

I. WE ARE... GOSPEL-CENTERED



Everyone has a foundation on which they build their lives. It's the guiding principle or belief that affects their decisions, shapes their outlook on the world, and in which they put their hope for a satisfying life. At Sovereign Grace Church, that foundation is the good news about Jesus Christ, also known as the gospel. And when we say we are "gospel-centered," we mean that the gospel (or good news) of Jesus Christ is the central message to guide our teaching and to transform our lives.

A. WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

It is the good news of what Jesus did to save sinners in his life, death, and resurrection.

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel** I preached to you, **which you received**, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins** in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that **he was raised** on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Christ died for our sins – sin is our problem

- God created and lovingly rules the universe, and so he has the right to our devotion, obedience, and worship. (Revelation 4:11)
- When we break God's rules and intentions for us it is called sin.
- Everyone has sinned, and that's a problem. (Romans 3:23)

Christ died for our sins – sin requires a punishment

- The penalty for sin is God's judgment - death (Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:27)
- Unless a way of escape is available, we must die the eternal death in hell for our sins (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Luke 12:5)
- But God *will allow an acceptable substitute to take our punishment in our place*

Christ died for our sins – Jesus takes our punishment on himself

- Because of his mercy, God sent his perfect Son, the God-man Jesus Christ, to take the blame and punishment for our sins (1 Peter 3:18, 1 Peter 2:24)
- Jesus takes our guilt and punishment on the cross and in exchange gives us his perfect record of obedience to God (1 Peter 2:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- Clothed in Jesus' perfect righteousness, God accepts us and forgives all our sin (Philippians 3:8, Romans 8:1, Colossians 1:13-14)

He was raised – the result of Jesus’ saving work is eternal life

- All who are forgiven their sins will follow Jesus in his resurrection to eternal life (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

...**which you received** – you must receive this good news to be saved

- Forgiveness and eternal life are not automatic; you must trust in Jesus and his saving work in order to be saved (Acts 16:31; John 11:25-26; Philippians 3:9)

B. THE GOSPEL PLAYS THE MAJOR ROLE IN OUR LIFE TOGETHER

It is the only saving message.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:6-7

The Scriptures say the gospel is central.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...

1 Corinthians 15:3

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God

Acts 20:24

The ‘shape’ of Scripture puts the gospel in the center.

- The Bible is a story of creation, fall, redemption and final re-creation, with Jesus as the hero of the story (Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 21:5)
- The only Bible writings repeated 4 times are the gospels – descriptions of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection

The gospel is central to transforming our lives.

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.

Romans 1:16

God intends the gospel to be the one transcendent truth that defines your life. God intends the gospel to be the ruling reality in your life – He intends the gospel to shape what you do, why you do it, and how you do it. The gospel is not meant to be shelved after conversion; it’s meant to be experienced by us daily.... This is why we gather on Sundays and during the week in care groups – to be amazed afresh at the gospel, to tighten our grip on the gospel, to get ourselves back to center on the gospel.

Derek Overstreet

C. HOW THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS US DAILY

Deeply embracing and trusting the gospel’s implications for our lives and what it says about God leads to a transformed life.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

- *Examples: Colossians 1:3-5 (the hope of heaven leads to loving other believers); 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (being bought with a price leads us to flee immorality); Hebrews 10:32-34 (knowing you have a better possession in heaven leads you to accept the loss of earthy possessions)*
- *“We are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on.” Tim Keller¹*

D. WE NEVER LEAVE THE GOSPEL BEHIND

One might think that after believing the gospel you move on to other things about the Christian life. And to be sure, there is much more to learn! But we make it our aim to daily get our hope from the gospel.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.

Colossians 1:21-23

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

Jerry Bridges²

¹ Tim Keller, Center Church (Zondervan, 2012), p. 48

² Jerry Bridges – *The Discipline of Grace*, p 46

II. WE ARE...NOT SOVEREIGN (GOD IS!)



Our church name is Sovereign Grace Church, and by calling it that we want to say something great about God, not about us. Specifically, by “sovereign grace” we are acknowledging that when it comes to everything in the Christian life, INCLUDING our salvation, it is God – and not us – who deserves all the credit for it. Our natural condition as sinners is so bad that only God has the power to come to our rescue and do everything necessary to give us eternal life. He saves us; we don’t save ourselves.

A. WHAT IS SOVEREIGNTY?

When we speak of God’s sovereignty, we are talking about his supreme authority and loving wisdom to determine what will happen and to make it happen in any sphere of our lives. For example, he is the one who ultimately determines...

- The outcome of our day-to-day planning (James 4:13-16)
- Our progress in growing spiritually (Hebrews 6:1-3)

So also, God is the one who ultimately determines who will be saved from their sins. He is sovereign in our salvation.

For he [God] says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Romans 9:15-16

B. YOU MUST REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL TO BE SAVED

We affirm that every person who gets saved does so through the process of hearing the gospel and making a conscious, voluntary choice to repent and believe in Jesus.

- Paul taught everywhere that a person must repent and believe the gospel (Acts 20:20-21)
- Jesus commanded people to repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15)

But behind our voluntary choice to believe the gospel is the sovereign action of God that creates our saving response.

Scripture teaches God is absolutely sovereign AND that man is responsible for his actions. This is seen all throughout Scripture and many times at the same place in Scripture:

- Joseph experienced the sovereignty of God and human responsibility (Gen. 50:20)
- Scripture is God centered not man centered (2 Cor 5:17-18)
- Scripture ultimately puts the accent on God's activity (John 1:12-13)

C. MAN'S NATURAL CONDITION IS NOT SIMPLY UNBELIEF BUT AN INABILITY TO BELIEVE

- We are captives, unable to break free from our predicament (Luke 4:18, 2 Timothy 2:24-26)
- Our minds are futile and ineffective when it comes to reacting to the gospel rightly (Ephesians 4:17-18, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Romans 8:6-7)
- We are spiritually dead because of our sins, unresponsive to the gospel medicine (Ephesians 2:1-2)
- We don't only need help; we need a new beginning, a new birth (John 3:3) [i.e., we need CPR, not a life-preserver]

D. GOD GRANTS US THE REPENTANCE AND FAITH WE NEED TO BE SAVED

God himself gives the new birth by his own free, unobligated, and merciful choice.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:37, 44

- If someone believes and is saved, it's because God overcame our inability to believe and drew us to Jesus, granting repentance (2 Timothy 2:25-26) and faith (Philippians 1:29)
- The name for this event is the "effectual call" of God (Example: Lydia in Acts 26:14)

E. GOD MADE A CHOICE TO SAVE SPECIFIC PEOPLE BEFORE HE CREATED THE WORLD

Not everyone receives this saving "effectual call" of God that results in faith and repentance and salvation. So how does God decide who receives this saving call? We don't know how, but we do know when God decides.

- Before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4, Revelation 13:8)

F. GOD'S CHOICE TO SAVE SOME PEOPLE, BUT NOT OTHERS, IS MERCY, NOT INJUSTICE

It can be troubling to think that God decides who will be saved – and who will not. It seems unjust to think that God has the power to save people but doesn't use it to save everyone. So how should we think about this?

- God has no obligation to save anyone because we are all guilty (Romans 3:10-12)
- If God saves anyone that is sheer undeserved mercy (Titus 3:5, Romans 9:15-16)
- "Some receive mercy, others receive justice, no one receives injustice." R.C. Sproul
- The reality that we are finite, attempting to understand an infinite God (Deut 29:29)

G. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Romans 8:30 summarizes the process of salvation we've been describing.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8:30

- Predestined – God assigned a destiny beforehand to those who would be saved
- Called – he granted them repentance and faith through the gospel
- Justified – he declared them righteous and blameless in his sight
- Glorified – he guaranteed them resurrected, eternal, sinless life in heaven

And so we say, salvation is God's doing from first to last. We experience it as we hear the gospel and respond with faith. But the reason we choose Christ is because God chose us first to be saved.

H. HOW GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY SHOULD AFFECT US

This understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation goes by the name "reformed soteriology" in our Book of Church Order. The name is not as important as the effect it should have on our souls.

- It is humbling (Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29)
- It is encouraging (Romans 8:30 – those who are predestined will be glorified)
- It makes evangelism hopeful (Acts 13:48, 2 Timothy 2:10)

Our goal at Sovereign Grace Church is to be Biblical. Although we never want to focus on narrow aspects of Reformed Theology at the expense of Biblical truths, we do embrace the general, informing components of Reformed Theology because we see them as Biblical truths.

Most importantly, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that unites all believers. We never want to lose sight of this central truth in our pursuit of doctrinal accuracy.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

- *Describe how your view of God's sovereignty was challenged or confirmed by the outline or message?*
- *In what ways can you grow in Biblically understanding these truths?*
- *How might these truths impact areas of your Christian life such as Sunday worship, the pursuit of relationships in the Church, a proper view of God, prayer, or suffering?*

III. WE ARE... COMPLEMENTARIAN



Complementarian is a big word you may have never heard or used! But it is a name that has been coined to summarize a certain understanding of how men and women are created to relate to each other. We believe that God receives the greatest glory, and we enjoy the greatest good when the God-given differences between males and females are celebrated as *complements* to each other, as beautifully completing one another. And this includes differences in the roles that God has assigned to us based on our genders.

A. BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS EQUALITY YET DISTINCTIVENESS IN PERSONHOOD

There is one God who exists in three distinct persons and each person is fully God.

- *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."* (Deuteronomy 6:4)
- *"I and the Father are one."* (John 10:30)
- *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, ...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* (John 14:16-18)

The three persons of the Trinity have distinctive glories, and differing roles. Though it is oversimplifying it, we can say that regarding our salvation the Father leads, the Son sacrifices, and the Spirit helps.

- *O, righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.* (John 17:25)
- *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...* (John 14:16-17)

Our God has made us in his image, in two distinct genders which are to reflect both his equality and his distinctiveness in our relationships with one another.

- *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* (Genesis 1:27)
- The roles of leading, sacrificing, and helping among distinct yet equal persons will therefore find expression in maleness and femaleness if we are to reflect accurately the image of God.

B. THE DISTINCTIVE IMAGE BEARING OF MALE AND FEMALE

It is good for us to think of men's and women's roles as *postures* - values and inclinations of the heart – which will find appropriate expression in any setting.

The man's primary God-intended posture is to **lead** – to initiate and take responsibility. Evidence from the Genesis account bears this out.

- The order of creation: Adam was created first, then Eve (Genesis 2:7, 22)
- The purpose of the woman: Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve. (Genesis 2:18)
- The naming of the woman: Adam named Eve. (Genesis 2:23)
- The primary accountability: Adam bore the primary responsibility for sin entering the world, even though Eve ate the forbidden fruit first. (Genesis 3:8-9)

The woman's primary God-intended posture is to **help** – to come alongside, to assist, empower and support. Evidence from scripture also bears this out.

- Eve was created by God as a helper to Adam (Genesis 2:18)
- Helping is not a demeaning role but a complementary role to the leadership role. After all, God the Spirit is a helper, too (John 15:26).

C. MALE AND FEMALE IMAGE BEARING IN THE HOME

A husband's posture is **sacrificial love** to promote his wife's thriving.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:25-27

- Domination, self-serving and a sense of superiority have no place in his role
- Biblical love for a wife flows from knowing first Christ's love for you (the church)

A wife's posture is **respectful submission** to her husband to support his leadership.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ...Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:24, 33

- Not blind submission or following him into sin; submission *as to Christ*, which is full of trust in God as she helps an imperfect man

D. MALE AND FEMALE IMAGE BEARING IN THE CHURCH

Since gender roles of men leading and women helping are part of our creation in the image of God, one would expect these roles to be evident in the church, which is the community in whom God's image is particularly being restored in us through Christ. And we find exactly that, particularly in the leadership role of the pastor.

- Pastors are assumed to be men in the list of qualifications (1 Timothy 3:2)
- The proving ground for pastors in the church – God's family - is how they lead in the home – the pastor's family - because the two settings are related (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Men are to lead in the home, and so also in the church.
- Paul did not permit women to be pastors (1 Timothy 2:12 – “teach” and “exercise authority over” refer to the pastor role)

There are abundant opportunities for women to help and even to lead and teach that don't conflict with the 1 Timothy 2:12 guideline. We want to affirm and release women into their God-given areas of gifting and fruitfulness. We believe this is best facilitated by maintaining distinctiveness in roles even as we affirm equality in personhood.

E. EQUALITY WITH DISTINCTIVENESS IN PERSONHOOD GLORIFIES GOD

When there is biblical leading and sacrifice and helping in the home and the church, divided among males and females who are equal yet distinct, we point to the glories of the Trinity. We point to the equality and distinctiveness of the Father, Son, and Spirit and their different roles of leading, sacrificing, and helping.

That's why it matters in the end. It's about being faithful to point to the glory of God, to point to the Trinitarian workings that lead to salvation from sin. This is why we maintain this position even as it is becoming less popular and less tolerated in our culture. We do not believe that cultural expressions of human sexuality that blur the differences between male and female are glorifying to God (such as same-sex marriage). Rather, we affirm the beauty, value and goodness of the gender differences created by God, which brings him glory and promotes human thriving.

IV. WE ARE...CONTINUATIONIST



The Bible is full of commands on how to live and think as believers in Jesus, as well as descriptions of the purposes and plans of God for our lives. One might be tempted to think or function as if we have the inherent ability to do these things if we just have the right motivation, training, resources, time, and energy. Yet Scripture paints a very different picture. We are constantly dependent on the Holy Spirit of God to sustain us, change us, and empower us to do God's will. So, our posture toward the Spirit is to reflect this.

A. THE SPIRIT'S PRIMARY WORK IS TO REVEAL THE REALITY AND PRESENCE OF CHRIST FOR CHRIST'S GLORY

Often conversations about the Holy Spirit move quickly toward some of the more spectacular or controversial aspects of his ministry. So, we need to start with his primary work, the work of revealing Christ to us.

And 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...

John 14:16-18

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

John 16:14

- Through the Spirit's presence we experience Christ's presence (Romans 8:9, Galatians 2:20)
- The Spirit is the member of the Trinity who applies to us the benefits of the salvation Jesus accomplished (Titus 3:4-5)
- So we are not centered on the Holy Spirit instead of Jesus, but we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit in order to know Jesus who is the center.

B. THE SPIRIT'S MINISTRY IS ESSENTIAL TO LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The range of what the Holy Spirit does to help us know Jesus and the blessings that flow from him covers all of a believer's life. We need what the Spirit has come to give, for the Spirit...

- Regenerates us, giving us new life in Christ (John 3:7-8, Titus 3:4-5)
- Sanctifies us, makes us more like Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22-23)

- Teaches us (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)
- Empowers us for serving others (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)
- Leads and guides us (Romans 8:14, Acts 16:7)
- Assures us of our salvation (Galatians 4:4-7)
- Gives power for evangelism (Acts 1:8)

In light of all the Spirit provides, we adopt a dependent posture toward the Spirit that involves at least three aspects.

C. OUR POSTURE IS ONE OF ACTIVE DEPENDENCE

In other words, it isn't enough to just believe the doctrine of depending on the Spirit, we need to actively pursue the Spirit's ministry in our lives.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...

Ephesians 5:18

- Indwelling by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are distinctly different things (compare Ephesians 5:18 with Ephesians 1:13-14)
- The Ephesians 5:18 command is an ongoing pursuit of the Spirit's control and influence in your life (literally, "be continually being filled")
- Actively pursuing the Spirit through the 'spiritual disciplines' of Bible meditation, prayer, and fellowship (Ephesians 6:17-18, Acts 2:42, 2 Corinthians 13:14)

D. OUR POSTURE IS ONE OF BROAD DEPENDENCE

We value all the range of spiritual gifts that the risen Christ has poured out for the building up of his church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

- Spiritual gifts are Spirit-empowered abilities to do different things for the glory of God as they build up others
- The range of spiritual gifts is broad, and all are to be appreciated, welcomed, and used appropriately and motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13; 14:40)

We understand that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ...For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:9-10, 12

- “The perfect” refers to the time of Jesus’ return at the end of this world
- Until that final Day, all gifts including tongues and prophecy will continue to be available according to the sovereign distribution by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11)
- All of these gifts and others are given for the growth of the church and are to be earnestly desired and practiced (1 Corinthians 14:1)
- Though some gifts such as tongues and prophecy have been abused, we don’t forbid them but rather seek their proper use for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7)
- This position can be described as “continuationist pneumatology,” referring to the continuation of the Spirit’s gift ministry until the final Day.

E. OUR POSTURE IS ONE OF EXPECTANT DEPENDENCE

In other words, we believe the Lord intends to reward our faith-filled pursuit of the Spirit’s ministry in our lives.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:11-13

- Cultivate openness to the Spirit’s activity and expect that if Jesus and rose to send us the Spirit, that he intends for us to experience the Spirit’s ministry (John 16:7)

V. WE ARE... A PASTOR-LED CHURCH



Every church has a leadership structure; somebody makes decisions, sets direction, and oversees the day-to-day life of the church. Our church is primarily led by Pastors. But we are not to think of their role merely as one of the decision-makers. Pastor-led Churches are an expression of Christ's own care for his people. The Good Shepherd cares for his blood-bought flock through Pastor-shepherds.

A. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS IS ONE OF SHEEP TO OUR SHEPHERD

I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:14-15

- We're called sheep, and sheep are dependent, vulnerable creatures who need to be taken care of by a shepherd (unlike mountain lions for example)
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep
- Jesus is the ultimate shepherd who feeds us and keeps us safe (Psalm 23)

But this does not rule out the need for 'on-site' human shepherds. On the contrary, it establishes the foundation and pattern for them.

B. JESUS SHEPHERDS US THROUGH PASTOR-SHEPHERDS

So I exhort the elders among you... 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. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Peter 5:1-4

- The presence of elders among gatherings of believers is assumed in Peter's letter (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1) and practiced and mandated elsewhere (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)
- These elders are to *shepherd* (or pastor) the flock of God, which is the people whom Christ obtained with his blood (Acts 20:28). We use the terms pastor and elder interchangeably.
- Jesus himself, as the *chief Shepherd*, puts his flock in the charge of the elders (assigns them to the care of pastors)

- We conclude that the intended place for believers to grow in their Christian life is in churches with elder leadership.

C. PASTORS MUST MEET CERTAIN QUALIFICATIONS

Jesus doesn't allow just anybody to care for his beloved people as pastors. They must meet certain qualifications of proven character and specific abilities that lend themselves to the spiritual health of the flock.

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.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

- These qualifications can be summed up as Christ-like character and the gift of teaching.
- Pastors are imperfect sinners who are also part of the flock themselves, yet they are to be *above reproach*, an example of humility, love, selfless service, and spiritual maturity.
- A Pastor must be submitted to the word of God and skilled in understanding and teaching it to others, which is central to his role.

D. PASTORS MUST DO CERTAIN THINGS

Pastors are to provide the following expressions of care for the church.

- Pastors feed the flock by teaching the Bible (1 Tim. 3:2; John 21:17/Matt. 4:4)
- Pastors govern the affairs of the church as overseers (1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:2)
- Pastors protect the church from false teaching and divisive people (Acts 20:29-31; Titus 1:9-11)

We should not think, however, that each pastor will bear the same load.

- There is a place for a leader of the leaders, a 'first among equals' (Peter among the apostles, Acts 1:15-22; James in the church of Jerusalem, Acts 15:13-21; Moses among the leaders of Israel)
- Some Pastors will teach more than others (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Some Pastors will be vocational and others bi-vocational

E. HOW PASTORS GOVERN OUR CHURCH

One big question behind any leadership structure is this: what **authority** do the leaders possess? When it comes to elders, we would call it ‘final governing authority’; that is, the authority to actually lead the church and make decisions that affect the church, including the appointment of new elders.

- Terms like “overseer” (1 Tim. 3:1), “rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17), and “steward” (Titus 1:7) all speak of duly appointed authority to lead
- Church-planting pastors appointed elders in churches (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5)
- The congregation plays a role in providing input and feedback on ministries and on potential elders, but final decisions are made by existing elders, and with the involvement of regional elders when appointing new elders³

Another big question is this: to who are the Pastors **accountable**? That is, who can speak into their lives about how they are exercising their authority and their roles? Pastor accountability exists on several levels.

- Foremost to Christ who is the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4; Heb. 13:17)
- To other Pastors (the New Testament goal is a plurality of Pastors), or in the absence of other Pastors, then to other leaders such as deacons
- To the congregation, in the same manner as one believer to another, ready to give and receive correction and input as needed to walk in holiness (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- To other Pastors within a region⁴

F. DEACON MINISTRY

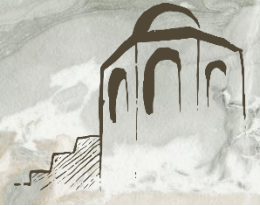
Beyond the role of elder or pastor, Scripture speaks of the role of deacon. Deacons free up the pastors to focus on their primary responsibilities by attending to the needs of the church in a variety of ways. Scripture doesn’t define in detail their responsibilities, but a few things are clear:

- Deacons must be spiritually mature, though they don’t require the gift of teaching (1 Timothy 3:8-13)
- They will often be involved in leading ministries that address physical or administrative needs of the church (Acts 6:1-6)
- In our church, deacons are community group leaders and may be leading other ministries but not all ministry leaders are deacons.

³ For a full explanation of the elder appointment process, see the Sovereign Grace *Book of Church Order*, current revision.

⁴ This is also described in the *Book of Church Order*

VI. WE ARE... MISSIONAL



The local church is very important in bringing the gospel to individuals and to the world. Though it is true that much evangelism takes place apart from participation in a local church – and may the Lord bless it with conversions! – nevertheless, we don't think that is the main way the Lord wants to see the gospel spread. Rather, it is through the planting and building of local churches from local churches.

A. THE 'GREAT COMMISSION' IS TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

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."

Matthew 28:18-20

- *Disciples* aren't just people who say Jesus is the Savior, but who adhere to his teaching and follow him as Lord
- *Baptizing* is what you do when a person puts their faith in Jesus, so this requires evangelism as the first step of making disciples
- *Teaching* is the ongoing process of making disciples, helping people grow in applying God's word to their lives

But what is the end goal of making disciples? Where is this all going?

B. THE END GOAL OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18

The church in splendor that gathers together in the new heaven and earth is the end goal of making disciples.

- It consists of people from every ethnic group on earth (Rev. 7:9-10)
- This church is called the "bride" of Christ that he came to purchase with his blood, people gathered together as one entity, one body set apart for Jesus (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:6-7)

C. THE IMMEDIATE GOAL OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

What you think you are building will influence how you build it. The Great Commission is not only to proclaim God's gospel but to create God's community, the church. Since the church in splendor is the end goal of the Great Commission, it is most natural for this to be accomplished through the immediate goal of planting and building local churches which are foretastes of that future assembly. The New Testament records this very thing.

- Paul and Barnabas were church planters, not simply evangelists (Acts 14:1-23)
- Every letter of Paul was to a local church, with the exception of Philemon, who nevertheless had a church in his house (Philemon 1:2)
- Paul's ongoing burden was for the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28)
- The book of Revelation was a word to the churches (Revelation 1:4)
- Local churches are the assumed context for disciples who are sheep needing shepherds (see the last lesson)
- The one-another commands of scripture assume a local church setting (ex. 1 Corinthians 11:33; 12:25; 16:20)

D. THE GREAT COMMISSION IS A COMMISSION TO THE CHURCHES

The gospel is the power of God for salvation, so it must be preached in order to make disciples. Individuals must do it. But where shall they come from? Answer: from the local churches.

- The Great Commission was given to the church in its infancy (the apostles), not simply to individuals (Matthew 28:16-18)
- Paul and Barnabas were sent out from the local church of Antioch (Acts 13:1-2)
- Paul expected the churches he planted to continue the work of reaching the regions where they were planted (Romans 15:18-19)
- Like begets like in the kingdom of God; churches reproduce to create other churches

E. IMPLICATIONS FOR HOW WE SEE OUR CHURCH'S TASK

We see it as our responsibility to be active in bringing the gospel first of all to the area where our church exists.

- Being salt and light through good works (Matt. 5:13-16; Jeremiah 29:7)
- Personal evangelism in our spheres of influence
- Planned church events – Christmas, Easter, summer outreach, etc.
- Partnering with specialty organizations that assist the church in our local outreach

But it is also our responsibility to be involved in bringing the gospel to Arizona and the western region.

- Looking for opportunities to plant a church in other cities
- Fielding inquiries from potential church planters who have a heart for a city in our western region
- Working in conjunction with other Sovereign Grace churches in the western states to bring this about (more on this in the next lesson)

Finally, it is our responsibility to be involved in the global Great Commission effort as we are able.

- Deploying called and trained individuals to church plant efforts near and far
- Supporting global mission through prayer and financial giving, with our priority being the shared mission of our family of churches through Sovereign Grace Ministries

F. THE POWER OF THE GREAT COMMISSION IS JESUS

We don't ever want to get the idea that the success of the Great Commission lies with us and our efforts. They are necessary, but they aren't ultimate. Our hope is in how Jesus concluded the Great Commission:

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:20

VII. WE ARE...UNITED AND INTERDEPENDENT



Any given local church can rightly be called 'the body of Christ' (ex. 1 Cor. 12:27) and most of our daily activity involves building up that local body. But the body of Christ is also bigger than any one church – as is the mission Jesus gave to the church. Jesus intends that there be deep relational, doctrinal, and committed connections between churches for their individual health and for the greater progress of the gospel.

A. A NON-SUPERFICIAL UNITY WITHIN A LOCAL CHURCH

When Jesus prayed for the disciples in John 17, he asked for unity between believers that was deeper than people simply agreeing to attend meetings together.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

John 17:20-21

- Unity among the Trinity is much more than being Facebook friends
- Jesus calls us to maintain unity in love (Ephesians 4:1-3)
- He also calls us to attain unity in doctrine (Ephesians 4:11-14)
- This unity is a full-orbed agreement to walk together as brothers, sisters, and friends who care about each other and seek to let nothing divide us (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:1-2)

B. A NON-SUPERFICIAL UNITY AMONGST LOCAL CHURCHES

Jesus' prayer for our unity extends beyond local church borders to all believers.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one...."

John 17:20

- The unity of love and doctrine within a local church is to find expression with believers from other churches, for we all have the same Lord (Ephesians 4:4-6)
- Therefore, at a minimum we pursue the unity of love with all other churches

- But we also pursue a deeper relational and doctrinal unity with some churches where we commit to walking together as friends and co-laborers in the gospel under a common governing structure. (ex. the Acts 15 Jerusalem council, esp. vs. 1-2, 28-31)

In our case, pursuing this deeper relational and doctrinal unity means forming an ‘ecclesiastical union’ with the family of Sovereign Grace Churches.

“The Sovereign Grace churches together voluntarily form a unified ecclesiastical body to glorify God as an expression of the bride of Christ. The churches share spiritual and material resources for the furtherance of our common mission under a common government, which guards our fidelity to our common Statement of Faith and standards of corporate holiness.”⁵

C. BENEFITS OF OUR ‘ECCLESIASTICAL UNION’ WITH SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCHES

The benefits of being substantially connected to other churches (as opposed to ‘going it alone’) are many:

We receive cooperation in mission.

“...that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me”

John 17:20-21

- Sovereign Grace Ministries – the entity within Sovereign Grace Churches that facilitates our international ministry, produces worship music, handles communication and administrative tasks
- Pastors College for training church planters and pastors

We receive cooperation in care.

- Annual pastor/wife conference – intentionally relational
- A network of pastors for wisdom, counsel, and fellowship
- Regional leaders dedicated to caring for the churches

Our doctrinal fidelity is safeguarded.

- Common statement of faith changeable only by a supermajority
- Ongoing theological education available at Pastors College
- Ordination standards for elders

We receive accountability in crisis.

- Commitment to care for a church that loses a pastor
- Policies in place to help a church going through division
- A fair process for handling complaints or accusations against leaders and members

⁵ Sovereign Grace, *Book of Church Order*, revision May 2013, pg. 49

We benefit from shared resources.

- Funding for church planting efforts
- Pastors willing to preach at each other's churches
- Joint conferences for singles, youth, etc.

D. YOUR PART IN THIS

Should you become a member of Sovereign Grace Church here's how you can be involved in supporting our interdependent family of churches:

- Commit to protecting the unity of our church. The unity of our network of churches depends on the unity of each individual church.
- Support this local church with your prayers, participation, and finances. Some of our budget goes to supporting Sovereign Grace Ministries to fund our common mission together.
- Where possible support our national and international mission through our mission fund, take advantage of conferences and become familiar with what God is doing in our churches through our church network website www.sovereigngraceministries.org.
- Be an influence for the gospel in our community and look forward with expectation as Christ continues to build his church through his all-sufficient grace.