laws as they shall deem necessary for the efficient implementation of this constitution; but no by-law which is in violation of any of the terms of this constitution shall be valid.

ARTICLE XI

Amendments

This constitution may be amended by *a two-thirds majority* of the members present and voting at a duly-convened business meeting of the congregation. No proposed amendment may be voted on which has not been distributed to the congregation in written form at least two weeks prior to such a meeting.

On 2 Dec 2018, this constitution was unanimously and formally adopted by official church members and supersedes all previous constitutions. On 23 Feb 2020, this constitution was amended by unanimous consent to include the statement regarding The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as a fuller expression of our doctrinal statements under Article IV.