

Grace Baptist Church

Hartsville, Tennessee

Introduction to the Church

Constitution and
Articles of Faith

What is a Reformed
Baptist Church?

What is the Gospel of
the Lord Jesus Christ?



The back cover expresses Grace Baptist Church's commitment to historic biblical truth and appreciation for God's provision of godly men to proclaim that truth. The Christians pictured are (top, left to right) Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and Jonathan Edwards; (center, left to right) John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, Isaac Backus, John Gill, and Adoniram Judson; (bottom, left to right) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, John Dagg, Andrew Fuller, and William Carey.

Encircling the men are the Latin phrases that express the foundational truths of the Protestant Reformation. These principles are often summarized as the Five Solas of the Reformation (sola is the Latin word for alone or only): Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), or the conviction that the Bible is the only flawless and authoritative source of God's truth; Sola Gratia (grace alone), or the truth that God saves sinners by grace alone; Sola Fide (faith alone), or the belief that God's salvation is apprehended through faith alone; Solus Christus (Christ alone), or the certainty that God's redemptive work is accomplished through the person of the risen Lord Jesus Christ alone; and Soli Deo Gloria (to the glory of God alone), or the persuasion that all of God's activities do (and all of our activities should) ultimately magnify the glory of God.

AN INTRODUCTION TO GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH

Grace Baptist Church was founded in 1980. In those initial months, about ten families gathered for worship and purchased Hartsville's old theater building for a meeting place. Over the next decade, God kindly preserved and instructed the church. By His grace, the church grew in its appreciation for the biblical truths that were articulated in the Protestant Reformation and embraced by early Baptist churches. This led to GBC becoming what is commonly known as a Reformed Baptist church. The church adopted this current *Constitution and Articles of Faith* in 1990, and minor revisions were made to it in 2006.

Grace Baptist Church is a community of Christians committed both to the Lord Jesus Christ and to one another. Our goals are to live as full-time worshipers of God; to meet regularly for corporate worship, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and instruction from the Bible; to engage in the kind of fellowship that results in spurring one another on to love and good works; to grow in personal holiness; and to proclaim God's gracious saving activity in Jesus Christ through personal evangelism and global missionary activities. Several elders provide spiritual oversight for God's flock at GBC, while several deacons attend to the church's material needs.

This *Constitution and Articles of Faith* explains both the church's doctrinal distinctives and many practical church matters. It is followed by an explanation of what it means to be a Reformed Baptist church and a presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At Grace Baptist Church, we take the Bible seriously. God calls us to adjust our thinking so that it conforms to biblical truth. In order that we might be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2), our worship services prioritize the public teaching of the Word of God. At GBC, you will hear the Bible taught.

We also take worship seriously; indeed, it is our highest calling as humans. Worship is acceptable to God when it is reverent, Christ-centered, Bible-saturated, and regulated by the Word of God. As a Body of Christ, we worship corporately by reading the Bible publicly, praying together, singing psalms and hymns to

God, and meeting with God through the preached Word of God. We regard our Wednesday night prayer meeting as a worship service (where we specifically worship God in prayer); likewise, our Lord's Supper services are times when we worship the risen Christ at the communion table.

By God's grace, we endeavor to take living the Christian life seriously. Correct doctrine must lead to correct living. We emphasize that true holiness is a heart-level matter that involves the Christian's motives, passions, goals, and desires. Mere outward conformity to a list of prescribed man-made lifestyle standards is inadequate. However, when the Law of God is indeed written upon the believer's heart, the Christian's outward behavior will be quite different from that of the unsaved man. The saint will make his chief end the glorifying of God, whereby he enjoys God both now and forever. With regard to practical day-to-day living, our purpose is to live by the truth articulated by Abraham Kuyper: There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!" Thus every believer will devote himself to Christian service because Jesus is Lord of the Christian's time. The believer will also engage in counter-cultural living, or living as salt and light in a decaying world. Living as one of Christ's disciples includes applying God's Word to practical issues like marriage, work, finances, and recreation. Every area of the Christian's life must be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

At GBC, we have a large doctrine of regeneration. We believe the Holy Spirit transforms a spiritually dead sinner into a new creature in Christ— a saint in whom the power of sin is broken and the power of the Holy Spirit is producing holiness. True believers will persevere to the end, which means they will grow in grace. Sanctification is not an optional extra for first-class believers; it is an inevitability for all true Christians. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord! Accordingly, chronic spiritual immaturity and stubborn unrepentance is not tolerated. The church takes disciplinary action when— after numerous pleadings and explanations— a member refuses to repent of persistent sin. Church discipline is one of Christ's blessings for His people.

DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. A local church is a fellowship of born-again followers of Jesus Christ whose profession of faith shows itself in holy living and good works.

2. A properly constituted local church exists where:

(a) the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church is duly recognized;

(b) the whole of God's Word is preached and practiced;

(c) the two ordinances established by Christ's authority, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, are correctly administered; and

(d) biblical church discipline is practiced.

3. The purpose of the local church is:

(a) to provide for the united worship of God in prayer and praise;

(b) to provide for the fellowship and nurture of God's people through teaching and pastoral care;

(c) to provide for the physical necessities of those in need, with special concern shown to those of the household of faith;

(d) to be God's instrument in preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the world; and

(e) to be salt and light in the unbelieving world.

CONSTITUTION AND ARTICLES OF FAITH

I. NAME

This local Body of Christ shall be known as Grace Baptist Church of Hartsville, Tennessee.

II. ARTICLES OF FAITH

The church adopts as a summary of our faith the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. This confession is a concise statement of biblical doctrine. In no way is it equal to the infallible authority of the Word of God. A brief summary of what we believe follows.

A. THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God. They are the infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. All Scripture is (in its original autographs) the very Word of God, and it is therefore without error and utterly reliable with regard to fact and teaching. It has been graciously preserved with particular care and providence for our benefit today. The Scriptures are to be neither added to nor subtracted from. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21, 3:15-16; John 10:35; Deut. 4:1-2; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 John 5:9; Gal. 1:11-2:21; 1 Cor. 2:6-13)

B. DOCTRINE OF GOD

There is but one God, the Creator, Maker, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things, having in and of Himself all perfections and being infinite in them all. To Him all people owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. (Col. 1:15-17; Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Jer. 10:10; Rev. 5:12-14)

C. THE TRINITY

There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory. (Matt. 28:19; John 1:14,18, 8:58, 14:9-11, 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Exod. 3:14; Luke 3:22)

D. CREATION

God created all things from nothing. Adam and Eve were the first humans; they were created by God after His own image in perfect righteousness. The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is historical, not mythical; hence evolution is a theory contrary to a scriptural understanding of creation. (Heb. 11:3; Ps. 33:6; Jer. 32:17)

E. PROVIDENCE

God from eternity decreed all things that come to pass, and He perpetually governs all creatures and events. We affirm the absolute sovereignty of God. However, God is in no way the author or approver of sin, nor does His sovereignty in any way diminish or violate the responsibility of men. (Jas. 1:13-15; Luke 22:22; Eph. 1:11)

F. THE FALL OF MAN

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, by their disobedience, lost the righteousness in which they were created and became corrupt. The guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to all men, who, being his descendants, are born in a sinful state and condition called original sin. From this corrupt nature, all transgressions proceed because all men are wholly inclined to all evil continually and are opposed to all that is spiritually good in the sight of God. This is often referred to as man's total depravity. Thus while man is unable of himself to repent of sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, he is completely responsible to do so. This is by no means to deny that a vast amount of virtue prevails through the common grace of God; yet man is unregenerate and essentially alienated from his Creator. (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:11-13, 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18, 5:12-21, 8:6-8)

G. THE MEDIATOR

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man. Having taken to Himself a human nature, while maintaining His sinlessness, He perfectly fulfilled the law, suffered, and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, rose again the third day,

and ascended to the Father, at whose right hand He ever lives to make intercession for His people. He is the only Mediator, Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church, and the Sovereign and Lord of the universe. (Matt. 1:23; 1 Tim. 2:5,6; John 1:14; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14, 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:3,4; 1 Tim. 3:16; Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 1:2-3; Rom. 8:34; Acts 3:22; Heb. 5:5-6; Ps. 2:7; Eph. 1:22)

H. ELECTION

Election is God's eternal choice of some persons to eternal life— not because of foreseen merit or faith in them, but because of His mercy in Christ. Those who have been predestined to be saved are in due time called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4-5,11, 2:5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:2)

I. EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION

By His Holy Spirit and through His Word, God calls us into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ. By this divine work, He enlightens our minds, recreates us in and to newness of life, and renews our wills and affections by the Holy Spirit. (Jer. 31:31-34; John 3:3-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:3,23; Luke 24:27-32; Eph. 5:25-27; Tit. 3:5; 1 John 1:3)

J. REPENTANCE

Repentance is a saving grace. The repentant person is convicted of the evil of his sin by the Holy Spirit. Repentance involves a humbling of oneself, self-abhorrence, exhibition of godly sorrow for and hatred of sin, and a purpose to walk before God so as to please Him in all things. Repentance is to continue through the whole course of the believer's life. (Matt. 16:24-28; Luke 3:8-14, 13:3-9, 18:13-14; Acts 2:37-38, 5:31, 17:30; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Cor. 7:8-11)

K. FAITH

Faith is a saving grace. By faith, we receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation as He is freely offered to us in the gospel. Faith is also a grace by which we believe the Word of God to be true and seek to apply its teachings to ourselves. (John 5:44, 8:24; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:9-10,17; Rom. 4:3; Heb. 11:1-2,6,13-16; Acts 17:30, 18:27; 2 Thess. 2:10)

L. JUSTIFICATION

Justification is an act of God's free grace whereby He pardons our sins and accounts us righteous in His sight. Justification is based not on anything we have done but only on Christ's righteousness as imputed to us and received by faith alone. Thus justification is a declarative and forensic act of imputed righteousness, not a process wherein we acquire righteousness before God due to our own sanctification. Justification is by faith in Christ's work alone, not faith in Christ's work plus something the believer does. By no means is justification conferred in baptism. (Rom. 3:20-30, 4:5, 8:33; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Luke 18:13-14)

M. ADOPTION

For the sake of His only Son, Jesus Christ, God has been pleased to make all justified persons sharers in the grace of adoption. Adoption is the means by which believers are numbered with, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of, the children of God. (John 1:12; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15-17; 1 John 3:1; Ps. 103:13; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 1:14, 6:12, 12:6; 1 Pet. 5:7)

N. SANCTIFICATION

Those who are united to Jesus Christ are, by regeneration, renewed in their whole nature after the image of God, and are set apart by God to share in His holiness. This is definitive sanctification. Because of the remaining effects of the former corrupt nature, there is also a progressive aspect to sanctification whereby the Holy Spirit, by virtue of indwelling the believer, promotes true holiness of life. Sin's power over the believer is broken, the evil desires to which sin gives birth are increasingly weakened, and the Christian more and more lives according to the Word of God. This is the holiness without which no man will see the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16-18,24; 1 Thess. 5:21-23; Phil. 2:12-13; John 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:2; Acts 20:32; Rom. 6:5,6,14; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 3:16-19; Col. 1:11; Heb. 12:14)

O. PERSEVERANCE

Those whom God has accepted in the Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and to whom He has given the precious faith of His elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from

the state of grace. On the contrary, they will certainly persevere in the state of grace to the end of their lives and thus be eternally saved. This outcome is certain because God will never repent of having called them and made gifts to them. Furthermore, God continues to work in His chosen ones faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Holy Spirit that lead to immortality. Many storms and floods may arise and beat against the elect, but they will never be removed from that foundation and rock that they stand upon by faith. Nevertheless, through unbelief, temptations, allurements of the world, and indwelling sin, the sight of God's love may be temporarily hidden from them and they may fall into dreadful sins. God, however, is still the same, and they shall surely to be kept by the power of God unto salvation. Then they will enjoy their purchased possession, because they have been engraved upon the palm of His hand, and because their names have been written in the Book of Life from all eternity. (Rom. 8:30; John 10:27-29; 2 John 9; Heb. 10:39; Rom. 11:29; Phil. 1:6; Psalm 34:19; Prov. 24:16; Mal. 3:6; Jude 24)

P. THE CHURCH

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, which is composed of God's elect in every age. According to His commandment, Christians are to gather in local churches. To each local church He has given authority and responsibility for administering order, discipline, and worship. The officers of a church are elders and deacons. The church administers the public means of grace, which is the spiritual food that God has provided whereby Christians mature. The means of grace whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are His ordinances, especially the proclamation and explanation of the Word of God, the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and prayer. (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Heb. 10:25; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:8-10, 4:11-12, 5:25-32; Matt. 16:15-19, 18:17-20, 28:18-20)

Q. BAPTISM

Baptism is an ordinance of Jesus Christ obligatory for every believer. The proper mode of baptism is by immersion in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a symbol

of the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It signifies the washing away of sins and is a prerequisite to church membership. (Matt. 3:16, 28:18-20; John 3:23; Acts 8:38; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27)

R. THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ and is to be observed by His church until He returns. It is to be administered with the elements of bread and the fruit of the vine. It is in no sense a re-sacrifice of Christ. Its purpose is to commemorate Christ's death, confirm the everlasting covenant in Christ's blood, and strengthen union with Christ in His love as well as union and communion with other believers. Unforgiveness between members and unconfessed sin should be dealt with before coming to the Lord's Table. (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:14-22, 11:23-34; Luke 22:19-20)

S. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

It is the duty of every church and every Christian to extend the gospel to all men everywhere. As faith comes by hearing the Word of God, we are to seek by all methods sanctioned in Scripture to persuade men to seek Jesus Christ and His salvation. (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 9:22)

T. THE LAW OF GOD

God has commanded us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the summary of God's Law (Luke 10:25-27). The Ten Commandments (as given to Moses in Ex. 20:1-21) especially articulate the moral law of God. This moral law, which is expressed in the precepts of Scripture as a whole, provides the Christian with a guide for life. We affirm the perpetuity of the moral law, including the continuing validity of the Fourth Commandment. A man is not justified by the works of the Law, but only through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 2:16); even so, we reject antinomianism or any other teaching which claims that God's moral laws are not binding upon believers today (Matt. 5:17-19). The Old Testament ceremonial laws, having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, do not bind the consciences of believers today. Principles embodied in Old

Testament civil laws are timeless, but their specific applications were to the covenanted nation of Israel. (Mark 12:30-31; Rom. 13:8-10; Matt. 5:17-20, 19:16-22; Exod. 20:1-17; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1; Rom. 3:31, 6:14, 7:6, 8:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Jas. 2:8-12; 1 Cor. 9:21; Ps. 119:4-6)

U. WORSHIP

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and does good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all one's might. However, the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself and so limited by His own revealed will that He may not be worshiped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. (Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:29-33; Deut. 4:2, 12:29-32, 17:3; Exod. 20:4-6; Matt. 15:3,8-9,13; 2 Kings 16:10-18; Lev. 10:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; John 4:23-24)

V. THE STATE

Civil government is ordained of God. It is the duty of Christians to obey those who have rule over them in all matters consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Christians are also to pray for their rulers. (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2)

W. THE RETURN OF CHRIST

We believe in the visible, personal, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt. 24:27-30; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 1:7)

X. RESURRECTION

The bodies of men after death return to dust but their spirits return immediately to God— the righteous to rest with Him, the wicked to be reserved under darkness until the judgment. The bodies of all the dead, both just and unjust, will be raised. (Gen. 3:19; Eccles. 12:7; Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 1:23; 1 Cor. 15:35-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)

Y. THE JUDGMENT

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when everyone shall receive according to his deeds.

The wicked will go into everlasting punishment in Hell with the devil and his angels. The righteous, with glorified bodies, will live and reign with Christ forever. (Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 9:47-48; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 20:10-15, 22:3-5)

III. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: ELIGIBILITY

A. The qualifications for membership are:

1. Profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Evidence that this profession of faith is genuine, namely a scriptural experience of conversion, baptism by immersion following conversion, willing submission to the teaching and government of the church, a heart desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and consistent Christian living.

B. Applicants may not be members of a secret society (such as the Freemasons).

IV. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: PROCEDURE

A. At least two elders will interview the applicant and will report to the eldership as a whole. Applicants recommended for membership will be asked to study the church's constitution and discuss any points that are not clear to them. Following the interview, the elders shall bring the application to the church. Any objections to receiving the applicant into membership should immediately be made known to the elders.

B. If serious objections are raised concerning the applicant's qualification for church membership, the elders will interview the applicant again to determine whether to proceed with the application process. When the elders decide that it is appropriate to proceed, the applicant will then be asked to give to the church an account of his faith. If necessary, baptism will be administered as soon as possible. The church will then affirm the reception of the applicant into membership.

C. Some new converts with limited teaching may be unclear about some details of the church's beliefs and practices. Such should not be debarred from membership for that reason. This matter is addressed by the clause above (III-A-2) on willing submission to the teaching and government of the church.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. God has ordained that His normal method of protecting, nurturing, correcting, and encouraging His people is through His church (Eph. 4:11-16). It is therefore essential that Christians not forsake their assembling together (Heb. 10:23-25). All believers are urged and expected to make use of the public means of grace, since these are the ways that God typically feeds the soul. The public means of grace are administered in (1) the services of the Lord's Day: the first hour (or Sunday School hour), the second hour (or corporate worship service), and the Lord's Supper service; (2) the midweek prayer service; (3) baptism services; and (4) special meetings that the elders shall deem necessary to call.

Spiritually healthy Christians will want to make habitual use of these public means of grace, so they will consistently be present at church meetings. Providential hindrances like illness, travel, unusual working conditions, and other such circumstances sometimes legitimately prevent Christians from attending church services; this is understandable. But attendance to the public means of grace (and therefore attendance at church meetings) is a godly discipline that members are expected to cultivate (Matt. 6:25-34 and 1 Tim. 4:7-8). Benefitting from the means of grace is not only a duty but a privilege given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Often the most noticeable sign of poor spiritual health is neglect of the public means of grace. A believer who does not take advantage of them consistently (i.e., who is frequently absent from worship services, teaching times, prayer meetings, and/or Lord's Supper services) demonstrates that all is not well with his soul. He should expect the church to help him overcome such problems.

B. Members are expected to make use of the various private means of grace which are available to them, such as the regular daily reading of the Bible, personal devotional time, and private and family prayer. (Ps. 5:1-3; Dan. 6:10; Matt. 6:6; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:15)

C. The responsibility of praying together with other members of the church on a regular basis must be clearly established for membership to be a reality. (Acts 2:42, 4:24, 12:5, 12:12, 13:3; Matt. 18:19-20)

D. Members are expected to obey the teachings of the Scriptures in respect to family life and government. As the God-appointed head of the family, the husband must rule over the household with gentleness and love, but also with wisdom and firmness (1 Cor. 11:1-16; 14:34-35; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 3:4-5). The wife must be in subjection to her husband in all things according to the rule of Scripture (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1). The husband, assisted by the wife, must bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) by setting a godly example before them; by instructing them consistently in the Scriptures; and by wise and firm discipline, including corporal punishment when it is needed. The godly education of children is one of the foremost spiritual responsibilities of parents. They should insure that their children are educated in the Bible, think with a biblical worldview, and are alert to ideas that undermine the truth of God's Word. (Deut. 4:9, 6:4-9; Prov. 1:8, 13:24, 22:15, 29:15; Heb. 12:7)

E. Regular proportionate giving to the Lord's work according to our means and out of a spirit of generosity is a mark of a true worshiper and is pleasing to God. Tithing of one's substance is commended as a guideline to giving. (1 Cor. 9:13-14, 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:1-15, 9:1-15; Rom. 12:13; Mal. 3:8-11)

F. Elders, being ordained by the Holy Spirit to rule and pastor the flock of Jesus Christ, are to be honored. The flock should submit to their spiritual authority. (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17-20; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:14)

G. Members are to work and pray zealously for the welfare and the coming of the kingdom of God. They are to seek by all possible means to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 12:11; Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 9:19-23)

H. Members should undertake all Christian service connected with the church in consultation with the elders and other members rather than acting independently. (Acts 13:1-3, 14:27; Rom. 12:3-10,16; 1 Cor. 12:12-27)

I. Members should seek to avoid all causes of division in the body and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. All members are to discern their place in the body of Christ and honor one another above themselves. With regards to teaching ministries, all teachers will affirm the church's doctrinal positions. (Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:2-3; Phil. 2:1-4; Col. 3:12-14; Heb. 12:15)

J. Members are to promote holiness, edification, and love among themselves by praying for one another, by spurring one another on towards love and good deeds, by admonishing one another, by showing hospitality, by bearing one another's burdens, and by forgiving one another. Members are to pray particularly for elders and deacons in the discharge of their duties. (Rom. 12:10-13; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:32, 6:18-20; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 1:22, 4:8)

K. The behavior of believers in the community must accord with that wisdom and discretion which commends the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 6:1-6; Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2:12-17, 3:15-16)

VI. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Formative Discipline

Every disciple (i.e., follower) of Christ must be under Christ's discipline (i.e., His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one through the church, according to 1 Cor. 12:12-27 and other passages. Personal and mutual submission to one another and the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church

(Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each individual and of the whole body of the church collectively. This is sometimes called preventive discipline or self-discipline. There are occasions, however, when failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

B. Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine, disorderly behavior, 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 (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). In the case of heinous, broadly reported, and known public sin, discipline should not be delayed: public censure, excommunication, and removal from the church are called for (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Likewise, a divisive person will be removed summarily from the church if he does not heed several warnings (Tit. 3:10).

In the case of private sin and personal offenses, the instructions in Matt. 18:15-20 suggest a general framework for resolving the matter. That framework is expressed here in chronological steps, although the practical implementation of these steps may well call for flexibility and variation (as specific cases warrant).

Step One: A member of Grace Baptist Church who is in sin or thought to be in sin should be confronted privately by one fellow GBC member (who is not necessarily an elder) and urged to repent.

Step Two: If sin is present but the confronted member refuses to repent, then the original person who went to him should again go to him privately, this time with two or three other brothers to determine (a) if there is indeed sin present and (b) if the erring brother indeed is refusing to repent.

These initial two steps can be characterized as informal private corrective discipline. They involve only a few members of the church and occur in private settings. If the confronted member persists in his refusal to repent, the matter progresses from informal private corrective discipline to formal public corrective discipline. This is discipline that is led by the elders, involves all of the

members of the church, and occurs in a public setting. The following two steps characterize formal public corrective discipline.

Step Three: The matter of discipline becomes public, as it is formally brought before the congregation according to Matt. 18:17. The church takes several actions. (a) The unrepentant individual is marked, or identified as unruly (2 Thess. 3:6-15). This would be done in a closed meeting attended only by GBC members. (b) Though the unrepentant person is considered to be a believer, there is to be no normal fellowship with him that implies acceptance of his behavior (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). (c) The unrepentant member is excommunicated from the Lord's Table, as this is the most intimate fellowship afforded to Christians on earth. This is also done for the sake of the sinning individual (1 Cor. 11:27-32). (d) The erring member should be confronted, corrected, admonished, and urged to repent by all church members.

Step Four: If the unrepentant member does not eventually respond to these public and churchwide disciplinary actions, he is to be put out of the church and considered to be an unbeliever (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:2-13; 1 Tim. 1:20).

C. Restoration

The church should pray for the repentance and reconciliation of the those under discipline. When restoration is made, it may be appropriate for a testimony to be given to the church.

D. Cooperation With Other Churches

Church officers should encourage cooperation and mutual respect between evangelical churches in matters of discipline. This should be done so that the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures is not compromised to the dishonor of Christ.

E. Discretion

In some cases of discipline, great discretion is required; therefore, the elders are not obliged to give the church all the details. At church meetings that deal with these matters, the elders will inform the church of their proposed action and will invite members to approach them to gain further information or make their opinions known.

F. Children

Members of Grace Baptist Church include all believers who meet the qualifications in Section III above. Thus children may be members and—like all members—are subject to church discipline. During the formative childhood years, the primary responsibility for the spiritual discipline of such young church members falls to parents. (However, this does not exclude the possibility of corrective public church discipline). As young members pass from childhood into adulthood, corrective church discipline (if called for) should be expected to be more of a public matter.

VII. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

A. Scripture recognizes disciplinary action, integration with another church, death, or abandonment of one's profession of faith in Christ as the only grounds for termination of church membership.

B. In order for a church member to leave the church in good standing, he must leave for biblical reasons. General disaffection with the church, personality conflicts with church members, minor doctrinal disagreements, and the desire to escape church discipline are usually not legitimate grounds for such a departure. When members leave the church for unbiblical reasons, they do so without the church's blessing. It shall be at the discretion of the elders whether such members are to be dismissed with a public censure or formally put out of the church in absentia.

C. Those members who move from the area will be encouraged to integrate with a local church near their new home.

VIII. GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

A. The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole Lord over His church. He governs His church by the Word of God. His government is exercised in particular churches through the leadership of elders who have been set aside by the church to teach the Word of God and lead the flock. (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5)

B. Deacons are appointed to care for the administrative and practical affairs of the church. (1 Tim. 3:8-10)

C. A church, therefore, is comprised of a company of believers who have chosen men as elders and deacons in order to rule and to serve. The officers and members commit themselves to each other in a loving and harmonious bond.

D. All elders and deacons must agree to uphold the church constitution and must subscribe to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith in regard to all major issues of doctrine and polity. The phrase "all major issues of doctrine and polity" shall be understood to refer to, at the very least, the Articles of Faith as stated in Section II of this constitution. Any disagreements with the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith that do not contradict these core precepts shall be weighed by the elders; according to their judgment, such disagreements may or may not disqualify an individual from holding an office in the church.

E. If the church through the providence of God comes to have no elders, then the deacons shall assume leadership. If the church has no deacons, then the men of the church shall hold a men's meeting and choose two men of good reputation to act as leaders. These leaders shall immediately seek to place the church under the guidance of a church of like mind that has an established eldership. This relationship between the churches should normally be maintained until such time as elders are again raised up in place of those who have been providentially removed.

F. Recognizing those Scriptures that point out the importance of counsel in the decision making process (Prov. 11:14, 15:22), the elders of the church will be sensitive to the need to consult with the members of the church regarding important church matters. The counsel of the saints is not to be lightly esteemed. Major church decisions should only be made after all members have been thoroughly consulted. There is no basis for the idea that a democratic-style election is an act of sovereign and autonomous authority; nor is such voting the ultimate source of power in the

church. However, the uncoerced consent of the church membership constitutes the common suffrage of the church and is a necessary requirement in the decision-making process.

G. In light of the biblical teaching concerning male headship (1 Cor. 11:1-16, 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-15), the men of the church are not to take their special position of leadership lightly or passively. They should conscientiously strive to make a positive contribution to the decision-making process.

H. Fellowship with other like-minded churches is encouraged. Neither undiscerning cooperation nor rigid isolationism is healthy. Because the church benefits from meaningful relationships with other doctrinally sound churches, association with such churches (both in common projects and in fellowship) is appropriate.

IX. ELDERS AND GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

A. The qualifications for eldership are set out in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9. These passages, which form the guide to recognizing elders, are to be read and explained to the church whenever a man is being considered as an elder. (Note: The terms elder, pastor, pastor-teacher, overseer, and shepherd are synonyms.)

B. All elders rule and have the oversight of the local church. Authority resides in the plural eldership: it is the voice of the whole council of elders, and not one particular elder, which is authoritative. Elder plurality and parity means that neither elders nor church members should regard one elder's personal preferences as the collective will of the eldership. There should be mutual subjection among the elders and they should function together in harmony. In view of the fact that the responsibilities of this office are numerous and grave, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote his full time to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church. The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to those set apart for full-time

service. (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 1:7-9; James 5:14; 1 Cor. 9:9-11, 16:15-16; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2)

C. Appointment and Removal from Office

1. It is the Holy Spirit who raises up and equips men with a variety of gifts, and it is the responsibility of the church to recognize this gift and encourage its development. (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:7-11; Rom. 12:6-8; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 4:17)

2. The elders in particular should labor to prepare God's people for works of service (Eph. 4:11-12). They should be watchful to encourage potential elders by recognizing those who have the necessary grace and abilities and who are already functioning in the use of their gifts. Such should be brought before the church for recognition.

3. It may be necessary to call a pastor-teacher for the pulpit ministry from outside the church. This is a serious and important matter and calls for earnest prayer from every member. It demands great vigilance on the part of the elders, and in this the elders are to guide.

4. An elder's appointment shall be publicly ratified. He will be set apart for his duties by the prayers of the gathered church.

5. If an accusation against an elder is made, the directions of 1 Tim. 5:19-20 are to be followed. The other elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness, and impartiality.

6. The church officers are subject to the same disciplines as outlined in Section VI of the church constitution. If an elder falls into serious error or heresy, he must be removed from office.

7. An elder unable to fulfill his commitments for legitimate reasons, such as declining health and ability, should relinquish his office. Such retirement must be ratified by a meeting of the church.

8. An elder must not forsake the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer, and so should not extend his activities without prior consultation with the eldership. If an elder is called to another sphere of labor, this should be according to the goodwill and support of the church. The church should endorse his abilities for the same and not encourage ventures for which the appropriate gifts are lacking. (Acts 13:1-3, 20:28; Tit. 1:5)

D. Functions

The function of elders is to exercise shepherd-like pastoral care over the church. This involves:

1. giving themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word and the nurture of souls;
2. regulating all gatherings for public worship and supervising all the meetings of the church. This supervision shall include determining who will be allowed to be present at the meetings. When sensitive church issues are to be discussed, it is normally prudent to permit the presence of only church members. However, exceptions may be granted at the elders' discretion;
3. interviewing applicants for membership;
4. maintaining discipline;
5. administering the ordinances and supervising admission to the Lord's Table;
6. recommending to the church additional elders or deacons;
7. leading and overseeing the church in all its ministries and functions, including local evangelism; and
8. electing two elders among the council of elders to serve as the trustees of this church and to be responsible for all legal transactions. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Tim. 3:1-7)

X. DEACONS

A. The qualifications for deacons are also laid down in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6. These passages are to be read and explained to the church whenever a man is being considered for the office of a deacon.

B. Appointments

As with eldership, the ability to serve as a deacon is a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to His church. Those who are to serve as deacons will be chosen from the men who display the necessary gifts and abilities. The elders have the responsibility of recognizing the need for deacons and making recommendations to the church. The procedures for appointment to and removal from this office are the same as that for the eldership.

C. Functions

Deacons are called to:

1. relieve the elders so that they are able to fulfill their calling (see IX-D);
2. a ministry of mercy toward those in physical need, especially any such within the church;
3. administer the business and practical affairs of the church, as all accounts are to be properly audited; and
4. maintain the church premises. (Acts 6:2-4)

XI. THE ORDINANCES

A. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were especially instituted by Christ to represent and apply to believers the benefits of the New Covenant by visible and outward signs. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Luke 22:19-20)

B. Except under extraordinary circumstances, baptism by immersion is to be administered only to those believers who are becoming members of the church or of some other gospel church.

C. The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated bi-monthly or as often as is considered advisable by the church. Those eligible to commune at the Lord's Table are principally, though not exclusively, members of the church. Participants who are not members should be those (1) who have made profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and (2) who are members in good standing with some other local church. There may be exceptions to the second requirement, but such professed believers who are not currently members of a local church will be required to counsel with the elders before being admitted to the table.

XII. CHURCH MEETINGS

A. Where the church is gathered together in His name, the Lord is present. Therefore all meetings should be conducted in a spirit of worship and unity. (Matt. 18:20)

B. The elders should summon the church members for all matters of importance, such as considering the appointment of officers, the hearing of testimonies in support of applications for baptism and church membership, matters of discipline, the settling of doctrinal issues, the organization of evangelism, the sending out of missionaries, and major practical matters.

C. While members may bring matters to the church at large, it is advisable that they first take them to the church officers.

D. Every church meeting shall begin and end with prayer.

XIII. AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended by the elders only after consultation with the church body.

WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?

Like other Reformed Baptist churches, Grace Baptist Church is a Bible-centered, Christ-focused, grace-emphasizing, and gospel-proclaiming church. It embraces (and teaches) both the doctrinal truths championed in the Protestant Reformation and a Baptist understanding of believer's baptism and local church autonomy. Some refer to Reformed Baptists as Historic Baptists. This is because Reformed Baptists affirm the same Bible truths that the Puritan Baptists like John Bunyan affirmed in the 1600s, that prominent Baptists like Charles Spurgeon and William Carey affirmed in the 1800s, and that the Southern Baptist Convention affirmed until the mid-1800s.

Reformed Baptist churches regard the foundational truths of the Protestant Reformation as essential to a correct understanding of Bible truth. These principles are often summarized as *the Five Solas of the Reformation* (*sola* is the Latin word for *alone* or *only*):

Sola Scriptura, or the conviction that the Bible is the only flawless and authoritative source of God's truth, a book that is literally God's inspired communication to humans;

Sola Gratia, or the belief that God saves sinners by grace alone and not as a response to (or reward for) any works that we do;

Sola Fide, or the belief that God's salvation is apprehended through faith alone, and not through church institutions, baptism, church membership, or any other human activity;

Solus Christus, or the certainty that God's redemptive work is accomplished through the person of the risen Lord Jesus Christ alone; and

Soli Deo Gloria, or the persuasion that all of God's activities do (and all of our activities should) ultimately magnify the glory of God. This God-centered understanding of the world means that we must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God, and for God's glory alone.

Our commitment to these indispensable "*sola* truths" of the Reformation is what the word *Reformed* means in the phrase *Reformed Baptist church*.

Thus Reformed Baptist churches celebrate the sovereignty, holiness, wisdom, and love of the Triune God. We regard God as majestic and all-powerful, a God whom all men must worship with reverence, gratitude, and godly fear. We find God revealed to us in an error-free, God-breathed, and wholly sufficient Bible. The Word of God is our only authority for matters of faith and conduct. Reformed Baptist churches are governed by the Bible—not traditions, not men’s opinions, and not personal preferences. We also emphasize salvation by grace alone, apart from man’s works. God’s salvation is a free gift based upon the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. Sinners are declared righteous (or justified) by faith in Christ alone. We present the gospel to all sin-blinded men and tell them that true contentment comes when we repent of our sins and follow Christ wholeheartedly. A Reformed Baptist often describes his life’s purpose as glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

Reformed Baptist churches regard doctrine as important. We note that God Himself deems doctrine valuable: in the Bible, He repeatedly declares (and explains) His truth while also correcting error. We recognize the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith as a concise summary of the Bible’s main teachings. Many Baptist churches both in Europe and North America have used this document (or have produced local versions of it) over the past three hundred years.

The London Baptist Confession expresses a Reformed understanding of how a sovereign God saves sinners. This understanding is sometimes referred to as *the Doctrines of Grace*. All men need salvation because all men are totally depraved sinners. “Total depravity” doesn’t mean that sinful men are as bad as they could possibly be, but rather that sin corrupts the totality of the sinner. Spiritually dead sinners can only embrace the Lord Jesus Christ with saving faith if God first effectually calls them to a repentant faith; this election is not triggered by human works but rather by God’s grace (and since it is by grace, it is unconditional). Sins are forgiven because the Messiah’s full atonement was definite and certain: His death on the cross paid for all of the sins of all God’s people. Thus Jesus secured the salvation of every man who repents and believes the gospel. When the Holy Spirit regenerates

the lost sinner, He makes a radical and thorough change inside him. The Holy Spirit changes the sinner's very nature, breaks the power of sin inside him, and works in him both repentance and faith. This results in the sinner turning from his sins to trust and obey Jesus Christ. The man who has been truly saved by the Son of God will most certainly grow in holiness. Sin's hold over the believer is shattered; evil desires inside the believer are increasingly weakened and put to death. Although the Christian will face struggles and fight with the remnants of sin, he will mature and make spiritual progress. He will deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ. He will live a life that is committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ. And he will never abandon his faith: God will preserve and protect His people so they do not fall away.

Regarding corporate worship, Reformed Baptists follow the motto "sing the Bible, pray the Bible, read the Bible, and preach the Bible." We regard *good worship* as worship that God likes. Thus our first question when it comes to corporate worship services is not, "What do we want to do?" or "What makes us feel good?" but rather, "What does the Bible say that God wants us to do?" This results in worship services that are simple, reverent, God-focused, and saturated with the Word of God. We regard corporate worship as a dialogue between God and His people: God speaks to us through His Bible, accurate Bible teaching, and hymns that convey His truth, while we speak to God through prayers and hymns that guide us in biblical responses to our Creator. Unlike many modern churches, the worship services of Reformed Baptist churches place great emphasis upon the pastor's sermon. We regard this as one of the chief means by which God communicates to His people. Martin Luther, the champion of the Protestant Reformation, expressed this truth well: "People generally think: 'If I had an opportunity to hear God speak in person, I would run my feet bloody [to get to where He was]' . . . But you now have the Word of God in church. . . and this is God's Word as surely as if God Himself were speaking to you."

Reformed Baptist churches practice believer's baptism, not infant baptism. The New Testament covenant community consists only of those who have embraced Jesus Christ by faith and have been born again. Thus we administer baptism only to members of

the covenant community— that is, those who have been regenerated, converted, and made partakers of the New Covenant. Reformed Baptist churches place local church authority in particular local churches and their own ordained elders/pastors, not in a denominational headquarters or council. Reformed Baptist churches cooperate with one another and create associations to encourage mutual spiritual health; however, they affirm the autonomy of the local church.

Reformed Baptist churches are committed to evangelism and global missionary projects. We take Christ's free offer of the gospel to all people in our community, and we support missionaries who plant churches overseas. Some wrongly assume that a Reformed church will not be committed to fulfilling the Great Commission. Not true! Reformed Baptists are eager to preach the gospel to every creature, not only because God has commanded that we do so but because we are confident that God will save souls when His gospel—which is the power of God unto salvation—is proclaimed. Over the past three hundred years, Reformed Baptists have been at the forefront of many worldwide missionary endeavors. We continue to announce the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with enthusiasm and confidence.

Reformed Baptists are also committed to recovering a biblical understanding of the local church. While many local churches are plagued by grave errors, our response must not be to abandon Christ's church or simply criticize it. Rather, we must reform the church and restore it to its biblical pattern. The risen Christ is even today building His church, and it is a church against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail. For Reformed Baptists, this means that if we want to be a part of what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing on earth today, we must be a part of the local church that He is building. Church is not an optional extra for enthusiastic believers; neither is it a shopping mall where we show up only when we please and take only what tickles our fancy. The Bible says that the church is the Body of Christ and individual believers are members of that Body. That means every Christian has a calling (or a function) within a local church that he must fulfill. Reformed Baptists believe that every believer must be vitally connected to a local church and committed to the other believers there.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?

The word *gospel* means *good news*. Indeed, God proclaims good news to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Without this gospel, our lives here on earth would be hopeless; without this gospel, our lives in the next world would be marked by eternal punishment. The good news of Jesus Christ is really *great news*!

Before we can understand God's good news, we must first understand the bad news. The gospel is God's solution (and His only solution) to a serious problem that we all have. We must appreciate our problem in order to appreciate God's remedy to it.

The Bible tells us that every human being has sinned. We sin each time we break one of God's laws. We also sin every time we fail to do what God instructs us to do. The Bible says that sin is not restricted to outward actions; sin also includes wrong motives, unbiblical attitudes, and immoral thoughts. Sin is so common in our world that we often accept it as normal and don't become alarmed by it. But according to the Bible, sin makes us lawbreakers in God's courtroom. We are guilty of cosmic treason because we reject God's instructions. It's not that we have only sinned a few times; no, we are repeat offenders and serial sinners. Why do we sin over and over again? Because deep within our hearts, we are corrupted by sin. We want to sin. This is why the Bible says bluntly that "there is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10), "there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:12), "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves." (1 John 1:8)

We are sinful, but God is holy. That means God is morally perfect and unblemished by sin. He cannot approve of evil. Because God is holy, He must condemn and punish all sin. It would be unjust for a righteous God to permit sins to go unpunished. It is not true that God can simply ignore sin, pretend it never happened, or sweep it under the rug. He is a holy judge who must always do what is right; that includes judging all sin. (See Habakkuk 1:13, Hebrews 12:28-29, Psalm 7:11.)

This is the bad news: every one of us is a guilty sinner and we must stand before a holy God for judgment. If God gives us what we deserve, He will sentence us to eternity in Hell. That's only fair: as lawbreakers, it is right that we pay the penalty for our repeated disobedience to God. The Bible says that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and "the person who sins will die." (Ezekiel 18:20) If we stand before a holy God and give account for all our sins, we will be declared guilty and sentenced to eternal punishment. (See James 2:10, Psalm 130:3, and Psalm 143:2.)

But there is good news: the Lord Jesus Christ took the punishment that God's people deserved. God's method of rescuing sinners from their punishment is to pour out that punishment on a Substitute. Jesus Christ became the Sin-Bearer. All the sins of all God's people were placed upon Jesus; Jesus then went to the cross and received the full punishment that all those sins deserved. The full sin debt of millions of people was transferred to Jesus; the equivalent of millions of eternities in Hell was poured out on Jesus at the cross. Thus Jesus became the Lamb of God: He became the sacrificial lamb who died in the place of (and as a substitute for) God's people. In this manner, Jesus secured forgiveness for His people. For Christ's disciple, sin's penalty has already been fully paid; the sin debt no longer exists. The Christian looks at all his sins and says, "Placed upon Jesus and paid in full."

Thus the Bible says that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) It reports that Jesus "bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24) The Lord Jesus Christ was called "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Why did the Messiah die on the cross? "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18)

You can't earn this forgiveness. Jesus Christ takes away sins as a free gift, not as payment for something we do. Hell-deserving men are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24) Thus the Bible repeatedly declares that salvation is by grace, not human effort. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it

is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9; see also 2 Timothy 1:8-9 and Titus 3:4-7) It is faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ and trusting in His sin-paying death on the cross that results in forgiveness.

How must we respond to what God has done for sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ? With repentance and faith. Jesus came to rescue men from sin; He came to save them from lives full of sin. Thus God now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30; Matthew 4:17). *Repent* means to be so sorry for your sins that you stop doing them. The man who repents thinks differently about his sin: he stops doing his sin and turns to obey God. When a sinner repents, he will live his life like this: "What does God say in the Bible? Show me what God says and I will do it. No more sinning for me!" Real repentance is always married to saving faith. Faith is a trusting, believing, and loving commitment to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is confidence that Jesus indeed paid for sins at the cross and secured full forgiveness for His people. Faith is entrusting the eternal destiny of your soul to the Son of God and what He accomplished at Calvary. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36) "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:9,13)

Baptism does not make you a Christian. Church membership and believing various Bible stories does not guarantee that your sins are forgiven. Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven will enter." (Matthew 7:21) You must go to the Lord Jesus Christ yourself. You must face up to your sins, repent of them, and embrace the risen Christ with an energetic and sincere faith. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). *That's* true faith, the kind that accompanies salvation. Jesus also said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (John 6:37) Jesus receives sinners— that's good news!