

**CONSTITUTION OF  
SOVEREIGN GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH  
14703 SILVERDALE DRIVE  
DALE CITY, VIRGINIA**

**PREAMBLE**

We, the members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, do hereby establish and adopt the following articles as the constitution to which we and all subsequent members do voluntarily covenant to submit ourselves.

**ARTICLE I--NAME**

The name of this local assembly shall be Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, which is, located at 14703 Silverdale Drive in Dale City, Virginia. Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is committed to the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27b) and, thereby, "to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24b).

**ARTICLE II--PURPOSE**

The purpose of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, in love and obedience to her Savior and covenant head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is to worship the triune God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) by continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in observing the ordinances, and in prayers (Acts 2:42), which require the members to assemble themselves together (Heb. 10:25) that the saints might be perfected for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12) and through this ministry that the elect might be saved (II Tim. 2:10; John 17:2; Matt. 28:18-20) and that the members of this church, both individually and collectively through a proper exercise of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 13; Rom. 12:6) sovereignly bestowed at regeneration (I Cor. 12:13, 18), might be built up in the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13) unto godliness (Titus 1:1) to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) so that each member, by good works, might glorify the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

**ARTICLE III--MEMBERSHIP**

***1. Qualifications.***

**a. Church Membership.** The membership of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church shall consist of born again believers (John 3:3; Titus 3:5) who:

(1) Have publicly confessed that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior through the ordinance of water baptism. It is the doctrinal conviction of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church that baptism is to be administered once, as an ordinance of the church, to believers only, and that the biblical mode of baptism is to be by immersion or dipping in water (Acts 8:36-39a; Rom. 6:3-5).

(2) Present a signed application for membership to the elders using the official membership application of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church.

(3) Are unanimously approved by the elders after examination as to their Christian doctrine and life (and, if coming from other churches of like faith and order, as to a letter of recommendation or an approving answer to a letter of inquiry into their standing with that church).

(4) Are officially presented to the congregation on a Lord's Day meeting following approval by the elders. New members will then be personally recognized by the congregation following the meeting of the church symbolized by extending to each one the right hand of Christian fellowship.

(5) Anyone who is saved by the Lord through the ministry of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church and desires to become a member will be received into membership immediately upon them receiving the ordinance of water baptism, administered through the church, and submitting a signed church application. (It will be the normal practice for new believers in Sovereign Grace Baptist Church to attend a doctrinal class soon after their conversion. Although attendance at this class is expected for new believers, it is not a requirement for church membership).

***b. Voting Membership.***

(1) Believing that it is ordained of God that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man (I Cor. 11:3) and that in the meeting of the church women are to learn in silence with all subjection and not to teach or usurp authority over man (I Tim. 2:11-12; I Cor. 14:34-35), those church members, therefore, who have the right and responsibility to vote in transacting the affairs of the church are to be male heads of households and other 21-year-old male church members who are not heads of households. It is the consensus of this church that these men must have met the qualifications for church membership enumerated above, be at least 21 years of age and meet the

following requirements to be recognized as voting members by the church:

(a) Manifest the fruits of repentance in their lives (Acts 26:20; I John 5:2-3; II John 6; III John 3-4).

(b) Voting members who are providentially hindered from being present at a business meeting may vote in advance on known issues by presenting a signed absentee ballot to an elder. Should any church member (whether voting member or not) object to the voting membership of a church member, the objection and the grounds for it will be made known personally to the elders for biblical resolution at least two weeks prior to the regularly scheduled quarterly business meeting at which official approval for voting membership is being sought.

**2. Duties.** Every member of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is expected to:

a. Be in voluntary submission to the doctrinal position of the church and the elders (Heb. 13:7, 17) as they carry out the functions of their office “in the Lord” (I Thess. 5:12). (Also see Article IV and V below.)

b. Be faithful in all duties essential to the Christian life (Matt. 22:36-40; Jas. 2:8).

c. Attend regularly the meetings of the church of the Lord's Day (Rom. 1:4; Acts 20:7; Heb. 10:23-25) unless temporarily and geographically, separated from the church by divine providence; for example, due to missionary work, prolonged bodily infirmities, or in transit from Sovereign Grace Baptist Church to another church because of geographical dislocation.

d. Give willingly and regularly to the church of their labors and/or finances as God providentially enables for its support and its causes (I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:7).

e. Share in the church's organized work and responsibilities with Spirit-wrought conviction, enablement and faithfulness (I Cor. 12:4-7).

**3. Rights**

a. All members share equal spiritual rights and privileges (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 3:6, Jas. 2:1) but not all have equal God-appointed functions, gifts and responsibilities (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-6:4; I Peter 3:1-7).

b. Church membership and voting membership rights and responsibilities are stated at various places throughout this constitution.

**4. Discipline.**

a. The primary purpose of church discipline is to restore the erring believer to fellowship and willful obedience to the Word of God that the restored believer might afterward yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness and that Christ might be glorified, not blasphemed, by a godly manner of life (Heb. 12:10-11).

b. Should a member become an offense to the church and thus to Christ, the head of the church, by reason of immoral or unchristian conduct, by persistent breach of covenant vows (i.e., failing to fulfill the duties of membership as outlined in paragraph 2 above), or comes into unreconcilable disagreement with the church's doctrinal position (Article IV below), one or more of the following disciplinary steps will be taken, in order, under the oversight of the elders:

(1) Private rebuke of a member (Matt. 18:15).

(2) Plural rebuke of a member (Matt. 18:16). This is the first disciplinary step for an elder, for an elder must not be accused except before two or three witnesses (I Tim. 5:19).

(3) Public rebuke by the elders of a member before the congregation (Matt. 18:17a; I Tim. 5:20).

(4) Official exclusion by the church of a member from the Lord's Supper and public exercise of spiritual gifts and responsibilities in the church (Matt. 18:17b). A voting member (including an erring elder or deacon) forfeits his right to vote in the affairs of the church if this disciplinary step is administered to him.

(5) Official rejection from the fellowship of the church by the elders, but only after two official admonitions before the congregation when persistence in ungodliness and/or heresy willfully and defiantly occurs (Titus 3:10-11). This involves exclusion from the Lord's Supper, exercise of spiritual gifts in the church and the right to vote if a voting member.

c. As a final resort, a rebellious believer who in a most grievous and acute manner persists in his offense and disruption of the church will be publicly and finally rebuked before the congregation, dismissed from membership in Sovereign Grace Baptist Church and delivered over to the severe chastening hand of God. The church will be publicly instructed to have no company or fellowship with him in his most hideous and blasphemous sin (I Cor. 5:4-13; I Tim. 5:19-22; I John 5:16b). It is believed that the proper discipline exercised against false but professing believers in the church will, ultimately, result in self-wrought departure from church membership because they were spurious believers (II Pet. 2:20-22; I John 2:29).

d. Any member who has been excluded from the Lord's Supper and public fellowship of the church may be restored to fellowship with the church by the unanimous approval of the elders, or remaining elders if the offender

is an elder, upon evidence before the elders of his repentance toward God and public confession and apology to the congregation if his offense was against the church. If previously a voting member a 3/4 vote of the total voting membership present is also required to restore his voting rights and responsibilities in the church.

#### **5. Termination of Membership**

a. The membership status of a member, including both voting and non-voting members, will be terminated whenever the member no longer fulfills the duties of membership. Except for physical death or disciplinary dismissal, the termination of membership will be officially announced to the church at a regularly scheduled quarterly business meeting. Cessation of membership in Sovereign Grace Baptist Church (not the body of Christ) will result from:

(1) Physical death.

(2) Voluntary termination to become a member of another church. Members who depart the church due solely for geographical reasons may retain a non-voting membership status in Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, if requested, until such time they join the fellowship of another church. Normally this time will not exceed one year.

(3) Disciplinary termination for unfaithfulness in fulfilling the responsibilities stated in paragraph 2 above. Disciplinary termination does not necessarily mean that such a person is an unbeliever, but it should serve as a most solemn admonition for that one to examine himself whether he be in the faith or a reprobate (II Cor. 13:5), especially if dismissed for rebellious persistence in offending and disrupting the church.

b. Termination of membership will be officially noted in the minutes of the applicable quarterly or special business meeting of the church. Letters of termination or dismissal will not be issued by the elders, unless specifically requested, except for dismissal for disciplinary reasons. In the latter case a letter of dismissal will be written by the elders and provided to the dismissed member stating the circumstances and biblical grounds for the termination.

### **ARTICLE IV--DOCTRINE AND LIFE**

1. **The Bible.** The 66 books of the Bible are the only authoritative, certain, inerrant, and infallible rule of faith and obedience. Therefore, no human organization, institution, individual, or personal experience can be a guide or standard for Bible doctrine, because there is no authentic leading of the Holy Spirit that is not wedded to the words of the Bible.

2. **First London Confession of Faith.** Believing it to be scriptural, although not infallible, Sovereign Grace Baptist Church adheres to the First London Confession of Faith (1646). All who are united to Sovereign Grace Baptist Church must study and willingly submit to the teaching of the First London Confession of Faith.

3. **Non-Central Doctrine.** All scriptural truth is important and essential for doctrine and life; yet, not all truth is central. Therefore, exceptions may be granted on doctrines determined to be non-central by the discernment and unanimous approval of the Elders. This does not mean that non-central doctrines are not important; rather it means that certain doctrines are not considered, in and of themselves, to be central to the Christian faith.

4. **Voluntary Doctrinal Submission.** The elders, who are charged by God with the spiritual oversight and building up of the church (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 3:5-15), will determine, on an individual basis, what liberty may be granted to a member's doctrinal views (including the doctrinal convictions of visiting or guest speakers in the church) that are not in harmony with this constitution and not central, although important, to the Christian faith. The elders will take into consideration that all believers are finite and that no man or church can infallibly interpret the Word of God in every area. Yet, they will also consider that it is the right of any autonomous church to set forth its own doctrinal convictions, including areas where liberty is or is not to be granted. Consequently, the position of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is this: "Every Christian church is entitled to declare the terms of admission to its own fellowship. In the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of fellowship too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own." Therefore, members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church are assumed to voluntarily submit to the terms of this constitution; if not, they should not join; or, if after having joined, they can no longer submit they should peacefully withdraw to some other church whose terms they believe to be more scriptural.

5. **Doctrines of Special Concern to the Church.** In light of the above, the following doctrinal subjects are addressed to clarify the position of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in areas that are of special concern to many

within evangelical Christianity:

a. **Soteriology.** (The Doctrine of Salvation). The eldership and deaconate, including all teachers of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, by Spirit-wrought conviction and church covenant, are to proclaim the whole counsel of God and “to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24b) as summarized by the doctrines of: (1) total depravity (which includes the legal imputation of Adam's first sin to the whole human race); (2) unconditional election; (3) definite atonement (which teaches the penal satisfaction of Christ's substitutionary death for the elect only); (4) effectual grace; and (5) final perseverance of the saints. While ideally, every member of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church should hold each of the above doctrines with conviction, it is not mandatory to hold to the definite or particular design of the atonement to be a member, as long as he ascribes to (although he may not, relatively speaking, fully understand) sovereign unconditional election and voluntarily submits to the teaching of the church on definite atonement as one of the doctrines of grace, as they are commonly called. As a safeguard in asserting the sovereignty of God in all things and human responsibility in salvation to repent and believe the gospel, the church is committed to teach the doctrines of grace in the context of the whole counsel of God and in their application to the believer's lives. This approach is taken to prevent the teacher and those taught from becoming distorted and cultic in their doctrine, rather than fruitful in their life and practice of the grace of the doctrines as they are revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both the topical and expository methods of preaching and teaching will be exercised in Sovereign Grace Baptist Church.

b. **Spiritual Gifts.** The triune God, through the victory of the resurrected, ascended and glorified Christ and by the working of the Holy Spirit, has sovereignly bestowed spiritual gifts (abilities) upon the Church universal, the spiritual body of Christ. This is clearly set forth in the context of the Word of God (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; I Pet. 4). The spiritual gifts are of two types; temporary and permanent. The temporary gifts were given primarily for the establishing of the foundation of the infant Church and to authenticate the Apostolic messengers and their message. The permanent gifts are given primarily for the qualitative and quantitative growth of the superstructure of the body of Christ as carried out through the ministry of local churches (Acts 9:31). In that Christ has gifted every member of His body with one or more spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3,6), it is the duty of each member to recognize and exercise his/her gift(s) in Christian love (I Cor. 13) according to biblical principles and the grace that has been granted to them, neither going beyond nor falling short of exercising the gift(s) for the edification of the saints and glorification of God (I Cor. 12:7; I Pet. 4:10-11).

c. **Biblical Evangelism.**

(1) **The Meaning of Evangelism.** Basically, “evangel” means “good message” or “good news.” Biblically, evangelism is the setting forth of the good news of the Gospel of Christ to sinners.

(2) **The Message of Evangelism.** Broadly speaking, the message of evangelism is the Gospel message, the proclamation of the good news of the saving grace of the triune God. This involves a declaration of the whole counsel of God with its main theme centering upon the person and work of Jesus Christ and a divine summons to repentance and faith in Him (Luke 24:46-47). More specifically, the Gospel message is fourfold. It is a message about God, about man and his sin, about Christ and his salvation of sinners from sin, and a summons to repentance and faith in Christ as Lord and Savior by all who hear it.

(3) **The Means of Evangelism.** Biblical evangelism is not a clever device of man, but it is a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6) in both the proclaimer (I Thess. 1:5) and the hearer (Eph. 1:19; 2:1-5) of the message of evangelism (Rom. 10:17; I Cor. 1:18). The power of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the individual and collective life and exercise of spiritual gifts in the local church, is the divinely ordained means by which the ministry of evangelism takes place (Acts 13:2-4; Eph. 4:12). The divine order or means is recorded in Acts 9:31 “(The churches\* . . . throughout Judaea and Galilee and Samaria . . . were\* edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were\* multiplied.)” When the churches were edified while walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, biblical evangelism took place--the churches were multiplied.

(4) **The Methods of Evangelism.** Evangelism in the New Testament takes on many forms or methods, both in public and private and by those Christians who have the spiritual gift of evangelism and those who do not. Whatever method is used is to harmonize with the biblical teaching of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility (Matt. 11:25-30; John 1:12-13; 6:37). Unbiblical expressions that exalt man's wisdom (I Cor. 1:17-29) and the use of human tricks and gimmicks must be avoided (Acts 8:18-21; II Cor. 4:2).

(a) **The Formal Work of Evangelism.** The formal work of evangelism is the work of Christians in the local church who have the spiritual gift of evangelism (Eph. 4:11), a gift which every Christian does not have. It involves ambassadors of Christ (II Cor. 5:20) in direct confrontation with the lost with the message of evangelism (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:22-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 17:22-33) by means of preaching or heralding the Gospel of Christ (Acts 8:4; Rom. 10:15).

(b) **The Informal Work of Evangelism.** The informal work of evangelism is not confrontation evangelism by one who has the spiritual gift of evangelism. Rather it is non-confrontation evangelism which is the responsibility of every Christian (including those who have the gift of evangelism) to evangelize by a godly walk (I Thess. 2:12; 4:12) and good works (II Pet. 3:12; Matt. 5:16). Every Christian is an epistle known and read of all men (II Cor. 3:2) having been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The Scripture clearly teaches that Christians influence the world by their difference from it, rather than their likeness to it (Rom. 12:1-2). Therefore, every believer is to evangelize the world by faithfully abiding in Christ, loving the brethren and testifying of Him (John 15).

(5) **The Motive of Evangelism.** The motive of evangelism is that God's elect may “obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (II Tim. 2:10).

**d. Biblical Separation.** There are two aspects of biblical separation: separation from sin unto God based upon the clear revelation of the Word of God and abstaining from certain amoral things based upon biblical principles derived from the Word of God.

(1) **Separation from Sin.** With regard to separation from sin, there can be no compromise (I Cor. 5; II Cor. 6:14-18). The believer must, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, strive to be holy as God is holy (I Pet. 1:16) and to be separate from and rebuke sin in all of its manifested forms (Eph. 5:11-12). This does not mean that wisdom is not to be exercised or that a believer is to isolate himself from the world, but that he is to be separate and holy in the world without being conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2), being in loyal obedience to all those moral precepts established in the Word of God (Heb. 10:22-25).

(2) **Separation from Things that Are Amoral.** With reference to the abstaining from certain things which are amoral, every believer is to strive for spiritual discernment and maturity. Participation in, use of, or abstinence from them in light of Spirit-wrought conviction must be based upon biblical principles, which include but are not limited to, the principles of Christian liberty and the weaker brother. In this regard, caution must be constantly exercised against the two extremes of legalism and antinomianism. The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

(a) **Fear of God.** As a servant of Christ, all actions must be based upon a motive of love to God, and all objects must be used for His glory. The term “Liberty” is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin (I Cor. 10:31; I Tim. 4:4-5; I Pet. 2:16).

(b) **Love of Brethren.** Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; I Cor. 10:23; 8:9-13).

(c) **Compassion for Sinners.** Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and that behavior chosen which will, if God pleases, win some (I Cor. 9:19-22; Jas. 5:20; I Pet. 3:1; Jude 23).

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\*There is good manuscript support for the singular forms “Church” and “was,” but the meaning is not affected for, if singular, local churches are understood as the expression of the one true Church, the spiritual body of Christ.

(d) **Watchfulness over the Soul.** Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to persevere (I Cor. 9:23-27).

(3) **Principle.** Where God has not prohibited certain amoral practices in His Word, the Christian has liberty to participate in them if done so in wisdom and in harmony with biblical principles, including those listed above. In this regard, the church must be careful not to transgress against the liberty of the individual believer's conscience before his God and the God given sanctity of his home. On the other hand individual church members must be careful not to transgress against the God given sanctity of the church collectively, because God has ordained it to be the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15) and custodian of the Kingdom of God during this dispensation (Matt. 21:43). Only through the internal application of biblical principles by the indwelling Spirit can these two dangers be avoided. It must be remembered that God is sovereign in sanctification (Phil. 2:13) just as He is in predestination, calling, justification, and glorification (Rom. 8:30).

**e. The Meeting (Worship Service) of the Church.**

(1) The meeting of the local church is an act of worship (service) that occurs when the whole church\* comes together into one place (I Cor. 14:23, 26; 11:20) under the spiritual oversight of the elders (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17) to carry out the purpose of a local church. This purpose, as viewed by Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, has been defined, although not exhaustively in Article II above.

(2) The meeting of the church may take on one or more of the many facets of worship set forth in Scripture; for example, preaching, teaching, prayer, praise, observing the ordinances, and conducting church business

meetings (Acts 6:1-3). Three things in particular, however, characterize the meetings of local church. They are:

(a) Meeting under the spiritual oversight of the Elders in the exercise of their office.

(b) Meeting where the whole congregation comes together in one place to carry out the stated biblical purpose of the local church. (Therefore, Bible classes conducted where the whole congregation is not gathered or assembled together in one place, even when within the same facility, are not considered to be meetings of the whole congregation, e.g., Sunday School classes that are in separate rooms in one building. They are extensions of the church's ministry, but not a meeting of the whole church in the biblical sense of a local church assembly).

(c) Meeting where the primary purpose is to direct the congregation's acts of worship or service and fellowship vertically toward the triune God. (Therefore, gatherings of the whole church where the elders are not functioning in the exercise of their office, except when the elders appoint a man to lead in their absence, are not considered to be meetings of the church e.g., where the primary purpose is to direct the fellowship horizontally from one member toward another to fulfill social and recreational needs of the congregation).

f. ***Church Order and Exercise of Spiritual Gifts in the Meetings of the Church.*** Christ, the Head of the Church, gave gifts to the Church for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry and for edification of the body of Christ that it might not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:11-12, 14). This passage, when applied to the official meetings (worship services) of the church teaches several important things relating to church order and exercise of spiritual gifts. With respect to the role of both men and women in the meetings of the church, specific qualifications and regulations are set forth in the Word of God. Although these specifications may seem restrictive in nature to many who are unfamiliar with New Testament Christianity, it should be remembered that the Christian ministry of the saints is not restricted to the exercise of spiritual gifts in the local church, but it extends far beyond the worship services of the church; even unto the ends of the earth, e.g., a mother's faithfulness in teaching and bringing up their children in the knowledge of the holy scriptures (I Tim. 2:15; II Tim. 3:15).

(1) ***The Role of Men in the Church.***

(a) The role of elders and deacons is stated in paragraph 2., Article V below.

(b) Because of the order of creation and Adam's not being deceived in the first sin, God has ordained that man is to be the head of the woman (Gen. 3:16; I Cor. 11:3) and that wives are to submit to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22, 24) not usurping authority over them (I Tim. 2:12). Adherence to these biblical commands in the marriage relationship is a divine picture of Christ's headship over the Church and the Church's submission to Christ (Eph. 5:23-24).

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\* The term "whole church" is to be understood relatively not absolutely, for the church may meet without each and every member being in attendance.

(c) The importance of the body of Christ in its spiritual union with Christ is emphasized by the fact that He has gifted certain men, not every believing man, to minister to it (Eph. 4:11) when assembled for worship. It is commanded that they so minister in an orderly manner and in submission to one another (I Cor. 14:27-33). For example, men who are "new comers" to the faith cannot be elders (I Tim. 3:6). Neither should those men who lack doctrinal discernment teach; rather they should learn from those gifted by Christ (Eph. 4:11-12, 14).

(2) ***The Role of Women in the Church.***

(a) The role of women in the meetings of the church is silently to join in the worship services, to set a godly example by their appearance and conduct, and to learn with "a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Tim. 2:10; I Pet. 3:4).

(b) Because of the order of creation and Eve's being deceived in the first sin (I Tim. 2:13-14), women, in the meetings of the church, are to learn in silence with all subjection (I Tim. 2:11). A woman's desire is to be to her husband and he is to rule over her (Gen. 3:16; I Cor. 11:8-9). Women are not permitted to speak publicly in the church, or to teach, or to usurp authority over man (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:12). They must not ask questions in the meetings of the church, for it is a shame, an ugly thing, for "a woman to speak in assembly" (literal translation of I Cor. 14:35).\* It is the consensus of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church that women should be silent in the worship services with the only exception being granted when responding to a personal address from an elder (e.g., answering questions in testimony to their salvation during the administration of the ordinance of water baptism).

(c) Participating in congregational singing and reading of Scripture is to be permitted in the meetings of the church for women, even children, because such congregational acts of worship are not unsubmitive or a usurping of authority over man as would be the case if a woman were to speak individually and publicly and the whole congregation, including the men, were required to listen to her speak.

(d) I Timothy 3:11 (which should be translated: "Women likewise must be grave . . . in all things") teaches, in context, that women who meet the qualifications of the verse, whether married, unmarried, or widowed, may

help the deacons in carrying out their ministry of serving to meet the outward needs of the church. It is expected that the wives of elders and deacons meet the qualifications of this verse. (See Article VI for the role of women in speaking and teaching in outreach ministries of the church external to the worship services).

g. **Family Life.** Every member of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is exhorted to follow the Scripture in home government. God has required that godliness in the home have a high priority in every believer's life. The home holds central attention in God's Word and is the object of frequent exhortations in the Word of God. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness but firmness (Eph. 5:23, 25; I Pet. 3:7). Women are to be subject to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:24; I Pet. 3:1-6). Children are responsible to obey reverently their parents (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-2). Parents are responsible to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) by holy example, catechizing, firm and loving discipline according to biblical standards (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15, 17) and by providing Christian education during the school age years through Christian schooling, home schooling or other means that ensure a Christ-centered education. To otherwise educate our children, except in those rare instances where it is not possible, is to fail to do that which God has clearly commanded. These primary responsibilities of home government, prayerfully executed, will honor the name of Christ in the spheres of the home, the church, and the world without one sphere transgressing another.

h. **Eschatology.** (The Doctrine of Last Things). The eldership and deaconate, including all teachers, of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, by personal conviction and church covenant, are premillennial in their interpretation of the prophetic portions of the Word of God. But, since no man knows the day or hour of the return of the Lord (Matt. 25:13; Mark 13:32), the timing of the rapture of the saints and Christ's second coming (I Thess. 4:15-17) will not, in and of themselves, be made a test of fellowship or a basis for church membership or discipline.

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\*I Cor. 11:5 does not contradict I Cor. 14:34-35, but refers to praying and prophesying in public, not in the official meetings of the church. The meetings of the church "in assembly" does not occur, in context, until vv. 17-18. In v. 2 of the KJV, the word translated "ordinance" should be translated "traditions."

## ARTICLE V--CHURCH ORGANIZATION

1. **General.** Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is autonomous; that is, a self governing, body of born again believers in covenant union with the Lord Jesus Christ, each one having been spiritually baptized into His body, the Church, with the Holy Spirit at new birth (Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13).

2. **Biblical Organization.** The biblical organization of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church will be as follows:

a. Christ--the Head and Shepherd of the Church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). Christ, as the Head of the Church, ministers to the local church, the expression of the one Church of God (Acts 20:28), the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13), in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

b. Elders--undershepherds and overseers (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

(1) Sovereign Grace Baptist Church will be sensitive to the need of recognizing God appointed elders to meet its need for spiritual oversight believing that Christ, the Head of the Church, gives all necessary spiritual gifts to each local assembly. At least one elder must have and shall exercise the gift of pastor-teacher in a full time capacity, not precluding outside interest or activity. We believe that plurality of eldership is not an absolute necessity, but rather a practical means that may be deemed necessary according to the concerns of the church. These concerns will be determined by the full time appointed elder, who is to be recognized as the senior pastor (I Tim. 5:17), and in conjunction with the congregation; both conscious of the needs of the body of Christ according to their individual perspective, the pastor as the administrator, and the congregation as those being ministered to. All elders so recognized will be considered assistants to the pastor-teacher. The spiritual function and duties of elders are:

(a) To rule over and superintend the work of the church. Without lording over the congregation, the elders, as undershepherds, rule by virtue of their spiritual gifts exercised in a love for the church that centers in Christ Jesus, its Lord and Savior.

(b) To feed the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (Acts 20:28-32; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Tim. 5:17; I Pet. 5:1-4).

(c) To teach and preach the whole counsel of God, as gifted by Christ and, assisted by the deacons, administer the ordinances. At least one of the elders must have and shall exercise the gift of pastor-teacher in full time capacity.

(d) To discipline church members in Christ's name and in His stead in the light of Scripture, as required.

(2) Each elder must possess the spiritual gifts of ruling with diligence or government (Rom. 12:8; I Cor. 12:28), exhortation (Titus 1:9), shepherding, and teaching (I Tim. 3:2) having met the requirements for voting membership stated in Article III. Elders shall be unanimously recommended by the other elder(s) and approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership present at a regularly scheduled quarterly business meeting. Those approved as Elders are to be publicly ordained to fulfill this office indefinitely, and shall be removed by physical death, voluntary resignation, or because of transfer to another geographical location, at which time he can no longer fulfill his duties and responsibilities to the church as outlined in Article V under elders, or for disciplinary reasons (due to unfaithfulness to the duties and responsibilities outlined in paragraphs 2 and 4 of Article III) upon unanimous recommendation by the other elders and approval by 3/4 of the total voting membership present.

(3) Action by the eldership significant enough to require approval by 3/4 of the total voting membership present requires unanimous consent of the elders, except in a situation where disciplinary action is being taken against another elder or elders.

c. Deacons--officially recognized servants in the local church (Acts 6:1-7; I Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13).

(1) The function and duties of deacons are:

(a) To minister to the outward needs of the membership of the church, showing mercy with cheerfulness to those in special need.

(b) To care for the material interest of the church; such as buildings, properties and land, and to recommend action to the church pertaining to these interests when needed.

(c) To superintend the collection and recording of church offerings.

(d) To serve as trustees of the church where legal action is required.

(e) To assist in the spiritual unity and growth of the church as gifted by the Holy Spirit.

(2) Deacons shall be recognized by the elders, other deacons, and the congregation as possessing the spiritual gifts of ministering (Rom. 12:7) and helps (I Cor. 12:28). They shall be approved and recommended unanimously by the elders and approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership present. They shall be publicly ordained to fulfill their office indefinitely and shall be removed from office by death, voluntary resignation, or upon approval by the elders for disciplinary reasons (due to unfaithfulness to the duties and responsibilities outlined in paragraphs 2 and 4 of Article III).

d. Individual Saints--true believers in Jesus Christ (I Pet. 5:9). Every believer has been gifted by Christ to perform a necessary function in the church whether it seems to be more or less honorable (I Cor. 12:22-23) and to be salt and light in the world through their good works accomplished for the glory of God (Matt. 5:16).

3. **Administrative Organization.** The church shall have the following administrative offices:

a. Secretary and Assistant Secretary. The deacons shall select two from among them to perform the duties of church secretary and assistant secretary respectively. Both shall be unanimously approved by the elders and 3/4 of the total voting membership present. The secretary is responsible for keeping an accurate register of the names of the church members with dates of admission, and discipline or death, together with a record of confession of faith and water baptism. He shall also record and maintain the minutes of all congregational business meetings. The assistant secretary shall perform these duties during the absence of the secretary.

b. Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. The deacons shall select two from among them who have abilities in financial administration to perform the duties of church treasurer and assistant treasurer respectively. Both shall be unanimously approved by the elders and 3/4 of the total voting membership present. Their duties shall be to establish and maintain an accurate accounting system to include all cash flow activities of the church. It shall be the duty of the treasurer (or the assistant treasurer during the absence of the treasurer) to render to the church at each quarterly business meeting an itemized report of all receipts and disbursements for the preceding quarter. All disbursements must be in accord with the annual budget as approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership present. Any item that is recommended for acquisition that has not been included in the annual budget costing more than \$2,000.00 must be presented in advance and approved for inclusion into the budget by 3/4 of the total voting membership present. The Church is not bound to expend funds, for purposes stipulated by individuals, unless approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership present. At the first quarterly business meeting in the calendar year, the treasurer shall render an annual report showing the total amount of receipts and disbursements together with all other pertinent information. This report shall be audited by two or more separate church members possessing qualified auditing talents. The financial record shall be available for inspection to the membership, either individually or collectively, upon request and unanimous approval of the elders..

c. Other Administrative Offices. Other administrative offices will be designated, when required, as recommended by the deacons and approved by the elders and 3/4 of the total voting membership present.

## ARTICLE VI--BIBLE TEACHING MINISTRIES

1. ***Teaching in the Meetings of the Church.*** All who regularly teach in a meeting of the church (see paragraph 5e, Article IV) must manifest the spiritual gift of teaching, be a voting member of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, and meet the qualifications of an elder or deacon as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-10, 12-13. Exceptions may be granted on occasion at the discretion of the elders for visiting or guest teachers, or voting members of the church who are not currently recognized as an elder or deacon but are desirous to determine if they have the gift of teaching.

2. ***Teaching in the Church Facility but not in the Meeting of the Church.*** The Sunday morning Bible study, for example, is an integral part of the church's ministry, but it is not a meeting of the church according to New Testament teaching (see paragraph 5e, Article IV) not being introduced into common church practice until the late eighteenth century. It and other similar studies are a centralized form of biblical instruction that is taught by spiritually gifted teachers in the church facility rather than in a decentralized manner by parents in the home (Deut. 6:4-7). As such, the biblical principles that govern Bible teaching in the home apply rather than those principles which govern the worship services. Because such Bible studies are an outreach of the church's approved teaching and evangelistic ministries that are taught in the church facility and directly associated with the church's name by those outside, the following principles, requirements, and qualifications are the ideal that apply:

a. All teachers must have the spiritual gift of teaching and must be unanimously approved by the elders and reported to the congregation.

b. The doctrinal qualifications for teachers formally associated with the church are stated in Article IV above and apply to all teachers who teach the Bible in the church facility. Exceptions may be granted by the elders in cases where the stated qualifications are not met.

c. All teachers for adults must be men (I Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:11-12) with the exception of qualified women approved by the elders who would teach only other women (Titus 2:3-5) who are not spiritual novices (Eph. 4:14; I Tim. 3:6; Jas. 3:1) who have a good reputation both within and without the church and who, if married:

(1) Are the husband of one wife (have not been divorced). This is the ideal and is required for those who teach in the worship services of the church (I Tim. 3:2), but it is not an absolute requirement for official Bible teaching ministries separate from the formal meeting of the church, providing that the following two qualifications are met, because the principles that govern teaching in the home apply. However, it is the consensus of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church that the ideal should be practiced where God permits;

(2) Rule well their own house having their "children in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3:4, 12);

(3) Whose wives are believers and in subjection to their husbands (Eph. 5:24).

d. It is desirable that spiritually qualified men teach all classes with the exception of qualified women teaching an all women's class (see 2c), and that qualified husband-wife couples teach the younger children with the wife serving as a helper to her husband. A Christian wife who has a saved husband and single Christians who are church members, spiritually qualified, and have experience in working with children may teach children providing they meet the qualifications in paragraphs a and b above.

e. Christians who have an unsaved spouse are not to teach a formal Bible class taught in the name of the church. Rather, they should devote their primary efforts to learning and fulfilling the principles of I Cor. 7:13-14 and I Pet. 3:1-6 that God in His grace and mercy might save their mates and enable them to raise up their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

f. Unlike in the official meetings of the church, a woman may participate in the discussion of Bible study outreach ministries of the church (Acts 18:26) providing they do not usurp authority over man (I Tim. 2:12-15).

3. ***Teaching Home Bible Classes in the Name of the Church.*** The qualifications and requirements for teaching home Bible classes in the name of the church; that is, as a church approved outreach ministry, are the same as those stated in paragraph 2 above.

4. ***Teaching or Participating in Bible Classes not Conducted in the Name of the Church.*** Bible studies participated in by members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church outside the formal meetings of the church including classes taught in the church facility and which are not taught in the name of the church are an individual believer's prerogative (and are encouraged) and do not come under the spiritual oversight of the church. In this realm, especially in family life, it is the consensus of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church that the following applies:

a. Should church members participate in informal Bible studies where their doctrine and/or conduct publicly contradict the teachings of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church freely ascribed to in their voluntary application for membership, church discipline will be administered. Otherwise, such as in the individual member's home, he is free

and encouraged to teach and live according to his own conscience, being directly responsible to God for any error that he may propound or practice. Admittedly, there is a fine distinction between the sanctity of the individual believer and his family life and the church, but, nonetheless, there is a line that must not be transgressed by the church. The wisdom and maturity of the saints (Gal. 6:1-5) must govern in these situations believing that the chastening hand of God, not the church, will correct abuses in doctrine and life that occur within the privacy of one's individual life and home.

b. Christian parents are responsible to evangelize those within their household by the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities of home government. This does not mean that they necessarily have the spiritual gift of evangelism. In this regard, confrontation evangelism, as commanded in Matt. 28:19-20, is first of all the responsibility of those believers in the church who have the spiritual gift of evangelism. This is true because every Christian has not been given the specific gift of evangelism by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:11) to do confrontation evangelism. Yet, in a very practical way, every Christian is to recognize that he is an epistle read of men (II Cor. 3:2), that he is to evangelize by the godly manner in which he lives his life (Matt. 5:16), and that he is to be ready always to give an answer to every person that asks a reason for the hope that is in him (I Pet. 3:15). Evangelism in the home, in this latter sense, is the responsibility of the Christian parent(s). The wife's best teacher of the Word of God in the home is or should be her husband.

## **ARTICLE VII--COOPERATION**

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is an autonomous body which believes in agreeing and cooperating with other local churches of like faith and order. We greatly desire fellowship with other churches that hold the truths of the Scripture as expressed herein. Although all true believers in Christ must be within the circle of the Christian's love, Sovereign Grace Baptist Church will not become a participant in any denominationally controlled program or any other centrally controlled "missionary" board or committee, believing it to be non-biblical. Sovereign Grace Baptist Church will cooperate with other local churches of like faith and practice in the support of missionaries and other causes that are under the direct authority and discipline of one local church upon unanimous recommendation of the elders and approval by 3/4 of the total voting membership present.

## **ARTICLE VIII--CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS**

Business meetings are to be conducted as official meetings of the church (see paragraph 5e, Article IV above). All items of business are to pertain to the spiritual and outward needs of the church in both its individual and corporate form. Any matter requiring a vote must be approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership present, or by written proxy, at the meeting. An elder will be the moderator of all church meetings, or in his absence, another elder. No business meeting will be conducted without an elder present (except in the event of death or other obvious providential reasons at which time a deacon appointed by the deaconate, will act as moderator). All points of order in conducting the business affairs, except as modified in this paragraph, shall be resolved by referring to a current edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

1. **Quarterly Business Meeting.** The church shall conduct quarterly business sessions at a Sunday worship service in the last week of the months of January, April, July, and October for the purpose of transacting any church business that should come before the congregation. The elders and deacons have the authority to cancel up to two (2) quarterly business meetings in any one (1) calendar year. The quarterly meetings being canceled cannot be in succession.

2. **Special Business Meeting.** Special business meetings may be called by announcing it at a Lord's Day worship service for two successive Sundays.

## **ARTICLE IX--CONTROL OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS**

The church's facilities were provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. The church desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to bring God glory. All buildings and grounds of the church are to be used at the direction of the church for regular worship and activities. The use of church buildings and grounds will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing, or advocating beliefs or practices that conflict with the church's faith or moral teachings as summarized in Article IV. Nor may church facilities be used for activities that contradict, or are deemed inconsistent with, the church's faith or moral teachings.

The church may not in good conscience materially cooperate in activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith. Allowing its facilities to be used for purposes that contradict the church's beliefs would be material cooperation with that activity, and would violate the church's faith and religious practice. (2 Cor 6:14; 1 Thess 5:22.)

This policy applies to all church facilities, regardless of whether the facilities are connected to the church's sanctuary, because the church sees all of its property as holy and set apart to worship God. (Col 3:17.)

#### **ARTICLE X--AMENDMENTS**

The desired procedure for amending the constitution, if the elders are not in unanimous agreement, is to wait until the Spirit of God brings them into agreement, or, if discipline is required, until biblical disciplinary steps have been administered to bring them into unanimous agreement. Amendments must be approved by 3/4 of the total voting membership. As a final resort, the voting membership may overrule the elders by obtaining a 3/4 majority of the total voting membership. If this should occur, the elders should voluntarily resign their office for it does not seem proper for elders to rule over a local assembly when constitutionally opposed by 75% of more of the total voting membership.

#### **ARTICLE XI--DISSOLUTION CLAUSE**

In case of dissolution of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, which may only be accomplished through a regularly or specially called business meeting, any and all property and assets belonging to this church shall be given, granted and conveyed to a tax exempt purpose/agency (recognized by the law of the land), according to the will of a 3/4 majority of the total eligible voting membership. This will be accomplished as a testimony of disgrace and defeat that Christ's Church cannot prevail against the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18b) or against divisions and heresies which are ordained by God "that they which are approved may be manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19).

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