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The 2nd London Baptist Confession (1689)

"This ancient document is the most excellent epitome of the things most surely believed among us. It is not issued as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby you may be fettered, but as a means of edification in righteousness. It is an excellent, though not inspired, expression of the teaching of those Holy Scriptures by which all confessions are to be measured. We hold to the humbling truths of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of lost sinners. Salvation is through Christ alone and by faith alone." -

C. H. Spurgeon

1. The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God to the extent that man is left without any excuse, they are not sufficient to provide the knowledge of God and His will which are necessary for salvation.

Therefore, it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare His will to His church;

- and afterward, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the sure establishment and comfort of the church, protecting it against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world,

- it pleased the Lord to commit His revealed Truth wholly to writing. Therefore the Holy Scriptures are totally necessary, with those former ways by which God revealed His will unto His people having now ceased.

Under the title of Holy Scripture (or the written Word of God) are now contained all the following books of the Old and New Testaments:

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans. 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

All these books are given by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

The books commonly called 'The Apocrypha', not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon or rule of Scripture and are therefore of no authority to the church of God; nor are they to be approved of or made use of any differently from other human writings.

The Holy Scripture should be believed as complete Authority; it depends not on the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God its Author, Who is Truth Himself. Consequently, it is to be received and believed as the Authoritative Word of God.

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the people of God to gain a high and reverent estimation of the Holy Scriptures. We may be similarly affected by the nature of the Scriptures—the heavenliness of the contents, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God, the full disclosure it makes of the only way of man's salvation, together with many other incomparable excellencies and entire perfections. By all the evidence, the Scripture more than proves itself to be the Word of God.

Yet, notwithstanding this, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth of Scripture and its divine authority, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glorification and for man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture. Nothing is to be added at any time, either by new revelation of the Spirit or by the traditions of men.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such matters that are revealed in the Word.

There are some circumstances, concerning the worship of God and church government, which are common to human actions and societies. Those are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word which are always to be observed.

Not everything in Scripture is equally clear to everyone; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and revealed in portions of Scripture, that not only the educated, but also the uneducated, can attain a sufficient understanding of them by utilization of ordinary means.

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of its writing was most generally known to the

nations) were immediately inspired by God, and were kept pure through subsequent ages by His singular care and providence. They are, therefore, authentic, and religion, the church must appeal to them as final.

But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have a right to, and an interest in the Scriptures, and who are commanded to read and search them in the fear of God, the Scriptures are therefore to be translated into the ordinary language of every nation into which they come, so that, with the Word of God living richly in all, people may worship God in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.

The infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore whenever there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other passages which speak more clearly.

The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and by which must be examined all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, and doctrines of men and private spirits can be no other than the Holy Scripture, delivered by the Spirit. And in the sentence of Scripture we are to rest, for it is in Scripture, delivered by the Spirit, that our faith is finally resolved.

2. God and the Holy Trinity

The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; Whose subsistence is in and of Himself

- Who is infinite in being and perfection; Whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself;

- Who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions

- Who only has immortality

- Who dwells in the light which no man can approach, Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute;

- Who works all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory;

- Who is most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth;

- Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin;

- Who is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him;

- and Who, at the same time, is most just and terrible in His judgements, hating all sin and Who will by no means clear the guilty.

God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and from Himself, is unique in being all-sufficient, both in Himself and to Himself, not standing in need of any creature which He has made, nor deriving any glory from such.

- On the contrary, it is God Who manifests His own glory in them, through them, to them and upon them. He is the only fountain of all being; from Whom, through Whom, and to Whom all things exist and move.

- He has completely sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do through them, for them, or to them whatever He pleases.

- In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and not dependent on the creature.

- Therefore, nothing is for Him contingent or uncertain.

- He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands.

- To Him is due from angels and men whatever worship, service, or obedience, they owe as creatures to the Creator, and whatever else He is pleased to require from them.

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are one in substance, power, and eternity; each having the whole divine essence, yet this essence being undivided.

The Father was not derived from any other being; He was neither brought into being by, nor did He issue from any other being.

- The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

- All three are infinite, without beginning, and are therefore only one God, Who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties, and also their personal relations.

- This doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of our entire communion with God, and our comfortable dependence on Him.

3. God's Decree

God has decreed in Himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things which shall ever come to pass.

- Yet in such a way that God is neither the author of sin nor does He have fellowship with any in the committing of sins, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

- In all this God's wisdom is displayed, disposing all things, and also His power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.

Although God knows everything which may or can come to pass under all imaginable conditions, yet He has not decreed anything because He foresaw it in the future, or because it would come to pass under certain conditions.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace. Others are left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.

Those angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and the number of them is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

Those of mankind who are predestinated to life, God chose before the foundation of the world was laid, in accordance with His eternal and immutable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will. God chose them in Christ for everlasting glory, solely out of His free grace and love, without anything in the creature as a condition or cause moving Him to choose.

As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so, by the eternal and completely free intention of His will, He has foreordained all the means. Accordingly, those who are elected, being fallen in Adam:

- are redeemed by Christ,
- are effectually called to faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season,
- are justified, adopted, sanctified,
- and are kept by His power through faith unto salvation;
- neither are any but the elect redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved.

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, in order that men who are heeding the will of God revealed in His Word, and who are yielding obedience to it, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation be assured of their eternal election.

So shall this doctrine provide cause for praise, reverence, admiration of God, and also provide cause for humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the Gospel.

4. Creation

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world and all things in it both visible and invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasoning and immortal souls, rendering them fit to live that life for Him for which they were created;

- being made in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and having the power to fulfil it;

- and yet living under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will which was subject to change.

Besides the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While they kept this command they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over all other creatures.

5. Divine Providence

God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures and things, from the greatest to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created.

- God governs according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchanging counsel of His own will;

- For the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, boundless goodness, and mercy.

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, Who is the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that nothing happens to anyone by chance, or outside His providence, yet by His providence He orders events to occur according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

God, in His ordinary providence makes use of means, yet He is free to work outside, above, and against them at His pleasure.

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God manifest themselves so far in His providence that His determinate counsel extends even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions of both angels and men.

- This is not merely by a bare permission, but by a form of permission in which He included the most wise and powerful limitations and other means of restricting and controlling sin. These various limitations have been designed by God to bring about his most holy purposes.

- Yet, in all these affairs, the sinfulness of both angels and men comes only from they themselves and not from God, Who is altogether holy and righteous, and can never be the author or approver of sin.

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves, for a time, His own children to various temptations, and to the corruptions of their own hearts, in order to chastise them for the sins which they have committed, or to show them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness still in their hearts, so that they may be humbled and aroused to a more close and constant dependence upon Himself for their support, and that they may be made more watchful against future occasions of sin. Other just and holy objectives are also served by such action by God.

Therefore whatever happens to any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and for their good.

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God as a righteous judge, blinds and hardens for former sin, from them He not only withholds His grace, by which they might have been enlightened in their understanding and affected in their hearts, but sometimes He also withdraws the gifts which they had and exposes them to certain objects which their corrupt state will make the occasion of sin.

- God gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, so that eventually they harden themselves under the same influences which God uses for the softening of others.

As the providence of God in general reaches to all creatures, so, in a more special manner, it takes care of His church, and governs all things to the good of His church.

6. The Fall of Man, Sin and Punishment

Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which secured life for him while he kept it, and although God warned him that he would die if he broke it, yet man did not live long in this honour.

- Satan using the subtlety of the serpent to subdue Eve, seduced Adam by her, and he, without any compulsion, willfully transgressed the law of their creation and the command given to them by eating the forbidden fruit.

- And this act God, according to His wise and holy counsel, was pleased to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory.

Our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them. For from this, death came upon all: all becoming dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

They being the root, and by God's appointment, standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and their corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. Their descendants are therefore conceived in sin, and are by nature the children of wrath, the servants of sin, and the subjects of death and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus sets them free.

All actual transgressions develop from this original corruption, by which we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.

During this life the corruption of nature remains in those who are regenerated, and although it is pardoned and mortified through Christ, yet this corrupt nature and all its motions are truly and properly sinful.

7. God's Covenant

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life except by some voluntary condescension on God's part, and this He has been pleased to express in the form of a covenant.

Moreover, as man had brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace. In this covenant He freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring from them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give to all who are appointed to eternal life His Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.

This covenant is revealed through the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by further steps until the full revelation of it became complete in the New Testament. The covenant of salvation rests upon an eternal covenant transaction between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect. It is solely by the grace of this covenant that all the descendants of fallen Adam who have ever been saved have obtained life and blessed immortality, because man is now utterly incapable of gaining acceptance with God on the terms by which Adam stood in his state of innocence.

8. Christ the Mediator

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, in accordance with the covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; to be Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Saviour of His Church, the Heir of all things, and the Judge of all the world. To the Lord Jesus He gave, from all eternity, a people to be His seed. These, in time, would be redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified by the Lord Jesus.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being true and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of the same substance and equal with Him;

- Who made the world, and Who upholds and governs all things which He has made,
- did, when the fullness of time had come, take upon Himself man's nature, with all its essential properties and common infirmities, with the exception of sin.
- He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her, so that He was born to a woman from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of Abraham and David, in accordance with the Scriptures.
- Thus two whole, perfect and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion;
- So that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, yet He is one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

The Lord Jesus, His human nature thus united to the divine, once in the person of the Son, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, having in Himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Him so that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety, a position and duty which He did not take upon Himself, but was called to perform by His Father. And the Father also put all power and judgement in His hand, and gave Him commandment to exercise the same.

This office and duty of Mediator and Surety the Lord Jesus undertook most willingly. To discharge it, He was made under the law, and perfectly fulfilled it, and He underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered. He was made sin and was made a curse for us; enduring the most grievous sorrows in His Soul with the most painful sufferings in His duty. He was crucified, and died, and remained in the state of the dead, but His body did not undergo any decomposition. On the third day He rose from the dead with the same body in which He had suffered, with which He also ascended into Heaven, and there He sits at the right hand of His Father making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up to God, has fully satisfied the justice of God, has procured reconciliation, and has purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven for all those whom the Father has given to Him.

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ until after His incarnation, the virtue, efficacy, and benefit arising from His payment were communicated to the elect in all ages from the beginning of the world through those promises, types, and sacrifices in which He was revealed and signified as the seed which should bruise the serpent's head, and also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, for He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Christ, in His work of Mediator, acts according to both natures, each nature doing that which is proper to itself. Yet, because of the unity of His person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

To all those for whom Christ has obtained eternal redemption, He certainly and effectually applies and communicates this redemption, making intercession for them, uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing to them in the Word and by the Word the mystery of salvation. He persuades them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, and overcome all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom. This is achieved in such a manner and by such ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation, and it is all by free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it.

This office of Mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, Who is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church. This is by the Free Will of God and this office may not be transferred from Him to any other, either in whole or in part.

This number and order of offices is essential. Because of our ignorance we need His prophetic office. Because of our alienation from God and the imperfection of the best of our service, we need His priestly office to reconcile us and present us to God as acceptable. Because of our aversion to, and utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and keeping from spiritual enemies, we need His kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us until we reach His heavenly kingdom.

9. Free Will

God has endued the will of man, by nature, with liberty and the power to choose and to act upon his choice. This free will is neither forced, nor destined by any necessity of nature to do good or evil.

Man, in his state of innocence, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but he was unstable, so that he might fall from this condition.

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability of will to perform any of the spiritual good which accompanies salvation. As a natural man, he is altogether averse to spiritual good, and dead in sin. He is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself for conversion.

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into a state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and by grace alone He enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good. But because of his remaining corruptions he does not only (or perfectly) will that which is good, but also wills that which is evil.

The will of man will only be made perfectly and immutably free to will good alone in the state of glory.

10. Effectual Calling

Those whom God has predestinated to life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time to effectually call by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death which they are in by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives to them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills, and by His almighty power, causes them to desire and pursue that which is good. He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ, yet in such a way that they come absolutely freely, being made willing by His grace.

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not on account of anything at all foreseen in man. It is not made because of any power or agency in the creature who is wholly passive in the matter. Man is dead in sins and trespasses until quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit. By this he is enabled to answer the call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it. This enabling power is no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead.

Infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, Who works when, where, and how He pleases. So also are all elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

Others are not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may experience some common operations of the Spirit, yet because they are not effectually drawn by the Father, they will not and cannot truly come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved. Even less can men who do not embrace the Christian religion be saved however diligent they may be to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the requirements of the religion they profess.

11. Justification

Those whom God effectually calls He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. They are not justified because God reckons as their righteousness either their faith, their believing, or any other act of evangelical obedience. They are justified wholly and solely because God imputes to them Christ's righteousness. He imputes to them Christ's active obedience to the whole law and His passive obedience in death. They receive Christ's righteousness by faith, and rest on Him. They do not possess or produce this faith themselves; it is the gift of God.

Faith which receives Christ's righteousness and depends on Him is the sole instrument of justification; yet this faith is not alone in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all the other saving graces. And it is not a dead faith, but works by love.

Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified, and by the sacrifice of himself through the blood of His cross, underwent instead of them the penalty due to them, so making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on their behalf. Yet because He was given by the Father for them, and because His obedience and satisfaction was accepted instead of theirs (and both freely, not because of anything in them), therefore they are justified entirely and solely by free grace, so that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

From all eternity God decreed to justify all the elect, and Christ, in the fullness of time, died for their sins, and rose again for their justification. Nevertheless, they are not personally justified until the Holy Spirit, in due time, actually applies Christ to them.

God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may because of their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure. In that condition they will not usually have the light of God's countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, ask for pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

The justification of believers during the Old Testament period was in all these respects exactly the same as the justification of New Testament believers.

12. Adoption

God has vouchsafed, that in Christ, His only Son, and for His sake, all those who are justified shall be made partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number of the children of God and enjoy their liberties and privileges. They have His name put upon them, and receive the Spirit of adoption. They have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry, 'Abba, Father!' They are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a father, yet they are never cast off, but are sealed to the day of redemption, when they inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

13. Sanctification

Those who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having had a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are then further sanctified in a very real and personal way. Because of the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, and by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them, the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed. The different lusts of the body of sin are increasingly weakened and mortified, and Christ's people are increasingly quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to practice all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

This sanctification extends throughout the whole person, yet it remains imperfect in this life. Some remnants of corruption live on in every part, and from this arises a continuous war

between irreconcilable parties - the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

In this war, although the remaining corruption for a time may greatly prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes. And so the saints grow in grace perfecting holiness in the fear of God; pressing after a heavenly life in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word, has prescribed to them.

14. Saving Faith

The grace of faith by which the elect are enabled to believe, so that their souls are saved, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily brought into being by the ministry of the Word. It is also increased and strengthened by the work of the Spirit through the ministry of the Word, and also by the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and other means appointed by God.

By this faith a Christian believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word because this Word has the authority of God Himself. Also, by this saving faith, a Christian apprehends an excellency in the Word which is higher than in all other writings and everything else in the world, because the Word shows forth the glory of God, revealing His attributes, showing the excellency of Christ's nature and offices, and also the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in His workings and operations. - So the Christian is enabled to cast his soul upon the Truth he has believed, and to see and respond to the different kinds of teaching which different passages of Scripture contain. Saving faith equips him to perceive and obey the commands, hear the judgements with fear and respect, and to embrace the promises of God for this life and the life to come. - But the first and most important acts of saving faith are those directly to do with Christ, when the soul accepts, receives, and rests upon Him alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

This faith although it differs in degree and may be weak or strong, even at its very weakest is in an entirely different class and has a different nature (like other aspects of saving grace) from the kind of faith and common grace which is possessed by temporary believers. Therefore, though it may be frequently assailed and weakened, it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, Who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

15. Repentance and Salvation

Those of the elect who are converted in riper years, having lived for some time in the state of nature, and in this state have served various lusts and pleasures, God gives repentance which leads to life, through an effectual call.

Because there is not one person who does good and commits no sin, and because the best of men may fall into great sins and provocations through the power and deceitfulness of their own

indwelling corruption and the prevalence of temptation, God has mercifully provided in the covenant of grace that when believers sin and fall they shall be renewed through repentance to salvation.

Saving repentance is an evangelical grace by which a person who is made to feel, by the Holy Spirit, the manifold evils of his sin, and being given faith in Christ, humbles himself over his sin with godly sorrow, detestation of his sin and self-abhorrence. In such repentance, the person also prays for pardon and strength of grace, and has a purpose and endeavor, by the supplying of the Spirit's power, to walk before God and to totally please Him in all things.

As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, arising from the body of death, and the motions of it, it is therefore every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly.

Such is the provision which God has made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers in the way of salvation that, although even the smallest sin deserves damnation, there is no sin great enough to bring damnation on those who repent. This makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary.

16. Good Works

Good works are only those works which God has commanded in His Holy Word. Works which do not have the warrant of Scripture, and are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intentions are not good works.

Good works, performed in obedience to God's commandments, are these: the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith. By these believers express and show their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the Gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, Whose workmanship they are; created in Christ Jesus to perform good works, and to have fruits of holiness which lead to eternal life.

Their ability to do these good works does not in any way come from themselves, but comes wholly from the Spirit of Christ. To enable them to do good works, alongside the graces which they have already received, it is necessary for there to be a further real influence of the same Holy Spirit to cause them to will and to do of His good pleasure. But believers are not, on these grounds, to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless given a special motion by the Spirit, but they must be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

Those who attain the greatest height which is possible in this life in their obedience to God, are still so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, that they fall short of much which they are bound to do in their duty to God.

We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life from the hand of God because of the great disproportion between our best works and the glory to come, and because of the infinite distance which is between us and God. With our works we cannot profit or satisfy God

concerning the debt we owe prompted by our sins. When we have done all we can, we have only done our duty, and are still unprofitable servants. In any case, in so far as they are good, our works originate from the work of the Holy Spirit. Even then, the good works are so defiled by us, and so mixed with weakness and imperfection, that they could not survive the severity of God's judgement.

Yet, quite apart from the fact that believers are accepted through Christ as individual souls, their good works are also accepted through Christ. It is not as though the believers are (in this life) wholly without blame or reproof in God's sight, *but He looks upon them in His Son*, and is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although it is accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

Works performed by unregenerate men, although they may in essence be things which God commands, and they may be good and beneficial both to themselves and others, cannot please God since they do not proceed from a heart purified by faith and are not done in a right manner according to the Word. It is not their underlying purpose to bring glory to God; therefore, they are sinful and cannot please God, nor can they make a man fit to receive grace from God. Even so, for regenerate men to neglect such works is even more sinful and displeasing to God.

17. The Perseverance of the Saints

Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, and has effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, for they will certainly persevere in that state to the end and be eternally saved. This is owing to the fact that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and therefore He continues to beget and nourish them in faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the spirit which lead to immortality. And though many storms and floods arise and beat against the saints, these things shall never be able to sweep them off the foundation and rock onto which they are fastened by faith. Even though, for a time, the sight and feeling of the light and love of God may be clouded and obscured from them, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, *God is yet the same*. Thus, they are sure to be kept by His power until their salvation is complete, when they shall enjoy the purchased possession which is theirs, for they are engraved upon the palm of His hands, and their names have been written in His Book of Life from all eternity.

The saints are not preserved through their own free will. Their preservation rests upon the immutability of the decree of election, which flows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father. It also rests upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, and upon the union which true saints have with Him. Ultimately, it rests upon the oath of God, and upon the abiding of His Spirit.

- It depends upon the seed of God being within them and upon the very nature of the covenant of grace.

- All these factors give rise to the certainty and infallibility of the security and perseverance of the saints.

The saints may, through the temptation of Satan and the world and because their remaining sinful tendencies prevail over them, through their neglect of the means which God has provided to keep them, fall into grievous sins. They may continue in this state for some time, incurring God's displeasure and grieving His Holy Spirit. At such time, they suffer the impairment of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened and their conscience wounded, and hurt and scandalize others. By this, they will bring temporal judgements upon themselves. Still, they shall renew their repentance and be preserved, through faith in Christ Jesus, to the end.

18. Assurance of Salvation

Although temporary believers and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions that they are in the favor of God and in a state of salvation, such a hope on their part will perish. Yet those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him in sincerity, and who endeavor to walk in all good conscience before Him, may be certainly assured in this life that they are in the state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And such a hope shall never make them ashamed.

This assurance is not merely a conjectural persuasion, nor even a probable persuasion, based upon a fallible hope. It is an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel. It is also founded upon the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit in connection with definite promises made in the Scriptures as well as on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption who witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God, and who uses the experience of assurance to keep our hearts both humble and holy.

This infallible assurance is not so joined to the essence of faith that it is an automatic and inevitable experience. A true believer may wait long and fight with many difficulties before he becomes a partaker of it. Yet, being enabled by the spirit to know the things which are freely given to him by God, he may, without any extraordinary revelation, attain this assurance by using the means of grace in the right way. Therefore, it is the duty of each one to give the utmost diligence to make his calling and election sure, so that his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness for carrying out the duties of obedience. These duties are the natural fruits of assurance which is far from inclining men to slackness.

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, or intermitted in a variety of ways. This may be prompted by their negligence in preserving it, by their falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit, or by some sudden or forceful temptation. It may be by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and causing even those who fear Him to walk in darkness and have no light. Yet, believers are never left without the seed of God and life of faith, the love of Christ and the brethren, or sincerity of heart and conscience about their spiritual duty. Out of these substances, by the operation of the

Spirit, their assurance can be revived in due time, and in the meantime, the presence of these graces preserves them from utter despair.

19. The Law of God

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience which was written in his heart. He gave him very specific instruction about not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. By this, Adam and all his descendants were bound to personal, total, exact, and perpetual obedience, being promised life upon the fulfilling of the law and threatened with death upon the breach of it. At the same time, Adam was endued with power and ability to keep this law.

The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the Fall. It was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in the ten commandments and written in two tables, the first four containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.

In addition to this law, commonly called the moral law, God was pleased to give ceremonial laws containing several typical ordinances to the people of Israel. These ordinances were, in part, about forms of worship, and in them Christ was prefigured along with His attributes, qualities, actions, sufferings and benefits. The ordinances also gave instructions about different moral duties. All ceremonial laws were appointed only until the time of reformation when Jesus Christ the true Messiah and the only lawgiver, who was furnished with power from the Father for this end, cancelled them and took them away.

God, also, gave sundry judicial laws which expired when the Israelites ceased to be a nation. Their general equity continues to be applicable in modern times, but not reason of their being part of the laws of that nation.

The moral law ever binds everyone to obedience, justified people as well as others, and not only out of regard for the matter contained in it, but also out of respect for the authority of God the Creator, Who gave the law. Nor does Christ in the Gospel dissolve this law in any way, but He considerably strengthens our obligation to obey it.

Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, to be justified or condemned by it, it remains of great use to them as well as to everyone. As a rule of life, it informs them of the will of God and their duty and directs and binds them to walk accordingly. It also reveals and exposes the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts and lives, and if used for self-examination men may come to greater conviction of sin, increased humility, and greater hatred of their sin. They will also gain a clearer sight of both the perfection of Christ's own obedience and their need for Christ. The law is of additional use to regenerate people to restrain their corruptions because of the way in which it forbids sin. The threatenings of the law serve to show what man's sins actually deserve and what troubles may be expected in this life because of these sins, even by regenerate people who are freed from the curse and undiminished rigors of the law. The promises connected with the law also show believers God's approval of

obedience and what blessings they may expect when the law is kept and obeyed, though blessing will not come to them if they have satisfied the law as a covenant of works. If a man does good and refrains from evil simply because the law encourages him to the good and deters him from the evil, that is not evidence that he is under the law rather than under grace.

The aforementioned uses of the law are not contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but they sweetly comply with it, as the Spirit of Christ subdues and enables the will of man to do freely and cheerfully those things which are the will of God, which are revealed in the law, and are required to be done.

20. The Gospel and Its Influence

Due to the covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable for life, God was pleased to promise Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and bringing faith and repentance to life within them. In this promise, the substance of the Gospel was revealed and shown to be effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

This promise of Christ and the salvation which comes by Him are revealed only by the Word of God. The works of creation and providence, with the light of nature, do not reveal Christ or His grace even in a general or obscure way. How much less, therefore, can those who are devoid of the revelation of Christ by the promise (or the Gospel) be enabled by the light of nature to arrive at saving faith or repentance.

The revelation of the Gospel unto sinners, made in divers times and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God, not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever did make, or can do so; and therefore in all ages, the preaching of the Gospel has been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God.

Although the Gospel is the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and as such is totally sufficient to accomplish this, yet more is necessary if men who are dead in trespasses are to be born again, brought to life or regenerated. It is necessary for there to be an effectual, insuperable work of the Holy Spirit upon the whole soul to produce in them a new spiritual life. Without this, no other means will bring about their conversion to God.

21. various ways shaken

The liberty which Christ purchased for believers under the Gospel lies in their freedom from the guilt of sin and the condemning wrath of God, from the rigors and curse of the law, in their deliverance from this present evil world, from bondage to Satan, from dominion of sin, from the harm of afflictions, from the fear and sting of death, from the victory of the grave, and from everlasting damnation. This liberty is also seen in their free access to God and their ability to

yield obedience to Him, not out of slavish fear, but with childlike love and willing minds. All these freedoms were also experienced in substance by true believers under the Old Testament law, but for New Testament Christians, this liberty is further enlarged, for they have freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish church was subjected. They also have greater boldness of access to the throne of grace and fuller communications of the free Spirit of God than believers under the law normally experienced.

God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from all doctrines and commandments of men which are in any respect contrary to His Word, or not contained in it. Thus, to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience. The requiring of an implicit faith in absolute and blind obedience is to destroy both liberty of conscience and reason. Those who, on pretense of Christian liberty, practice any sin or cherish any sinful lust, to their own destruction, pervert the main purpose of the grace of the Gospel. They completely destroy the object of Christian liberty, which is that we, being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives.

22. Worship and the Sabbath Day

The light of nature shows that there is a God Who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is just and good, and Who does good to all. Therefore, He is to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God has been instituted by Himself, and therefore our method of worship is limited by His own revealed will. He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men or by the suggestions of Satan. He may not be worshipped by visible representations, or by any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

Worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures. And since the Fall, worship is not to be given without a mediator, or by any other mediation than that of Christ.

Prayer, with thanksgiving, is one part of natural worship, and is required by God of all men. But to be acceptable, it must be delivered in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, and according to His will. It must be conducted with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance. Additionally, corporate prayer must be made in a known language.

Prayer is to be made for lawful precepts and for all kinds of people who are alive now or who shall live in the future, but not for the dead, nor for those who are known to have sinned the 'sin leading to death'.

Included in the worship of God are the reading of the Scriptures, preaching and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing of one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. Also, parts of the worship of God are the Lord's

Supper and Baptism. On special occasions, thanksgivings, solemn humiliation, and fastings are offered up in a holy and reverent spirit. All worship is to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and Godly fear.

Under the Gospel, neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is tied to or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed or towards which it is directed. God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth, whether daily in private families, in secret by individuals, or solemnly in public assemblies. These are not to be carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken, since God by His Word and providence calls us to them.

As it is the law of nature, by God's appointment, that time should be set apart for the worship of God; He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, this was the last day of the week. From the time of the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath as the observation of the last day of the week has been abolished.

The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, and to carrying out duties of necessity and mercy.

23. Lawful Oaths and Vows

A lawful oath is an act of religious worship in which the person, swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgement, solemnly calls God to witness what he swears, and to judge him according to the truth or falsity of it.

Only by the name of God can a righteous oath be sworn, and only if it is used with the utmost fear of God and with reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by the glorious and awesome name of God, or to swear by any other name or thing, is sinful, and to be regarded with disgust and detestation. But in matters of weight and moment, for the confirmation of truth, and for the ending of strife, an oath is sanctioned by the Word of God. Therefore a lawful oath being imposed by a lawful authority can rightly be taken in such circumstances.

Whoever takes an oath sanctioned by the Word of God is bound to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act and to affirm or confess to nothing except that which he knows to be true. For by rash, false, and vain oaths, the Lord is provoked, and because of them this land mourns.

An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words without equivocation or mental reservation.

A vow, which is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone, is to be made and performed with all the utmost care and faithfulness.

Monastical vows (as in the Church of Rome) of a perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, so far from being degrees of higher perfection, are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

24. The Civil Magistrate

God, the supreme Lord and King of the entire world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under Him, and over the people, for His own glory and the public good. For this purpose, He has armed them with the power of the sword, for agreement with those that do good, and for the punishment of evil-doers.

It is lawful for Christians to accept and carry out the duties of a magistrate when called upon. In the performance of such office, they are particularly responsible for maintaining justice and peace by application of the right and beneficial laws of the nation. Also, to maintain justice and peace, they may lawfully (under the New Testament) engage in war if it is just and essential.

Because civil magistrates are established by God for the purposes previously defined, we ought to be subject to all their lawful commands as part of our obedience to God, not only to avoid punishment, but for conscience sake. We ought also to make supplications and prayers for rulers and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.

25. Marriage

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, or for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time.

Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and for preventing uncleanness.

It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry if they are able with judgement to give their consent. But it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord, and therefore those who profess the true religion should not marry with infidels or idolaters. Nor should those who are godly be unequally yoked by marrying with those who are wicked in their life or who maintain heretical teaching condemned to judgement.

Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in the Word, nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties so that such persons may live together as man and wife.

26. The Church

The universal Church, which may be called invisible (in respect of the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) consists of the entire number of the elect, all those who have been, who are, or who shall be gathered into one under Christ, Who is the Head. This universal Church is the wife, the body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all.

All people throughout the world who profess the faith of the Gospel and obedience to Christ on His terms, and who do not destroy their profession by any errors which contradict or overthrow Gospel fundamentals, or by unholy behavior, are visible saints and may be regarded as such. All individual congregations ought to be constituted of such people.

The purest churches under Heaven are subject to mixture and error, and some have degenerated to the extent that they have ceased to be churches of Christ and have become synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, Christ always has had, and always will (to the end of time) have a kingdom in this world, made up of those who believe in Him, and make profession of His name.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. In Him, by the appointment of the Father, is vested, in a supreme and sovereign manner, all power for the calling, institution, order, or government of the Church. The Pope of Rome cannot, in any sense, be head of the Church, but he is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, who exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God, who the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.

In the exercise of the authority which has been entrusted to Him, the Lord Jesus calls to Himself, from out of the world and through the ministry of His Word and by His Spirit, those who are given to Him by His Father, so that they may walk before Him in all the ways of obedience which He prescribes to them in His Word. Those who are thus called, He commands to walk together in particular societies or churches, for their mutual edification, and for the due performance of public worship, which He requires of them in the world.

The members of these churches are saints, because they have been called by Christ and visibly manifest and give evidence of their obedience to that call by their profession and walk. Such saints willingly consent to walk together, according to the appointment of Christ, giving themselves up to the Lord and to one another, according to God's will, in avowed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel.

To each of these churches thus gathered, according to the Lord's mind as declared in His Word, He has given all the power and authority which is in any way required for them to carry on the order of worship and discipline He has instituted for them to observe. He has also given all the commands and rules for the due and right exercise of this power.

A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. The officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church are bishops (or elders) and deacons. These are to be appointed for the peculiar

administration of ordinances and the execution of power or duty with which the Lord has entrusted them and to which He has called them. This pattern of church order is to be continued to the end of the world.

Christ appointed the process for the calling of any person fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit for the office of bishop or elder in a church; he is to be chosen by the common consent and vote of the church itself. Said person should be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with the laying on of hands of the eldership of the church (if there be any previously appointed elder/s). Christ set the method for the calling of a deacon, and he, also, is to be chosen by the common consent and vote of the church and set apart by prayer, with the laying on of hands.

Because the work of pastors is to apply themselves constantly to the service of Christ in His churches by the ministry of the Word and prayer, and watching their souls as they must give an account to Him, the churches to which they minister have a pressing obligation to give them not only all due respect, but also to impart to them a share of all good things, according to their ability. This must be so done that the pastors may have a comfortable supply and not become entangled in secular affairs as well as possess the means to exercise hospitality towards others. All this is required by the law of nature and by the express command of our Lord Jesus, Who has ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.

Although an obligation lies with the elders or pastors of the churches to be urgently preaching the Word by virtue of their office, the work of preaching the Word is not exclusively confined to them. Therefore, others who are also gifted and qualified by the Holy Spirit for tasks, and who are approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform them.

All believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches when and where they have opportunity so to do, and all who are admitted into the privileges of a church are also under the censures and government of that church, in accordance with the rule of Christ.

Any church member/s who has suffered an offence by a fellow member, having performed the prescribed duty toward the person causing the offense, may not disturb church order in any way, or be absent from the meetings of the church or the administration of any ordinances as a response to the offense. On the contrary, they are to wait upon Christ in the further proceedings of the church.

Each church and all its members are obligated to pray constantly for the good and prosperity of all Christ's churches everywhere. They are to encourage everyone who comes into their district by the exercise of their gifts and graces. It clearly follows that when churches are planted by the goodness of God, when opportunity arises, fellowship should be held with them in order to promote peace, and increase love and mutual edification.

In cases of difficulties or differences, either in matters of doctrine or administration, which concern the churches in general or any single church, and which affects their peace, union, and edification, or when any members of a church are injured because of any disciplinary

proceedings not consistent with the Word and correct order, it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together do, through their appointed messengers meet to consider, and give their advice about the matter in dispute, and to report to all the churches concerned. However, when these messengers are assembled, they are not entrusted with any real church power or with any jurisdiction over the churches involved in the problem. They cannot exercise any censure over any churches or persons, or impose their determination on the churches or their officers.

27. The Communion of Saints

All saints are united to Jesus Christ (their Head) by His Spirit and by faith; *however*, they are not, by this, made one person with Him. They have fellowship in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. Also, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces and are obligated to the orderly performance of such public and private duties as lead to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

Saints, by their profession, are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services that advance their mutual edification. Also, they are to give relief to each other in outward things, according to their different needs and abilities to meet them. This communion or fellowship, though chiefly exercised by saints in their immediate circle of fellow believers such as families and churches, is also to be extended (according to the rule of the Gospel) to all the household of faith, as God gives the opportunity. This means all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. However, their communion with one another as saints does not take away or infringe upon the personal ownership which each man has of his goods and possessions.

28. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in His Church to the end of the world.

These holy appointments are to be administered only by those who are qualified and called to administer them, according to the commission of Christ.

29. Baptism

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. To the person who is baptized, this a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection; of his being grafted into Christ, of remission of sins, and of that person's giving up of himself to God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

Those who actually profess repentance towards God and faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects for the ordinance of baptism.

The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, in which the person is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Immersion - the dipping of the person in water - is necessary for the due administration of this ordinance.

30. The Lord's Supper

The Supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by Him on the same night He was betrayed, to be observed in His churches until the end of the world for the perpetual remembrance and showing forth the sacrifice of Himself in His death. A further purpose was to confirm believers in all the benefits of His death, for their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, for their further engagement in and commitment to all the duties which they owe to Him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him and their fellow believers.

In this ordinance, Christ is not offered up to His Father nor is there any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sin (of the living or the dead). There is only a memorial of one offering up of Christ, by Himself upon the cross, once for all, the memorial being accompanied by a spiritual oblation of all possible praise to God for Calvary. Therefore, the popish sacrifice of the mass, as it is called, is most abominable, being injurious to Christ's own sacrifice, which is the only propitiation for all the sins of the elect.

The Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to pray and bless the elements of bread and wine (so setting them apart from a common to a holy use) and to take and break the bread, then to take the cup, and to give both to the communicants, also communicating themselves.

The denial of the cup to the people, the practices of worshipping the elements, lifting them up or carrying them about for adoration, or reserving them for any pretended religious use are all contrary to the nature of this ordinance and to the institution of Christ.

The outward elements in this ordinance, which are correctly set apart and used as Christ ordained, so closely portray Him as crucified that they are sometimes truly (but figuratively) referred to in terms of the things they represent, such as the body and blood of Christ. However, in substance and nature, they still remain, truly and only, bread and wine as they were before.

The doctrine commonly called transubstantiation, which maintains that a change occurs in the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood, when consecrated by a priest or by any other way, is repugnant not only to Scripture, but even to common sense and reason. It overthrows the nature of the ordinance, and both has been and is the cause of a host of superstitions and of gross idolatries.

Worthy receivers, outwardly taking the visible elements in this ordinance, also receive them inwardly and spiritually by faith (truly and in fact), but not carnally and corporally, and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of His death. The body and blood of Christ is not

present corporally or carnally, but it is spiritually present to the faith of believers in the ordinance just as the elements are present to their outward senses.

All ignorant and ungodly persons who are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ are equally unworthy of the Lord's Table, and therefore cannot without great sin against Him, take a share in these holy mysteries or be admitted to the Supper while they remain in that condition. Indeed, those who receive (the elements) unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgement upon themselves.

31. Man's State After Death and the Resurrection

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust and undergo corruption, but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God Who gave them. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise where they are with Christ and look upon the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are cast into hell where they remain in torment and under darkness, reserved to the judgement of the great day. The Scripture acknowledges none other than these two locations for souls separated from their bodies.

At the last day, those of the saints who are still alive shall not sleep but shall be changed. And all the dead shall be raised up with their own, same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, and these bodies shall be united again to their souls forever.

The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor. The bodies of the just shall, by His Spirit be raised to honor and made conformable to His own glorious body.

32. The Last Judgement

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to Whom all power and judgement is given by the Father. In this day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but also all people who have lived upon the earth. They shall appear before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done when in the body, whether good or evil.

The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and also His justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate who are wicked and disobedient. Then, shall the righteous go into everlasting life and receive the fullness of joy and glory with everlasting reward in the presence of the Lord. But the wicked, who know not God and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there will be a day of judgement, both to deter all men from sin and to give greater consolation to the godly in their adversity, so also He will have the date of that day kept unknown to men that they may shake off all carnal security

and always be watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come. Also, so that men may be affected in such a way that they ever say, 'Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!' Amen.

The Sabbath Day

As a young pastor, I inwardly chuckled each Sunday morning as an elderly gentleman would pray in thanks of God's provision "on this Sabbath day." The silly old man, I thought. The Sabbath was Saturday. The Sabbath is no longer in force. And if it were, we shouldn't have turned the lights on or even driven to church.

Looking back, I don't know if the elderly brother had an understanding of the Covenants (I doubt it) or said it out of routine or tradition. But, he was right. It was the Sabbath day. I was the one who was mistaken.

As it is the law of nature that, in general, a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.

The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, carrying out duties only of necessity and mercy.

Spurgeon explains the basic foundation of our view on the Sabbath:

For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18)

It has been said that he who understands the two covenants is a theologian, and this is, no doubt, true. I may also say that the man who knows the relative positions of the Law and the Gospel has the keys to the situation, in the matter of doctrine. The relationship of the Law to myself, and how it condemns me; the relationship of the Gospel to myself, and how if I am a believer it justifies me—these are two points which every Christian man should clearly understand... We are not under the law as the method of salvation, but we delight to see the law in the hand of Christ, and desire to obey the Lord in all things.

Jesus did not come to change the law, but he came to explain it, and that very fact shows that it remains, for there is no need to explain that which is abrogated. Upon one particular point in which there happened to be a little ceremonialism involved, namely, the keeping of the Sabbath, our Lord enlarged, and showed that the Jewish idea was not the true one. The Pharisees forbade even the doing of works of necessity and mercy, such as rubbing ears of corn

to satisfy hunger and healing the sick. Our Lord Jesus showed that it was not at all according to the mind of God to forbid these things. In straining over the letter, and carrying an outward observance to excess, they had missed the spirit of the Sabbath law which suggested works of piety such as truly hallow the day. He showed that Sabbatical rest was not mere inaction, and he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He pointed to the priests who labored hard at offering sacrifices, and said of them, "The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless." They were doing divine service, and were within the law. To demonstrate the popular error, he took care to do some of his grandest miracles upon the Sabbath-day. Although this agitated great wrath against him as though he were a law-breaker, he did it on purpose that they might see that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. It is meant to be a day for doing that which honors God and blesses men. Oh, that man knew how to keep the spiritual Sabbath by an easing from all servile work, and from all work done for self! The rest of faith is the true Sabbath, and the service of God is the most acceptable hallowing of the day. Oh that the day were wholly spent in serving God and doing good!

The sum of our Lord's teaching was that works of necessity, works of mercy, and works of piety are lawful on the Sabbath. He explained the law in that point and in others; yet that explanation did not alter the command, but only removed the rust of tradition which had settled upon it. Thus explaining the law, he confirmed it; he could not have meant to abolish it or he would not have needed to expound it.

Essentially, the concept is this: 1) The Moral Law, IE the Ten Commandments, are still binding upon us. (2) The Sabbath Day is a part of the Ten Commandments. (3) Therefore, there is still a command to honor the Sabbath.

Comparing the Old and New Covenants, we see that most things are "the same in substance, but different in administration" (to quote John Calvin). The Sabbath is one of "those things". It is the same, in substance, as a day set apart unto God for his purposes. It is different, in administration, since it is on a different day and includes the prescription for corporate worship (our spiritual rest) as well as physical rest. We understand why some would prefer the term "The Lord's Day" to "The Sabbath Day" to iterate the differences in how the day is administered, but we have no problem using the term because it is that which we find in the 4th Commandment. Sunday is the New Testament Sabbath, but it is *still* the Sabbath.

The Confessions says:

As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until

the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.

The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, and to carrying out duties of necessity and mercy.

So how do we observe the Sabbath in the New Testament Administration? Consider this treatise I wrote on the topic.

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT SABBATH: ITS DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN OBSERVANCE

This short treatise will explain a view of the Christian Sabbath, from both the Holy Bible and historic practices of the church, consistent with both Reformed and Baptist ecclesiology. This treatise will annotate:

- (1) Guiding principles for interpreting the proper understanding of Christian Sabbath
- (2) Behavior consistent with the Fourth Commandment
- (3) Tools for discerning the difference between obedience and legalism in regards to the Fourth Commandment

This treatise will contend for a view of the Sabbath that is consistent with what we see in the 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689, and I believe, in keeping with the Holy Bible's teaching on the subject of how this day should be observed.

Two Guiding Principles as Interpretive Tools

The Regulative Principle

Put simply, the regulative principle of worship states that the corporate worship of God is to be founded upon specific directions of Scripture. As Derek Thomas points out from the previously cited reference, "It's difficult to see why anyone who values the authority of Scripture would find such a principle objectionable." The principle is not always easy to apply, but it's certainly the target for which we must shoot.

This guiding principle is generally affirmed by both sides of the Reformed divide, both Calvinists and Anabaptists, who share certain of our "free church" traditions and beliefs in the ordinances (but not in Monergism). As a beautiful crossbreed between classical Calvinists and Anabaptists (which Reformed Baptists are), we enthusiastically embrace the Regulative Principle of worship.

The Regulative Principle stands in juxtaposition, and in contrast, to the Normative Principle, which asserts that what is not forbidden in Scripture, in regards to worship, can be allowed. Again, the Regulative Principle asserts the opposite: only those things explicitly and expressly permitted in Scripture are allowed.

As the charismatic movement grows in American evangelicalism, I believe it becomes even more important to embrace the Regulative Principle as a guiding light. For example, some assert that because the Bible does not forbid “holy laughter” or being “slain in the spirit” in worship, it therefore permits it. We would argue, however, that if these practices had no place or promotion in the Biblical New Testament church they have no place or promotion in our own. Whereas the Normative Principle allows for innovation and (possibly) blasphemous forms of worship, the Regulative Principle (although stifling innovation) ensures against blasphemous or unbiblical worship.

Although frequently called “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” the Regulative Principle can, and should be, used as a litmus test for issues, other than worship, relating to the church. For example, affinity-based churches are nowhere mentioned in Scripture, promoted in Scripture, or suggested in Scripture and, in fact, are antithetical to what, we are taught a church should be. One guided by the Regulative Principle would say, “Because this is not how we are told to plant churches, we do not do it this way.” One guided by the Normative Principle would say, “Jesus did not say you could not build a church on mutually share affinities” and so it is all right”. At the risk of sounding biased, I think it is typically clear that those embracing the Normative Principle have a low view of Scripture and simply do not understand (or choose to disregard) the fact that leaving behind instructions for *how to do it* rather than an exhaustive list of *how not to do it* (a never-ending book that would be!) is the only practical way in which the Holy Spirit can guide Christ’s church. The Normative Principle opens up the church to limitless possibilities for how church should be done, while the Regulative Principle limits those options to what we see explicitly in Scripture.

To be fair, those holding to the Normative Principle will be quick to point out that the Regulative Principle cannot be followed flawlessly to the “nth degree” – and they are right. For example, pianos are not mentioned as being a part of the Biblical worship (but instrumentation, including other percussion instruments, is). Therefore, they would contend that we are hypocritical in our allegiance to the Regulative Principle, if we have a piano in our sanctuary. But this is precisely why the Regulative Principle is designed to be a principle. Principles are not intended to be laws. Laws legislate, whereas principles merely guide.

At the heart of the Regulative Principle is the question, “Does God permit this?” It presupposes that God is not only concerned with our obedience but with *how* we obey. We are convinced that we cannot obey God in a disobedient manner. As I will flesh out later in this treatise, God has never given man free reign to worship as man chooses, and in fact, God has always been very specific about *how we observe his commandments* – *not just that we obey his commandments*. For example, it is not enough that my children clean their rooms. If this was my

only command to them, they would clean their rooms according to their standards. Instead, I must insist that they clean their rooms according to my standards of cleanliness. Likewise, it is not enough to obey God, but we must obey God according to His standards. Those affirming the Normative Principle (again, at the risk of revealing my bias) tend to have a more man-centered and pragmatic concern for what appeals to people; whereas, those affirming the Regulative Principle tend to have a more God-centered concern for what pleases God.

The Scriptural foundation for the Regulative Principle is what we find in relationship between the First and Second Commandments. It is not enough to worship God alone (First Commandment), but we must worship God specifically how he tells us to worship Him and eschew the practices he has not authorized (Second Commandment). It may benefit people to have a visible representation of God that will remind them to pray, focus their attention on, or motivate them to admire His beauty or presence; regardless, to create such an image is forbidden, irrespective of how reasonable it may seem to man. Accordingly, many violations of the Regulative Principle may appear to be perfectly benign, reasonable, and harmless – but must not persuade us to act unaccording to what God has permitted in His worship.

The Immutable Essence of God's Moral Law

An altogether different treatise could be written on the division between God's moral, civil and ceremonial law, but I pray that making the distinctions here is not necessary, considering the volume of teaching during Sunday School the last several years on this topic (along with the focus on the Baptist Catechism). To summarize, God's ceremonial law was fulfilled in Christ, God's civil law pertained to the nation of Israel in that time and place, and although is still useful in the understanding of Christian ethics, it is no longer binding upon the believer; God's moral law is still in force.

God's moral law is summarized and categorized by the Ten Commandments. God's moral law, the Mishpatim, is based upon God's unchanging (immutable) nature. It is, through this, that we see God's righteousness revealed. God's righteousness is unchanging; thus, the commandments are still binding. Although it is clear that we are not justified by obedience (nor could we ever be), the purpose of the law (as it states in our own Baptist catechism) is (1) to teach us our duty (2) to make clear our condemnation and (3) to show us our need of the Savior. Note that the first use of the law is to teach us what God requires. This is speaking of the moral law and the Ten Commandments, in particular.

Take notice that, unlike God's ceremonial law which was designed to point us to Jesus, God's moral law does not point us to Jesus. God's moral law only points our fallen state and teaches us what God requires. It is universal and eternal. It may change in detail (seldom do we have a problem coveting our neighbor's donkey today) but not in substance; therefore we are not to covet any of our neighbor's possessions. This understanding allows us to discern the relationship between the Christian Lord's Day and the Old Testament Sabbath. God's moral law is the law that Jesus said would never pass away (Matthew 5:18).

I reject the notion that the Fourth Commandment is a wholly ceremonial law that has passed away with the Old Covenant. Although Sabbaths were an element of ceremonial law, the keeping of Sabbaths is listed among the Ten Commandments as a part of God's moral law. I find it inconsistent with a God of order (He even divided the listing of the Ten Commandments in order, according to responsibilities first to God and then to man) that one of the nine Commandments were out of place, or temporary, while the others eternal. (I will write more on the eternal nature of the Fourth Commandment later).

Because God's moral law is intrinsically tied to God's righteous and holy character, it is changing in application (the human element) but remains unchanging and immutable in substance (as long as it pertains to God's revealed righteousness).

A Note on Adiaphora

Adiaphora is a term used to describe something as spiritually neutral or debatable. Certainly there are elements of adiaphora when determining the best application of Moral Law. When in doubt, I argue that we should err on the side of the Regulative Principle rather than the Normative.

The Old Testament Sabbath

The Old Testament Sabbath, far from being a minor detail of the moral law, was perhaps the single most important commandment to the enduring faithfulness of God's people throughout the generations of Israel's history. The Sabbath command was not a fine point of the law or a minor legal requirement; it was the heart and soul of the Covenant people.

The Fourth Commandment:

There are several exhortations here, including (1) Remember the day to (2) keep it holy, or set apart, separated from all other days (3) to rest on this day that is different from the kind of rest you enjoy on other days and therefore (4) to abstain from all work and (5) require that those within your sphere of influence are also observing this day, IE to not force or tempt others (even the 'sojourner' which is not a part of the Covenant) to break this commandment because (6) this is tied intrinsically to God's established order made manifest in the seventh day consummating creation, along with the caveat that (7) this day is not established holy by the law, but was established holy since creation.

There are seven various feasts observed under the Old Covenant (e.g. Feast of the Tabernacles, Passover, The Day of Atonement) which are referred to as Sabbath Days under the Old Covenant. John 19:31-42 refers to the weekly Sabbath, and we can infer that it was the Weekly Sabbath, and not any "High Sabbath" that God made holy at creation. It is not, therefore, relegated to the status of Ceremonial Law which has been fulfilled by Christ and passed away under the New Covenant with the feasts, but it remains established in God's moral law as it was established before God's moral law was given.

Essential for Unity in the Covenant Community and Assurance of Generational Faithfulness

The Sabbath has many tangible benefits. The Sabbath speaks to God's charity for his chosen people; out of love for them, He mandated a day of rest. As any physician or competent employer could tell you, man is not made to routinely and habitually work seven days without rest. When such is required, the results are poor work performance, diminishing returns in productivity, and damaging consequences upon the laborer's home and family life that will eventually have negative repercussions in the work place. Likewise, the Sabbath ensures that due diligence is given to the home, marriage, and family from the laborer to his family, which is honoring to God and the institutions of family and marriage.

Aside from these temporal physical benefits of the Sabbath for the laborer, the Sabbath also has tangible spiritual benefits. As the Scripture says, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), and the Sabbath requires a demonstration of faith, perhaps more than any other commandment. It takes faith to leave the fields that are ready for sowing or ready for harvest, with uncertainty of the weather to follow and the possibility that a crop may not be properly planted or reaped in a timely fashion. When a family (or the Jewish society at large) scrapes by with barely enough provision, it is a giant leap of faith to lay down your productivity for a day of rest. To observe the Sabbath is to have faith that God will meet your needs if you rest rather than labor. Honoring the Sabbath is, at its heart, reliance upon God's provision, rather than the work of your own hands.

Aside from physical and spiritual benefits of the Sabbath, for the covenant people, there were intrinsically important benefits in relation to community unity and generational faithfulness. It was honoring the Sabbath – more so than honoring any other commandment – that visibly and publicly set the Covenant people apart from the heathen nations around them. Most commands are kept in the heart, but this commandment is kept in such a way that is visible and manifest to the public. The pagan tribes of Canaan would have noticed the conspicuous absence of Hebrews in the fields and streets, and been reminded that the Hebrew people had a covenant with Yahweh. It was Sabbath-keeping that was the supreme testimony of the peculiarity of God's people. It was Sabbath-keeping that was the paramount outward display of God's people of their commitment to the Covenant. This was the commandment, more so than any other, that made one explicitly Jewish.

Other commandments (as one would expect with eternal moral law) are universal in scope and adoption. Pagans could agree that they should worship their gods. Pagans could agree that their parents should be honored. Pagans could agree that their gods not be blasphemed. Pagans could agree that theft, murder, lying and adultery were wrong (although not all did). In this, a well-behaved pagan could not be distinguished from a well-behaved Hebrew under the Old Covenant – with one exception. The Hebrew set apart a day of the week and observed it as holy unto them. This is not a concept that comes naturally to the pagan mind, and thus was unique to the Hebrews.

Not only did the Sabbath set the Hebrews apart, but the Sabbath unified the Hebrews. This was one practice they all held in common. Traditions are easier to maintain than commands of blanket morality (which some, like the Pharisees, abused to “clean the outside of their cup” only), thus, this is the only *commandment* that was, *at the same time*, an instant *tradition*. Traditions are held sacred by a community that shares traditions in common. Just as Americans are brought together by secular and insignificant (but oddly powerful) traditions such as a watermelon on the fourth of July or Memorial Day picnics, all-the-more powerful is a weekly holy day that is observed by everyone in the community.

The last eight words of the preceding sentence are not an over-statement! The tradition and command of the Sabbath was such a powerful unifying force that everyone – literally, everyone – in the community observed the Sabbath. This is partly an artificial distinction, however, and does not speak of the Hebrew’s obedience. The reason everyone in the community observed the Sabbath was because, in the Hebrew mind, if you did not observe the Sabbath you were not a part of the community. The Fourth Commandment was so important that it, in and of itself, was the dividing line of who and who was not to be considered a part of God’s Covenant. To not observe the Sabbath was, simply put, to not be a Jew. It is like saying, “Everyone in prison is a convict.” That is a statement of absolute truth. It does not imply everyone in prison is guilty. It means that everyone in prison has been convicted. To be in prison is to be a convict. Conversely, if one has not been convicted, they are not in prison. Observance of the Sabbath made one part of the Covenant community. To not observe the Sabbath made one not a part of the Covenant community. The Fourth Commandment was, literally, the tie that bound together the people of God unlike any other commandment. There might be a Hebrew that broke the eighth commandment would still be considered a part of the Covenant. There might be a Hebrew that (God forbid) even broke the Second Commandment (as did Aaron the High Priest) and would still be considered a part of the Covenant. But, failure to observe the Fourth Commandment immediately relegated one to the status of outsider, pagan and non-Jew (or in reality and in the eyes of the Jews, even worse than non-Jews – perhaps even a despised Samaritan).

This reality had a powerful influence on generational faithfulness. Today, the evangelical church in America is starting to see the value of tradition in its power over generational unity. The church growth and seeker-friendly church movements have relegated hymns, liturgy, and catechism to the dustbin of recent history. As we see growing generational disconnectedness within the church like never before, we also see hymns, liturgy and catechisms again finding their places in worship. Although there is nothing necessarily sacred in these practices, they have a powerful ability to bind generations together as intergenerational traditions. For example, as someone who has come out of the seeker-friendly movement, I now realize the beauty of not being able to hear “Amazing Grace” or “I Stand Amazed” without hearing it in the voice of my long-departed grandmother. She is gone, and yet I am connected to her. There is a comfort in picking up our church’s catechism, used for four hundred years, and knowing that I cast my eyes upon the same words as my beloved Spurgeon. And although Baptists are not a liturgical people, for those of that particular tradition, there is a beautiful connection with Saints

long gone from us, as we utter aloud the same words they uttered long. The words of the same liturgy still echo along in unison, as sound waves created hundreds of years before us, still echo somewhere out in God's Universe, traveling outward towards the expanse of heavens unknown.

Consequences for Breaking the Commandment: An Indication of Its Sacred Value

As we look to the punishment for breaking the Sabbath, notice the points evident in how the Sabbath is spoken of in Exodus 31:

[12] And the LORD said to Moses, [13] "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. [14] You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. [15] Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. [16] Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. [17] It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'" (Exodus 31:12-17 ESV)

Here we see that Sabbath-keeping was more than a command – it was a sign (verse 13). It is a sign, specifically, of the Covenant. Furthermore, it was a sign throughout your generations (which speaks to its importance for generational faithfulness). Not only that, but Sabbath keeping sanctifies (sets apart or distinguishes, makes Holy) in a uniquely Yahweh-oriented fashion (that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctifies you – verse 13). Notice also that the Sabbath was made holy before the Law (verse 17) and is holy after the law, forever (verse 16).

Also pay special attention to the consequence for breaking the Fourth Commandment. Punishment for "profaning" (making it common, regular or ordinary includes death (verse 14) and being cut off from the Covenant community (verse 14). This is why, in particular, not being a Sabbath-keeper was effectively to not be considered a part of the Covenant. Again, we see the consequence is death (listed a second time, verse 15).

Exceptions to Sabbath Observation

Are there exceptions to Sabbath observance? Did followers of Yahweh have to observe the Sabbath most of the time or all the time? Could they break it occasionally, but still follow it as a general rule, and be found innocent of infringing the Fourth Commandment?

Like with any of the other nine Commandments, the Fourth Commandment is not to be "mostly followed." One mustn't "mostly" obey the First Commandment and only worship a false god once in a while. One mustn't "mostly" obey the Second Commandment and make a graven image only on special occasions or for a good purpose. One mustn't honor their mother and father only up until he/she is the age of adulthood.

There are, however, exceptions granted (or expectations for obedience explained) in numbers of the commandments, including the Fourth Commandment. Keep the regulative principle in mind. Because the Scripture provides an exception, this does not mean we can deduce that we can make up more exceptions. We are bound by the Text.

The most notable exception in Scripture for Sabbath-keeping comes from Jesus in Luke 14:5, who presented, what appears to be a generally accepted understanding in His day for exempting Sabbath observance, due to a work-related emergency. Jesus asks the question, “Which of you would not get your son [in some translations, donkey] or ox out of a ditch on the Sabbath?” This suggests that there is at least this one exception to Sabbath keeping.

What is an ox in the ditch? **First**, it is an unplanned event. No one plans to have their ox in the ditch. Planning on Monday morning to work on the Sabbath is not an ox-in-the-ditch type situation. Secondly, it is something that cannot wait until the next day. An ox could die in the ditch (whether of injury, from wild beasts, as the ox is not in a position to defend itself or flee, or from drowning if it were a wetland or slough). A vehicle stranded on the side of the road, assuming it is in a safe place, is not an ox-in-the-ditch situation. It can wait until the next day. Your laundry being piled up is not an ox-in-the-ditch type situation. It demonstrates no faith and gives no glory to God if your life is perfectly in order and you pause to observe the Sabbath. It demonstrates much faith and gives to God immeasurable glory if your life is momentarily chaotic and you pause to put down your work (that can wait until tomorrow) to observe the Sabbath. That is the type of faith that makes pagans take notice. **Finally**, it is something that is significant to your livelihood. An ox was a major financial investment and primary farming tool that could mean the matter between life and death or prosperity and debtor’s prison. The modern day equivalent to an ox being in the ditch would be a trucker’s big rig or a farmer’s combine. A situation that might cause you financial loss, but only to the level of momentary discomfort and minor monetary value, is not an ox-in-the-ditch type situation. The exception then is an occurrence that is (1) significant to your livelihood (2) an unplanned event (3) and cannot wait until tomorrow. If Luke 14:5 is properly translated son (as the ESV translates it) and not donkey (as some other translations have it), it would also imply (4) that it may aid in alleviating human suffering – for example, helping a stranded person or assisting one who is in imminent jeopardy.

Interestingly, Jesus is the one – and not Moses – who provides the exception that appears accepted by the Jews. If it was generally accepted by the Jews of Jesus’ day, we must wonder why this appears to them an obvious exception. We find the answer in scripture. God allowed the breaking of Sabbath during times of war, as with Joshua’s march around Jericho on the Sabbath (Joshua 6:3-4). Those who serve others as a part of Sabbath worship (ministers facilitating worship) were permitted an exception (Exodus 29:29-30). Guards could work on the Sabbath (2 Kings 11:5-9), presuming that thieves do not take off the Sabbath. These all fit the category of either (A) unexpected events that require immediate attention or (B) people in fields of employment that deal with unexpected events (guards and soldiers) or assist in worship (priests) or deal with human needs that exist even on the Sabbath.

There is one other matter that some might call an exception, but it is better termed a “clarification.” The Pharisees rebuked Jesus in Matthew 12:1-12 for plucking grain to eat as they were traveling and accusing him of working on the Sabbath. Keep in mind that if Jesus broke the Sabbath, he could not have been our Savior. Clearly, Jesus did not believe that plucking or picking food to then eat was work. In other words, the man out harvesting his field on Sunday may be violating the Sabbath (unless he’s certain that it cannot wait until the next day); a woman picking produce from the garden to bring in for Sabbath meal, however, is not violating the Sabbath.

A word of reiteration...

Keep in mind that these are the exceptions for breaking the Sabbath. Although we do not deal with donkeys or oxen very often in modern times, the regulative principle still binds us to the general framework of these exceptions: (1) matters relating to your livelihood (2) an unplanned event that could not have been alleviated by better planning on your part (3) a matter that is urgent and cannot wait (4) a situation that may alleviate imminent human suffering, with the understanding that simple, mundane tasks such as collecting chicken eggs, milking the cow or picking produce is not work as long as it is for daily consumption (it is difficult to rest on an empty stomach).

Notice, there is no exception for family vacation. There is no exception for extreme, continual financial hardship (e.g. “I’ll rest three months from now when I get caught up on my bills”). There is rarely an exception for observing the Sabbath. To take a week off from observing the Sabbath, without a biblically prescribed reason, was enough for the Covenant community to perceive one as an outsider and pagan. A Jewish man plowing his field on the Sabbath, when there was no sign of imminent rain in the distance, would have immediately identified him with the pagan tribes of Canaan and he would be treated as such by his Jewish brethren. They would have presumed that one-time abandonment of the Covenant sign was his exodus from the community.

This seems harsh, but how many acts of defiant, intentional disobedience are necessary to determine one is apart from the Covenant? I would submit to you, given the significance of the Fourth Commandment, *only one*.

The New Testament Sabbath

Some take issue with term, New Testament Sabbath, because it implies a flawless continuity (in substance, meaning how the commandment is to be observed and in essence, meaning what the commandment is to accomplish) between the Old Testament Sabbath and the day set aside for corporate worship that is often called the Lord’s Day (which is a term used by the disciple, John in Revelation 1:10). Using the term New Testament Sabbath does necessarily imply flawless continuity in this commandment, under both covenants. Some use the term merely to illustrate a continuity in essence of the Fourth Commandments, in spite of a change in substance (see footnote below for further explanation).

Others take issue with the term New Testament Sabbath; they believe what defined the Sabbath was the *substance* of the Fourth Commandment and not the *essence* of the Fourth Commandment. Their error, however, is in not recognizing that the essence of the Tenth Commandment is not in refusing to covet your neighbor's donkey or wife, but in being grateful for God's provision and not lusting after possessions. What defines the Sabbath is that it is (1) a day set apart for the Lord and altogether different than other days (2) restful compared to our days of labor (3) a distinguishing mark of God's Covenant people that separates us from the pagans surrounding us and (4) observed faithfully by God's people.

Some prefer the arguably more-biblical term, the Lord's Day, and that is also an acceptable term. For the rest of this treatise, I'll use the term Lord's Day, with the open disclosure that I believe it to be synonymous with a proper use of the term, New Testament Sabbath.

A Transition of Substance, A Continuance of Essence: Becoming the Lord's Day

Aside from historical tradition (which is not a rule of faith or practice) which soundly illustrates that the Apostles led first century believers to set aside as holy unto the Lord the first day of the week as opposed to the last, we see the behavior of the Apostolic church indicate Lord's Day worship in Holy Script. There is a continual reference in Scripture to Sunday gatherings of the church body that seems to take for granted an understanding prevalent among first century believers that Sunday is the day set aside for God's people to observe and mark as holy. We see this in 1st Corinthians 7 in the phrasing, "On the first day of the week, as we were gathered together to break bread..." Often the debate concerns whether or not "break bread" was a euphemism for the Lord's Supper (which it was) because as the highest act of worship in the Christian faith, this would indicate that the believers had gathered for corporate worship on Sunday and not on Saturday. This is a sound argument, but what's often overlooked is the phrasing, "as we had gathered..." This implies that the unique event was not the church gathering that day, but it was the events to follow, chiefly Paul raising Eutychus from the dead. The saints gathering on this day was not the headline, meaning this was a usual affair and the observance of Sunday had already become a part of the church's tradition under Paul's direction. Combined with the reality that the church was "birthed" on Sunday (with the Holy Spirit coming down at Pentacost – on Sunday), it seems that this is the day now chosen by God as special. The Old Testament Sabbath was celebrated at the completion of creation. The New Testament Sabbath is celebrated at the beginning of Christ's re-creation, beginning with His Resurrection.

We see this "taken for granted" attitude toward Sunday observance in 1 Corinthians 16 as well. Paul instructs the church to take a collection. He tells them in verse two how to take the collection, which is to take place on the first day of each week. Again, Paul takes for granted the fact that the church meets on the first day. Although not explicitly didactic, we see that this is how the Apostles structured the church in its orderly observance of the Lord's Day. With the Disciple John delegating this day the honorary title of the Lord's Day (no doubt a reference to Christ's resurrection, which occurred on Sunday), he is declaring that the first day of the week

now belongs to the Lord and is set apart and holy (every day is technically the Lord's Day, and if John's term for Sunday is to hold any meaning at all it must mean that this day is special, sacred, and set apart wholly unlike the other six days of the week).

In this transition in the first century church, under Apostolic authority, we see the Fourth Commandment remain intact in its essence. The Lord's Day is a day set aside for observance, a day to be unlike all other days so that it is holy unto the Lord, it binds the generations together and promotes generational faithfulness in unity of its observation in the same way as under the Old Covenant, and it separates the people of the Covenant from the pagans around them. In this, I stand firmly convinced that the Lord's Day does not replace, but rather fulfills, all the requirements of obedience set forth in the Fourth Commandment.

The essence of the Fourth Commandment remaining immutable, the substance of the Fourth Commandment has changed to highlight the resurrection of Christ by (1) emphasizing our Sabbath rest is in Christ and (2) celebrating that Sabbath rest through worship.

Some may rightly point out that the Old Testament Sabbath emphasis was on rest, while the Lord's Day emphasizes worship – albeit some use this to argue that the Lord's Day cannot possibly replace the Old Testament Sabbath because they are too far apart in practice (again, learn to distinguish between substance and essence). This could be a compelling argument, if it were not for the Scripture's proclamation to us that *Jesus is our Sabbath rest* (Hebrews 4:9-11). Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8) and provides for us the foreshadowed rest we see mandated in the Old Covenant. Those of us who understand that Jesus is our Sabbath rest (the peace and tranquility given in our soul through the gift of the Gospel) are not subjected to the endless Jewish bylaws mandating and defining acceptable acts of physical labor on this day. What it does mean is that we recognize that the focus of Lord's Day observance – worship – is to celebrate the soulful rest we experience in Christ.

How the Lord's Day is to Be Observed

As with the Old Testament Sabbath, we are not free to observe the Lord's Day in whatever way we so desire. Contemporary Christians could argue that "as long as they make the day special" they are fulfilling God's commands, but they would be as wrong as an Old Testament Hebrew deciding to plow his field on the Sabbath for one reason or other he was under the assumption Yahweh would appreciate. Again, the regulative principle must guide our actions. Just as the First Commandment mandates worship, and the Second Commandment specifies how we should (or should not) worship, we are not free to decide how we are to observe the Lord's Day.

The Lord's Day was most plainly manifested and clearly observed by the gathering of the Saints.

Throughout the scripture, we see the Saints gathering on the Lord's Day. The disciples were gathered on Sunday when Jesus first visited them after the Resurrection (John 20:19) and then again a week later as they were gathered on Sunday (John 20:6). Some might argue that the disciples were huddled together perpetually until Pentecost, and that is a fair assessment, but

let the fact that Jesus visited on these two Sunday speak for itself. This could have played a pivotal role in their understanding of the day John would come to call the Lord's Day. The Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, on Sunday, as the Saints were gathered. Surely this fits into the development of this day becoming special unto the Lord. Not only is God the Son or Holy Spirit manifesting themselves on these days, but it happens while the Saints gather.

Paul, while traveling, gathered with the Saints on Sunday (Acts 20:7). Paul references the Christians gathering on Sunday in 1 Corinthians 16:2. In addition to these Biblical examples, history is clear that the Lord's Day became established as a day of Christians gathering in collective observance, not just observing separately or in family units. The Christian Didache of 90 AD is seen by most as a short treatise and summary of the Apostle's teachings, and although not inerrant or sacred writ, given its approximation in time to the death of the last Apostle (John), its accuracy should be weighed into consideration. The Didache asserts the Apostle's teaching included a command that "Every Lord's Day, gather yourselves to break bread, give thanksgiving..."

Just a few short years later in 110 AD, trying to describe the behavior of the Christians, Pliny writes, "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to (do) any wicked deeds, never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of good food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind." Notice that Pliny gives a description of what they were doing as they gathered. This will be important later in this treatise. Although Pliny doesn't state the day they met, remember: (1) he was a pagan and did not care about the particularities, and (2) that they met on the Lord's Day has already been resolved in this treatise. He specifies that they gathered together for what amounts to a sunrise service, no doubt in remembrance of the Resurrection.

Justin wrote the following in 150 AD, "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our

Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.” Please take note of their observance on the Lord’s Day, which again, will be important later in this treatise.

I dare not quote much further into history, lest I quote those more influenced by pagan Rome than Christ’s disciples. Both history and Scripture indicate that this day was observed (under the Apostle’s direction) primarily by gathering of Saints together. It is therefore safe to say, and an altogether sound conclusion, that not gathering on that day with other saints – outside of exceptions (that are coming) - is a violation of the Lord’s Day. The observation of this day differently than from how the Apostles instructed the church to observe it can be only an act of defiance toward Christ’s apostles.

The Lord’s Day gathering was not a conglomeration of Saints gathering randomly, but of Saints gathering in local congregations to which they belonged.

Scripturally, we see precisely what those gathered were doing on the Lord’s Day. Offerings were being taken (1 Corinthians 16:2) for mission needs that were mutually and previously agreed upon (e.g. this was no random hat-passing you may see at an evangelistic event or Gospel music concert). The congregation had determined the mission cause they were supporting, and they gathered with the congregation to take this offering (after all, this is a letter to a local church). They were observing the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), which is something that must be done only within the local church, as we see clearly in the didactic instructions from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. As the church began to gather (Acts 2:42), they engaged in listening to the Apostle’s teaching, in the Lord’s Supper, and in prayer.

We also see what the church was doing on the Lord’s Day and in their gatherings from the historical examples listed above. The Didache listed the Lord’s Supper and thanksgiving. Pliny mentioned singing hymns and “binding themselves together with a solemn oath,” referring to people with whom they are in covenant. These are not strangers. These are not Christians from afar. These are people with whom they have formally agreed to be accountable. In other words, these are Saints with whom they are in Covenant. It is impossible to be held accountable, as they were, for their fraud, theft, adultery or dishonesty unless there is established church discipline – and that can only happen within a local church. It can also only happen in a local church where there is an intimate familiarity with one another’s lives. Pliny mentions that they would gather, break, and then reassemble later that day. This was a church body in one’s local area for this to reasonably happen – it was near their home.

Justin further explains that the early Christians observed the Lord’s Day in local bodies, to which they belonged and with whom they were in covenant. The Scriptures were read, followed by the “president” (leader) preaching a message. Then, they prayed and took the Lord’s Supper, over which the leader officiated. This was not a loose affiliation of believers without an officially recognized pastor-leader. Benevolence giving was apportioned out, and deacons would take what was apportioned to those not present (widows and the housebound, presumably, from what we see in Scripture). Notice, both pastors and deacons were recognizable in this setting.

This is a local church body that is being described. An offering was then taken, according to Justin, and he reiterates that this all takes place as a part of the Sunday Assembly, which he points out is the day Christ rose from the dead.

A Brief Word on the Charge of Legalism

Is it not legalistic to insist that, other than the exceptions listed below, it is sinful to not engage in Lord's Day worship and not do it in a way that he has prescribed? If we believe in the immutable essence of God's Moral Law, then yes. Although in this sense, the term "legalistic" is not negative. To be accused of "legalism," one should only be offended if it implies making up laws, or in the sense of justification, to believe we're justified by following laws (which we are not, as we are justified by faith alone). If I called you "legalistic" because you paid your taxes without lying, is it an insult? If I called you "legalistic" for not speeding, is it an insult? As I illustrate later in this treatise, we treat no other commandment this way. If you believe it is sinful to commit adultery, even if it is just once, no one would call you "legalistic." If you believe it is sinful to murder, even if it is on rare occasion and you do not make it a habit, no one would call you "legalistic." And yet, if we insist that you observe the Lord's Day in the way the Apostles instruct us to observe the Lord's Day without exceptions, unless they're specifically biblically noted, even if it is rare and you do not make it a habit, people lay to us the charge of legalism. It is an unfortunate, but altogether irrelevant, annoyance.

Exceptions to Lord's Day Worship

Given that the essence of the Old Testament Sabbath given us in the Fourth Commandment is preserved in the Lord's Day observance, it is reasonable deduction that the same exceptions to this command exist now, as then, events that (1) relate to your livelihood (2) are unplanned and couldn't have been alleviated by better planning on your part (3) are urgent and cannot wait (4) may alleviate human suffering.

I see no other exceptions to New Testament believers observing the Lord's Day as the Apostles instructed the early church. They were instructed to attend and participate in the local congregation, with whom they are accountable through covenant and under the leadership and service of pastor and deacons, enjoying the spiritual rest of their souls, through the corporate worship of God in their home congregation.

The Confession dutifully points out that worship is not more or less acceptable to God because of where it is done. The Confession then points out that worship is to be done among private families, in secret by individuals, and in public assemblies.

It is here that many of today's American evangelicals would resist the general discoveries and assertions of this treatise. They would argue that worship is not more or less sacred because it is done at home, on the highway, at the river, or the picnic grounds. In fact, they might level the charge of pharisaic legalism at my treatise thus far, claiming that I do not understand that God can be equally worshipped anytime and anywhere. In fact, the Confession is resisting Papal

notions that worship is more sacred in a cathedral or upon a pilgrimage. The Confession is not yet speaking of our obligations of Sabbath-day worship, but only daily worship. The next article of the Confession speaks to Sabbath day requirements.

“As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so He has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.”

The Confession points out that there is a special day set aside to be observed to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, which is the first day of the week. Then, the Confession tells us what is to be accomplished on this day.

“The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, and to carrying out duties of necessity and mercy.”

The Confession then lays out what should be done (1) to have arranged all of our affairs prior to the Lord's Day including all work or acts of charity or industry (2) to observe the entire day and not merely a portion of the day (3) to be concerned neither for employment or recreation, and to (4) worship both privately and publicly unless it fits the exceptions, acts of necessity and mercy noted already in this treaty (although more concisely defined). It is my belief and conviction that information presented, thus far, in this short treatise, is totally in defense of and compatible with our Confession of Faith.

AN APOLOGETIC FOR LORD'S DAY REVERENCE IN REGARD TO THE LOCAL CHURCH IN MODERN TIMES

The following session of this treatise is to give an apologetic defense of what has been written thus far, especially in regard to Lord's Day observance being centered upon life in the local church, in light of peculiar and unique characteristics found both in our modern American culture and in the modern American, evangelical church.

We live in a day where covenant membership is rare, and when practiced, is undervalued.

Few churches today emphasize covenant membership. By this term, I mean a church that requires a covenant to be signed or agreed upon as the foundation for membership, or a church that recognizes a written covenant to be held in high regard among church membership.

Furthermore, it is not only rare that a church have a covenant mandating accountability among membership, many churches (and increasingly more all the time) have no concept of membership whatsoever.

Devaluing church membership is a bi-product of churches forsaking the biblically-mandated responsibilities of pastoral stewardship, including but not limited to, forsaking church discipline and abandoning the requirement for regenerate church membership. When a church does not practice discipline, the need for membership is easily overlooked. When a member is never removed from membership (as is required in scriptures - e.g. 1 Corinthians 5), membership is not needed. If the demonstrably lost are acting as believers within a congregation, and unregenerate membership is abided, soon membership loses all meaning and goes by the way side. First, the concept is neglected. Then, the concept is abandoned.

Inherent within covenant membership are the explicit responsibilities and expectations for church members. Churches without covenant membership, but only a loose affiliation of visitors and guests that gather should their schedule permit, hardly see the need for accountability and – in fact – stand in opposition to it. Evangelicalism today is conglomeration of churches consisting almost entirely of a non- membership of people that frequent that particular place of worship according to how their conscience at the moment dictates, who serve according to how much guilt or pressure is placed upon them, who give financially whatever does not pain them, and whose interaction among the fellowship is determined by how early they get to church or how soon they leave afterward.

Rarely does a church consist of dedicated members who have voluntarily, yet officially and formally, decided to covenant themselves with other believers and who have agreed to uphold a certain standard of personal holiness under threat of imminent loving rebuke and public discipline, who have sworn for the rest of their time in that body to financially sacrifice to sustain its ministry, even to the detriment of their own luxuries, and who will serve faithfully as a part of their binding commitment. Interaction among the fellowship is determined by a promise, made by their sacred honor, to be committed to others who have also pledged agreement with that same covenant.

It is a foreign idea, no doubt, that Christians are bound to their own local assemblies on the Lord's Day, and without exception, unless it is for reason of an exception this treatise has previously noted as Scriptural. I would submit to you that the resistance some people have towards an insistence of local church participation, as a part of Lord's Day observance, is from a church culture that finds foreign even the concept of covenant membership, making their resistance not only understandable, but predictable. Likewise, I would submit to you that if an individual understands and appreciates covenant membership, they would find the mandate that Christians are bound to their local assemblies on the Lord's Day to be natural and obvious.

We live in a day when para-church organizations unbiblically vie for the heart, attention, and commitment to the Bride of Christ.

A parachurch ministry is a ministry that performs a particular function (e.g. evangelism, discipleship, missions, and charity) that is not the local church. Parachurch ministries, ideally, serve in functions and capacities that local churches cannot serve alone. A typical local church cannot provide the training and resources necessary to have their personnel transcribe a previously-unstudied language into a decipherable alphabet, teach that alphabet to native people groups, and then translate the Bible into that language so they can read it. A parachurch ministry, however, may more easily allow various churches or individual Christians to cooperate on a very basic level for a very well-defined task, such as translating the Bible. Cooperation on a broader scale is not possible among churches that defend a certain doctrine (as God intended us to do) with those who hold different views. A seminary is another good example of a parachurch organization. It is not the church, but it serves the church to fulfill its Gospel-related objectives. Ideally, parachurch organizations are not governed by individuals, but by church bodies. If there are directing boards for the parachurch organization, churches should be able to appoint individuals to serve on the board, rather than individuals serving on the boards on their own merit and absent the support and leadership of the local church. When the proper structure is not present, parachurch ministries have a tendency to usurp the role of the local church by competing for the love, support, giftedness and loyalty of church members.

To counter this propensity, churches need not engage or affirm the mission of parachurch ministries unless they are performing (a) tasks not specifically given to the local church or (b) tasks the local church is unable to do. In Acts 6, the Greek widows were being overlooked by the Jewish-heritage church in the distribution of benevolence. So, the Apostles instructed that the church select seven individuals to distribute the benevolence fairly. Some have argued this is a Biblical support for parachurch ministries. It is not, because this was not a parachurch ministry, for several reasons. First, the men selected for this task were chosen by the church body, not an outside organization. Secondly, these men were under the authority and the direction given them by the church's authority. In fact, this example can be used to demonstrate a caution toward parachurch ministries, in that the church insisted on control and authority over those to whom they were delegating responsibility in carrying out the church's function. This would be substantiated by assertions (a) and (b) listed above.

Because there is not an explicit Biblical allowance for parachurch ministries (those performing the ministry of the church outside the authority of the church), today's New Testament churches should tread very, very carefully when it comes to this issue. When and if the role or authority of the parachurch organization and the church ever clash, the parachurch organization must immediately, apologetically, and emphatically defer to the authority of the local church. Anything else should be considered a sign of appalling disrespect to the organization that Christ has built and to which he gave the keys to his Kingdom for the power of binding and loosing. In fact, such mistreatment of the Bride of Christ could be considered gross disrespect for her Groom.

Dan Phillips explains the unique and preeminent authority of the local church this way:

But here's the problem. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25). Not the parachurch. Christ is the Head of the church (Eph. 5:23), not of the parachurch. He gave pastors and teachers for the equipping of saints for the work of service (Eph. 4:11). The church is created for, founded upon, and united in, its allegiance to the person of Christ who exercises His headship through the specific truths of God's Word (Jn. 8:31-32; 17:17, 21, 23; Eph. 4:4-5). The task of enlisting and cultivating students of Christ has been entrusted to it (Matt. 28:18-20). The task of preaching God's Word, come what may, has been thunderously pressed upon its leadership (2 Tim. 4:1-6). Assuring doctrinal purity, and guarding against (and repelling, and shutting the mouths of) unbelievers is Divinely mandated for that local church leadership (1 Tim. 1:3-11, 18-19; Titus 1:5-16; 2:1, 15; 3:9-11).

It is safe to say that if a parachurch ministry cannot concede these points, it should not exist. Many parachurch ministries claim to exist to support the work of the local church (especially when they are dependent upon the financial support of local churches), but would balk at the assertion that they must submit to the local church. If so, they should be considered anathema as usurpers of rightful authority.

Sadly, this is often not the case. In recent years, churches have bemoaned the influence of Campus Crusade for Christ upon their young people. Although not designed to remove college students from their local church bodies, it often succeeds in doing just that. The campus ministry becomes their "home," but it is a home that is not (or at least, should not be) set up to observe the ordinance or do church discipline, and therefore is not a church. The youth, believing themselves being spiritually engaged, become spiritually homeless in the midst of spiritual activity.

Christian Colleges are also a good example of this ecclesiological Downgrade. At small, denomination-affiliated or other private Christian colleges, a weekly worship or chapel service is mandated. Service, or some kind of ministry or volunteerism, is required. Peer support groups exist to provide accountability and promote discipleship. All of these activities are well and good. And yet, the college is not structured with pastor(s), elders, or deacons. The college has no right to administer the ordinances. The college has no spiritual right (although it may have a legal right) to discipline students for immoral behavior. These are tasks belonging to a local church. And yet, it is not uncommon to hear the controversy when these colleges begin to provide Sunday morning worship services for students on campus. "What's wrong with providing a worship service for student?" the college or college ministry responds. What's wrong with it is that Lord's Day observance is to be done among the local church, and the college's worship service does not constitute a church. Trying with good intentions to help, in this scenario, the parachurch organization actually leads the students into profaning the Lord's Day rather than honoring it (which it probably would have recognized if it had church oversight to begin with).

Other times, parachurch organizations receive the lion-share of Christian tithes and offerings. Although I will not provide a stalwart defense of New Testament financial giving here, I will submit for your consideration, that given the primacy of the local church so eloquently laid out by Dan Phillips above, it would be no far leap of logic to rightfully presume that one's financial stewardship should be primarily to his local church. For those familiar with my ministry, this explains why I have asked that even those supporting missionaries out of the percentage of their income they've set aside as a tithe or offering, that they allocate that for the missionary, and designate it in their giving through the local church, out of respect for this important and time-treasured principle. I rejoice when I hear parachurch organizations solicit funds on Christian radio and say, "After giving of your tithes and offerings to your local church, consider supporting our ministry," and I grimace when I hear a blanket solicitation *without any such stipulation*, and am immediately convicted that I should not financially support that parachurch ministry, for it does not submit to the local church and, instead, seeks to compete with it.

Since the Fourth Commandment serves the purpose and is the primary vehicle by which God's people are recognized (as seen in this treatise), it appears especially disrespectful and dishonoring to the local church to compete with the church for the affection of their people on the Lord's Day.

Modern evangelicals, as a whole, have an improper, missing, or confused understanding of God's Moral Law.

When you ask the typical modern evangelical about this, he would tell you "we are no longer under the Law" or perhaps "the Law has passed away." There is very little, if any, distinction in the minds of most modern Christians between God's Ceremonial, Civil and Moral Law. Our own church, for example, has only recently rediscovered these clear divisions through the use of our historic Baptist catechism – and I feel that rediscovery has been a source of an immeasurably heightened understanding of the purpose and use of God's Law.

In claiming that all of God's Law has passed away, as most indeed do, they do not understand that this would throw us into irreparable spiritual anarchy (perhaps this is the reason that the modern church indeed suffers from irreparable spiritual anarchy). Others err in the ditch on the other side of the road, as Messianic Christianity leavens the lump of Gentile Christianity and places under a curse countless churches that have traded free grace for tradition and legalism. Indeed, there are dangers on both sides.

There is widespread ignorance in the modern church concerning ceremonial laws and their fulfilment in Jesus (for the Messianic Judaizer, example) and concerning that the civil laws, although not applicable, still have their place and function (for the Christian Reconstructionist, who misapplies such), for the development of political theory and Christian ethics. However, *ignorance concerning God's Moral Law is particularly concerning*. It is this law that teaches us our duty, makes clear our condemnation, and shows us our need of the Savior (to quote our Baptist catechism).

The *substance of Moral Law* may change or expand and widen (again, seldom do we covet our neighbor's donkey's), but the *essence of the Moral Laws* do not change. Sadly, the modern Christian views God's Moral Laws as archaic suggestions by which we are guided in subjective, fluid, and even metaphoric renderings of their commands. Instead of expanding their scope as Jesus demonstrated in Matthew 5, for the modern Christian, the Ten Commandments have shrunk into subjective interpretations. I'll give some examples:

That you not commit adultery is not a suggestion. Should you commit adultery, you will be as guilty of sin as any Old Testament Jew who broke the Eighth Commandment. The Eighth Commandment isn't a "general rule." It isn't a guideline. It's an eternal law of God and does not change. And yet, because modern evangelicals don't understand the immutable nature of God's Moral Laws, we see rampant sin in the church. We tolerate the profaning of God's holy name like never before in church history, and I'd submit to you it's because we've never been more ignorant or had a lower view of the Moral Law. We've created so many exceptions to the Fifth Commandment that "honor your mother and father" have come to mean whatever the individual wants it to mean, and obedience to this commandment can hardly be defined. The Tenth Commandment has become almost as overlooked in modern evangelicalism as the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is overlooked by the United States Congress (it is present, but we act as if it's not there and never reference it or allow it to govern our behavior).

With this low view of the Moral Law, it is expected for people to think that honoring the Sabbath is a suggestion, or perhaps a general rule, or perhaps a law that we can break once in a while. It's not. It's a part of God's immutable Moral Law. It must be observed precisely how God should have us observe it in this current dispensation, each and every Lord's Day.

The Fourth Commandment, perhaps behind only the Tenth Commandment, is fervently resisted by true Christians in our modern culture.

Judging by our behavior, modern evangelicals live our lives as though the Ten Commandments do not exist, as we are only minimally different in our moral behavior from the world around us (any number of statistical surveys substantiate this). Adultery, divorce, and even abortion are demographically homogenous among evangelicals and those of other faiths or those professing no faith. But among those that are genuinely converted, two commandments stand out as especially being overlooked.

The truly converted will typically strive to worship God only, to forsake idols (although many true converts have a low view of this Commandment as well), not take God's name in vain (again, this means overtly take his name in vain, considering our low view of this Commandment), to make an obligatory attempt to obey our parents, to not commit adultery and to steal, lie and kill as little as possible. And if you ask the truly converted if these things are sinful, most will have no trouble giving you an emphatic and direct "yes."

However, ask the typical modern evangelical if it is sinful to miss the Lords' Day assembly because their child is in a basketball tournament, and you'll receive a whole spectrum of

answers from “no” to “maybe” to “yes” to “You’re a Pharisee, aren’t you?” Ask them if it’s sinful to miss the Lord’s Day assembly because they got in very late on Saturday night and Sunday is their only day to relax and you’ll hear the uncertainty in their answers. Ask them if it’s sinful to miss the Lord’s Day assembly because they are severely behind on work, and you’ll hear the uncertainty in their answer. This response is different from what it would be to almost any other commandment.

I would submit to you that this phenomenon isn’t because we’re any more unclear on the Fourth Commandment than on the others (we’re equally confused on their application and authority). I would submit to you this phenomenon is directly related to the fact that busyness is the bane of our age. Busyness is our idolatry. We are a people that travel to and fro like never before (Daniel 12:4). We are a people that glorify busy. Look at social media as an exhibit. Look at the photos and statuses that people post. Person by person, each one tries to prove that they are busier than the next. It is a sign of achievement, of success, of accomplishment; worn-out tires or frequent flier miles are the trophies of our modern age. We are compelled to push into our lives as many activities as is humanly possible, and we have been conditioned to do this since the advent of the automobile and onset of global communication. Like mindless and soulless lemmings, we jam into our schedule more activities than for which we have capacity, and grin with excitement, under the impression that busyness equals success and success equal happiness. We have become the hamster on the wheel and the rats in a maze with no end, although we are not running for the cheese; we are running for no apparent reason other than the fact that everyone else around us is also running.

The Fourth Commandment is directly antithetical to our way of life. In ages past, the chance for rest from a life that consisted mostly of hard, physical labor was a luxury. But in our modern age where luxuries are all around us and laborious work is reserved for the Third World working class who produce our inexpensive belongings in sweatshops for us, taking a day off from our routine is not as much celebrated. When the only time one left the homestead was to the Lord’s Day gathering, it was an opportunity one looked forward to and treasured. When an additional five hundred miles are put onto our odometer between Sundays, one more journey out your driveway hardly seems celebratory. Simply put, more than almost any other commandment, the Fourth Commandment cramps our style.

Keeping this in mind, it is essentially important to teach the modern evangelical church that regular and consistent, weekly observance of the Lord’s Day sets us apart as God’s people more than at any other time history. Observing the Lord’s Day in our pagan community is a more drastic statement of our commitment to the Covenant than an Old Testament Hebrew putting down his trowel or shovel among the pagan tribes in Canaan. Observing the Lord’s Day (as He prescribes us through the Apostle to observe it) is a stinging barb in the rebellious side of one whose tendency is to identify with culture more than Christ – and it is therefore an essential part of Christian sanctification.

Properly esteeming the Fourth Commandment is the greatest defense against gratuitous violations of the Tenth Commandment.

The only other commandment that may be as antithetical to our modern lifestyle as the Fourth Commandment is the Tenth Commandment. Barely even taught anymore (when was the last time you heard a sermon or had a Bible study on coveting), I would again suggest it's because the commandment so violently opposes our predisposed tendencies toward the favorite sins of our age. The essence of the Tenth Commandment, beyond the substance of coveting donkeys and wives, is to be content with what God has given you and to not yearn for what God has not given you. The emphasis on donkeys and wives in the Ten Commandment isn't on these things belonging to your neighbor; the emphasis of sin is found in that these things don't belong to you. The essential sin of the Tenth Commandment is ingratitude to God. The secondary sin of the Tenth Commandment is discontentment with what God has given that leads to a lust for possessions (the term lust is not too strong a term, as both a neighbor's wife and his donkey are mentioned in the same commandment).

Taking an entire day each week to observe as Holy unto the Lord, in which we do no labor that can increase our wealth, is a spiritual discipline that makes us strong against the temptations of lust for wealth, property and possessions. To observe the Lord's Day is to make a declaration to the pagan world, to Satan and ourselves that we are worship God rather than possessions. Again, following the Fourth Commandment has implications and benefits far beyond what we see at cursory reading.

A Summation of the Benefits of the Lord's Day Observance in Obedience to the Fourth Commandment

Far beyond the scope of human intelligence or imagination are the benefits weaved in and out of the Sabbath Day for the Sabbath observer. This short treatise and its short-minded author cannot possibly list all the ways that the immutable essence of the Sabbath Day first established on the first seventh day of all creation blesses those of us who now observe the Sabbath Day on the first day of Christ's re-creation as he makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). The Sabbath's riches are beyond the ability of what mortal man can grasp. This is not too lofty language to describe the only commandment that is explicitly unique for God's Covenant people.

And because the wisdom, beauty and benefits of the Sabbath are too much for us to intellectually ascertain, we must, like little children, obey as closely as possible the instructions we've been given regarding it. We must not, as adolescents often do, begin to stretch the rules to suit our tastes or ignore them as somehow we know better. Like little children, we are to follow the commandments in innocent and straightforward obedience to a Father that is far bigger and much wiser.

The blessings here established, are not most manifest in a partial observance or the commandment, but in a full and obedience observance to the commandment. Any corners cut, standards stretched or specifications skewed will no doubt be cut, stretched and skewed to

avoid hardship and discomfort. *But it's obedience in the hardship and discomfort that most sanctifies us.*

A Justification by Faith Alone

Let no one be so confused by reading this treatise so as to assume that we make God pleased with us by obeying the Fourth Commandment and observing the Lord's Day. God is pleased with us because He is immeasurably pleased with Christ on account of both Christ's active and passive obedience on our behalf. We are not made acceptable to God by following the Fourth Commandment. We are made acceptable to God through faith, given to us by God, in what Christ accomplished for us in His death, burial and resurrection.

The sixth verse of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews tells us that it's impossible to please God without faith. In that chapter, the author of Hebrews lists the Saints of the Old Testament and powerfully pronounces faith as being what made them acceptable before God. It would be great misunderstanding to believe that following God's Moral Law ever saved someone, first because no one has ever followed it flawlessly and secondly because it's faith that justifies. Why then, the common misconception among the Jews then and Christians today that there was at one time a salvation attainable by obedience to the Law? The answer is quite simple; obedience to the Ten Commandments requires faith. Each and every Commandment requires faith to obey and trust that God's righteous precepts are better than the ways that come naturally to our depraved hearts. A man of faith will be a man of obedience. Unfortunately, it's our human tendency to look to the outward demonstration of faith (obedience) rather than the source of faith, who is none other than God Himself. This tendency, if unchecked, will lead to works-righteousness and again place us under the curse.

But a mature believer, confident in their understanding and embrace of a justification by faith alone, is not afraid to face the reality that faith is demonstrated by repentance, and repentance demonstrated by obedience. These qualities, repentance and obedience, are the fruit of what the scripture calls sanctification. It is for this reason – because we have already been justified and not in order to become justified – we look to the open Bible and pour over God's revealed righteousness in His moral law and ask ourselves what God desires of us, that it might glorify Him.

Financial Giving

The New Testament Standard of Giving (By Dave Miller)¹:

What is the New Testament standard for giving?

The predominant message of our churches regarding giving has been pretty consistent. Figure out what you make, move the decimal one place to the left, and write a check. And if you really love Jesus, you add some offerings to that tithe. New Testament giving, it is said, involves paying the tithe, which is demanded by God's Word, and then giving offerings above the tithe.

Of course, many have argued that tithing is an Old Testament standard and that it no longer applies today. We are no longer required in this age of grace to give a set amount as the poor folks under the law were required to do, it is said. It is seldom stated, but my experience leads me to conclude, that often this is a means of justification for those who give far less than a tithe.

But does the Bible support either of these views? Is the traditional view of tithing as a New Testament mandate correct? Or does the Bible give justification to those who give much less than a tithe? What does the Bible actually say?

Perspectives

1) The concept of tithing in the Old Testament was considerably more complicated than the way we sometimes present it.

Andreas Kostenberger and David Croteau have an excellent study of the historical and theological aspects of tithing, called, "Will a Man Rob God?" I will let the reader evaluate their perspectives, but the tithing system in the Old Testament era was anything but simple. Before we attempt to bring tithing into the New Testament era and make it the standard for us today, we should ascertain we really understand all that was involved before and under the Mosaic Law.

2) None of the New Testament instructions on giving mention tithing.

There are a handful of New Testament mentions of tithing, either in the gospels or in Hebrews. They all reference the Old Testament system, in one way or another, primarily in the negative sense of the empty religious works of the Pharisees. In Hebrews, tithes are presented as part of that inadequate Levitical system which Jesus superseded.

On the other hand, the major passages of the New Testament regarding giving have absolutely no mention of tithing as a standard.

¹ From Dave Miller at SBC Voices, <http://sbcvoices.com/the-new-testament-standard-of-giving/> Accessed 1/22/2016

In Acts 2 and 4, great generosity is cited in the New Testament church, but none of it is ever accompanied by giving.

In Philippians 4:10-20, Paul discusses the generous giving the Philippians (Macedonians) demonstrated toward his ministry.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul speaks of these same Macedonians in the New Testament's most extensive teaching on giving. Is it not odd that Paul, in this extensive and systematic instruction on giving, never once mentioned tithing (giving 10%) as a mandate? Paul never mentioned tithing. Peter never mentioned it. John didn't either. Doesn't this seem strange?

3) There is a pattern of New Testament giving that does not involve tithing.

Those who promote tithing as a New Testament mandate have pointed out that there is no verse that negates tithing. But I think that there is such instruction. Tithing may not be mentioned, but there is a New Testament standard that is consistent in the New Testament. We need to examine that standard.

The New Testament Standard of Giving (2 Corinthians 8-9)

1) Giving is a voluntary act.

Second Corinthians 9:7 blows the concept of tithing as the mandatory New Testament standard out of the water.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

What does a person give? He decides in his heart what to give. He is under no compulsion to give a fixed amount or percentage. Giving is a voluntary act of love and thanksgiving. When Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, he made it clear that they were free to give whatever percentage of the money they decided. Their problem was not that they did not give some predetermined amount, but that they lied about it. What they gave was up to them, according to Peter.

But that does not mean that Christians can give tiny amounts of their income and expect that God will be pleased by their stinginess.

2) New Testament giving is generous.

Those who would say, "I don't have to give a tithe" as an excuse for giving little or nothing have absolutely no understanding of the New Testament standard. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 and many other verses, this is made clear.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Whatever the New Testament standard is, it is not stingy. It is not miserly. Americans, with all our prosperity, give around 2.5 per cent of our income to charitable causes. That is ridiculous. The absence of strict tithing does not justify that kind of ungodly stinginess.

3) New Testament giving is evidence of commitment to Christ and passion for his Kingdom.

Your giving demonstrates the level of your commitment to and your passion for Christ. Does that statement bother you? Read 2 Corinthians 8 – it becomes pretty clear. Look at verse 5.

“...they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

Their giving was an outflow of their commitment to Christ. Once you have given yourself to Christ, giving of your money and possessions to others becomes natural.

After urging the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving, in verse 7, Paul said this in verse 8:

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

Paul seemed to believe that giving was a way of demonstrating that love was genuine and faith was earnest.

4) The essence of New Testament giving is sacrifice.

Let us be honest. In America, many people give a portion of what is left over after they have paid all their bills and done everything they wanted to do. We give God the leftovers.

New Testament giving is marked primarily by one concept. Sacrifice. That is the very nature of Christianity, and our giving should be a reflection of our faith. Jesus gave himself for us on the Cross. We give ourselves to Christ, dying to self and sin and then living to Christ. Our giving, to be truly New Testament, must reflect that sacrifice.

Staying in 2 Corinthians 8, look at verses 2-4.

“...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”

Look at the formula for NT giving. Severe affliction + joy + extreme poverty = a wealth of generosity. The people of Macedonia gave according to their means. Honestly, who among us wouldn't be thrilled if our people just gave as much as they could afford to give? But the Macedonians (and the members of the Jerusalem church just after Pentecost) took it a step further. They gave beyond their means, beyond their ability.

In fact, they begged for the privilege of giving what they couldn't afford to give.

The New Testament Standard of Giving

In the New Testament era, disciples who had died to self and who were completely committed to the cause of Christ, gave cheerfully and voluntarily, first of themselves, and then of their earthly means. They gave more than they could afford to give, because the Kingdom of God mattered more to them than anything temporal.

If you suggested tithing to a New Testament giver, they would look at you with wide eyes and ask,

“After all Christ has done for me, why would I give so little?”

Service

The Scripture teaches that every member of the church has a purpose, which is edifying the local church and a particular function within that church.

[1] Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. [2] You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. [3] Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

[4] Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

One Body with Many Members

[12] For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

[14] For the body does not consist of one member but of many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? [18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

[21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [22] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, [24] which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, [25] that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

[27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [28] And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12 ESV)

All members of First Baptist Church Sidney are expected to serve in the benefit of the local church. Each individual is to have a place of service. A committee manual has been provided for you on the church website. At fbcsidney.org, click "Member Info" and then the link that says "Church Manual." The password for that pdf is 2181.

Church discipline

On occasion, a Christian will wander away from the fellowship of other believers and find himself ensnared by sin through ignorance or willful disobedience.² It then becomes necessary for the church, and particularly its shepherds, to actively seek the repentance and restoration of that Christian. As shepherds of the flock, the elders love the sheep and are also held accountable by God for their spiritual welfare, including that of the wandering sheep. As in Jesus' parable in Luke 15:3-8, it is a time of joy, both in heaven and within the church, when the wandering Christian truly repents.

One means by which the church seeks to lovingly restore wandering believers is the process of church discipline. In Matthew 18, the Lord explains to His disciples how to respond when a fellow believer sins. The principles He sets forth must guide the body of Christ as she seeks to implement discipline in the church today.

The Purpose of Discipline

The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord. When a sinning believer is rebuked and he turns from his sin and is forgiven, he is won back to fellowship with the body and with its head, Jesus Christ.

The goal of church discipline, then, is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is not to embarrass people or to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose is to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back.

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus says, "And if your brother sins go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." The Greek word translated "won" was originally used for accumulating wealth in the sense of monetary commodities. Here it refers to the gaining back of something of value that is lost, namely, an erring brother. When a brother or sister strays, a valuable treasure is lost, and the church should not be content until he or she is restored. The body of Christ is in the business of recovery (Gal. 6:1), and such is the purpose of church discipline.

The Process of Discipline

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus sets forth the four step process of church discipline: (1) tell him his sin alone; (2) take some witnesses; (3) tell the church; and (4) treat him as an outsider.

Step One (Matt. 18:15). The process of church discipline begins on an individual level. Jesus said, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private" (v. 15a). Here, an individual believer is to go to a sinning brother privately and confront him in a spirit of humility and gentleness. This confrontation

² This entire section: Adapted from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16–23* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988); John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991); and Stuart Scott and George Crawford, "Restoring the Wandering Sheep," (unpublished paper). For a fuller treatment of church discipline, consult these resources.

involves clearly exposing his sin, so that he is aware of it, and calling him to repentance. If the sinning brother repents in response to the private confrontation, that brother is forgiven and restored (v. 15b).

Step Two (Matt. 18:16). If the sinning brother refuses to listen to the one who has rebuked him privately, the next step in the discipline process is to take one or two more believers along to confront him again (v. 16a). The purpose of taking other believers is so that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed” (v. 16b). In other words, the witnesses are present, not only to confirm that the sin was committed, but also, to confirm that the sinning brother was properly rebuked and that he has or has not repented.

The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord.

The presence of additional witnesses is as much a protection for the one being approached as it is for the one approaching. After all, a biased person could erroneously say, “Well, I tried to confront him, but he’s impenitent.” It would be presumptuous to think that one person could make that ultimate determination, especially if he was the one who had been sinned against. The witnesses need to confirm whether there is a heart of repentance or one of indifference or rejection. Such a report provides the basis for further action because the situation has been verified beyond the report of one individual.

At this point, it should be hoped that the one or two who are brought along to confront the sinner will not have to become public witnesses against him before the rest of the church. Ideally, their added rebuke will be sufficient to induce a change of heart in the offending brother that the initial rebuke did not cause. If this change of heart does occur, that brother is forgiven and restored, and the matter is dropped.

Step Three (Matt. 18:17a). If the sinning brother refuses to listen and respond to the confrontation of the witnesses after a period of time, those witnesses are then to tell it to the church (v. 17a). This is most appropriately done by bringing the matter to the attention of the elders, who in turn oversee its communication to the assembly as a whole.

How long should the witnesses continue to call the person to repentance before telling the church? The elders at Fellowship Church avoid carrying out the third or fourth stage of church discipline until they are absolutely certain that the erring believer has truly sinned, or is continuing to sin, and that he has refused to repent when appropriately confronted. The elders will routinely send a letter by registered mail warning the individual that the third (or fourth) step of discipline will be taken if they have not received word of repentance by a specific date. When this date has passed, the person’s sin and refusal to repent are made known publicly, either before the entire assembly during a Communion service or through a fellowship group in which the person is known.

It has been the custom at Fellowship Church, upon enacting this third step, to clearly indicate to the congregation that they are to pursue the person aggressively and plead with him to repent before the fourth step becomes necessary. That crucial and potent procedure often draws the sinner to repentance and obedience. If repentance does take place, the sinning believer is forgiven and restored.

Step Four (Matt. 18:17b). The fourth and final step in the process of church discipline is ostracism. If a sinning believer refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be ostracized from the fellowship. Jesus said, "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (v. 17b). The term "Gentile" was primarily used of non-Jews who held to their traditional paganism and had no part in the covenant, worship, or social life of the Jews. On the other hand, a "tax-gatherer" was an outcast from the Jews by choice, having become a traitor to his own people. Jesus' use of these terms doesn't mean that the church is to treat these people badly. It simply means that when a professing believer refuses to repent, the church is to treat him as if he were outside of the fellowship. They are not to let him associate and participate in the blessings and benefits of the Christian assembly.

When a man in the Corinthian church refused to forsake an incestuous relationship with his stepmother, the apostle Paul commanded that the man be removed from their midst (1 Cor. 5:13). The believers there were not even to share a meal with him (1 Cor. 5:11), for dining with someone was symbolic of a hospitable and cordial fellowship. The one who is persistently unrepentant is to be totally ostracized from the fellowship of the church and treated like an outcast, not a brother.

As far as the welfare of the church is concerned, the purpose of putting the brother out is to protect the purity of the fellowship (1 Cor. 5:6), to warn the assembly of the seriousness of sin (1 Tim. 5:20), and to give a testimony of righteousness to a watching world. But as far as the welfare of the brother himself is concerned, the purpose of the ostracism is not to punish but to awaken, and it must therefore be done in humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteous superiority (2 Thess. 3:15).

When a church has done everything it can to bring a sinning member back to purity of life but is unsuccessful, that individual is to be left to his sin and his shame. If he is truly a Christian, God will not cast him away, but He may allow him to sink still deeper before he becomes desperate enough to turn from his sin.

The command not to have fellowship or even social contact with the unrepentant brother does not exclude all contact. When there is an opportunity to admonish him and try to call him back, the opportunity should be taken. In fact, such opportunities should be sought. But the contact should be for the purpose of admonishment and restoration and no other.

Church Governance

Elders

Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. An elder is one of a plurality of biblically qualified men who jointly shepherd and oversee a local body of believers.³ The word translated “elder” is used nearly twenty times in Acts and the epistles in reference to this unique group of leaders who have responsibility for overseeing the people of God.

The Office of Elder

As numerous passages in the New Testament indicate, the words “elder” (presbuteros), “overseer” (episkopos), and “pastor” (poimen) all refer to the same office. In other words, overseers and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The qualifications for an overseer (episkopos) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an elder (presbuteros) in Titus 1:6-9, are unmistakably parallel. In fact, in Titus 1, Paul uses both terms to refer to the same man (presbuteros in v. 5 and episkopos in v. 7).

All three terms are used interchangeably in Acts 20. In verse 17, Paul assembles all the elders (presbuteros) of the church of Ephesus to give them his farewell message. In verse 28 he says, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimaino] the church of God.” First Peter 5:1-2 brings all three terms together as well. Peter writes, “Therefore, I exhort the elders [presbuteros] among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [poimaino] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopeo] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.” The different terms, then, indicate various features of ministry, not varying levels of authority or separate offices, as some churches espouse.

A Plurality of Elders

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that each local body of believers is shepherded by a plurality of God-ordained elders. Simply stated, this is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture does one find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by a single pastor.

The Apostle Paul left Titus in Crete and instructed him to “appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). James instructed his readers to “call for the elders of the church” to pray for those who are sick (James 5:14). When Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they “appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, the apostle referred to “the elders who rule well” at the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 5:17; see also Acts 20:17, where Paul addresses “the elders of the church” at Ephesus). The book of Acts indicates that there were “elders” at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4; 21:18).

³ The entire section on elders was from John MacArthur via Grace to You, <http://www.gty.org/resources/questions/QA203/why-elder-rule>, accessed January 22, 2016.

Again and again, reference is made to a plurality of elders in each of the various churches. In fact, every place in the New Testament where the term presbuteros (“elder”) is used it is plural, except where the apostle John uses it of himself in 2 and 3 John and where Peter uses it of himself in 1 Peter 5:1. Nowhere in the New Testament is there a reference to a one-pastor congregation. It may be that each elder in the city had an individual group in which he had specific oversight. But the church was seen as one church, and decisions were made by a collective process and in reference to the whole, not the individual parts.

In other passages, reference is made to a plurality of elders even though the word presbuteros itself is not used. In the opening greeting of his epistle to the Philippians, Paul refers to the “overseers [plural of episkopos] and deacons” at the church of Philippi (Phil. 1:2). In Acts 20:28, Paul warned the elders of the church of Ephesus, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which God has made you overseers [plural of episkopos]” (Acts 20:28). The writer of Hebrews called his readers to obey and submit to the “leaders” who kept watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Paul exhorted his Thessalonian readers to “appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction” (1 Thess. 5:12)—a clear reference to the overseers in the Thessalonian assembly.

Much can be said for the benefits of leadership made up of a plurality of godly men. Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (cf. Prov. 11:14). If there is division among the elders in making decisions, all the elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. In this way, the unity and harmony that the Lord desires for the church will begin with those individuals he has appointed to shepherd His flock.

The Qualifications of Elders

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That’s why Scripture stresses the importance of qualified church leadership and delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position.

The qualifications for elders are found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-8. According to these passages, an elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, not fond of sordid gain, a good manager of his household, one who has his children under control with dignity, not a new convert, one who has a good reputation outside the church, self-controlled, sensible, able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict, above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, just, and devout.

The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be “above reproach.” That is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. An elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his business life, and his spiritual life. In this way, he is to be a model of godliness so he can legitimately

call the congregation to follow his example (Phil. 3:17). All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skills, only amplify that idea.

In addition, the office of elder is limited to men. First Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” In the church, women are to be under the authority of the elders, excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over them.

The Functions of Elders

As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus, it carried a great amount of responsibility. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource to understand the mind and heart of God (as revealed in the Scriptures) with regard to issues in the church.

The primary responsibility of an elder is to serve as a manager and caretaker of the church (1 Tim. 3:5). That involves a number of specific duties. As spiritual overseers of the flock, elders are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); oversee the church (Acts 20:28); ordain others (1 Tim. 4:4); rule, teach, and preach (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2); exhort and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the New Testament church’s work.

Because of its heritage of democratic values and its long history of congregational church government, modern American evangelicalism often views the concept of elder rule with suspicion. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, demonstrates that the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders, and only by following this biblical pattern will the church maximize its fruitfulness to the glory of God.

Deacons and Church Council

Deacons are servants and are not considered part of church governance. They do not set policy or make authoritative decisions. Likewise, the church council does not vote on issues, but rather advises the elder body.

Church Constitution

CONSTITUTION

of the

FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH SIDNEY, MT

Adopted by the membership on June 13, 2010

Revised by the membership on October 7 2012

Revised by the membership June 1 2014

Revised by the membership February 8 2015

Preamble

God, in his divine forbearance and his benevolent providence, saw fit to call together a group of Saints to be known as the Fellowship Baptist Church in 1980. The purpose of this body was, and remains, to glorify God through His worship, ordinances, preaching, fellowship, discipleship, discipline, and spreading of the Gospel.

As we have progressed in our task to glorify God and in our understanding of the Holy Scriptures under the guidance of His Spirit, we have decided to be bound in a Constitution that is both practical in design and Scriptural in its substance that we worship a God of order in an orderly fashion; one that is pleasing to the one who established the church, Jesus Christ.

We, as the membership of Fellowship Baptist Church, do hereby organize ourselves according to the guidelines and requirements set forth by all governing authorities, so long as they heretofore do not contradict our Christian conscience or the revealed will of God. This document submits to Christ Jesus as our head, founder and sustainer of this church, all rightful ruling authorities, the Baptist church covenant as adopted in 1980 at our church's founding, and the statement of faith of this body.

Article 1

Name

The name of this church is Fellowship Baptist Church.

Article 2

Purpose

This church exists to glorify God in all of its endeavors, as taken upon itself by the prescriptions of Scripture. This church glorifies God by loving Him and obeying His commands through: worshipping Him; equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study; proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and personal evangelism and any other means consistent with the teachings of Holy Scripture; to engage in the discipline of its members in accord to godly behavior; encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work, local, domestic, and global; administering the ordinances of baptism and communion; encouraging productive, edifying and healthy fellowship between members, serving other individuals, families, and churches by providing for physical, emotional and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ; and calling fellow churches to biblical faithfulness and purity through instruction and encouragement about the nature of the local church.

Article 3

Membership

Section 1: Qualifications

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who provides evidence of regeneration in keeping with a preliminary acknowledgment of their nature as a sinner, who has become regenerate, baptized by immersion, and who wholeheartedly believes the Bible as inerrant. Each member must agree to submit to the teaching of scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith – which is the 2nd London Baptist Confession - and must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant. The elders shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. In making this determination, they may rely on a person's profession of faith, or such other evidence, as they deem appropriate.

Section 2: Admission of Members

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission, advised by the church council, and presented to the members at any regular or special meeting of the members, and shall at that point relinquish their membership in other churches.

Section 3: Duties and Privileges of Membership

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only members of this congregation shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church; non-members may serve on an adhoc basis with the approval of the elders. Notwithstanding, non-members may serve the church for purposes of administration and professional consultation. Under Christ this congregation is governed by its members. Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings and vote on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership status, and on such other matters as may be submitted to a vote.

The church covenant shall be as follows:

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THIS CHURCH:

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality and to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines;

AS CHRISTIAN STEWARDS:

To contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

ALONE AND AT HOME:

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances;

BEFORE THE WORLD:

To walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

TOWARD ONE ANOTHER:

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place - which shall be in good standing in fulfillment of this covenant - we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

Section 4: Associate Membership

Students and others temporarily residing in the Sidney area, who are already members of an evangelical church, may apply for associate membership. Qualifications are identical to those for full membership as set out above, except that home church membership must be retained. A letter of commendation will be sought from the applicant's home church.

Duties and privileges of associate members are the same as for other members except that:

(a) When absent from the Sidney area for extended periods of time, they are released from the responsibility to attend our church services;

(b) While they will be encouraged to participate in members' meetings they will not be eligible to stand for any office or to vote.

Termination of associate membership as a disciplinary measure will be as it is for other members, except that the elders shall notify the pastor or elders of the home church of that termination.

Associate membership will normally terminate immediately upon the ending of the period of temporary residence in the Sidney area.

Section 5: On Church Discipline

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the elders and the discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18: 15 and the example of scripture. Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

Elders may bring any level of church discipline against an individual they feel is necessary, prudent and beneficial to bring them to repentance; however, if the individual would like to seek appeal to the church membership as final authority, they may do so by asking the elders to call a congregational meeting to settle the matter of discipline, who are thereby bound by this Constitution to do so.

A congregational meeting to settle a matter of church discipline shall be held by the same procedure as for any other regular or special business meeting. Church discipline can include admonition by the elders or congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period, deposition from office, or disfellowship.

The purpose of such discipline should be for the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined; for the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to others; For the purity of the church as a whole; For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians and Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy name.

Section 6: Termination of Membership

The church shall recognize the termination of a person's membership following his or her death, or may do so after he or she has voluntarily resigned or joined with another church. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline (ordinarily, but not necessarily, at the recommendation of the elders) upon the vote of at least two thirds of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members.

The church shall have authority to refuse a member's voluntary resignation or transfer of membership to another church, either for the purpose of proceeding with a process of church discipline, or for any other biblical reason.

Members may be terminated, without a vote of the membership, only in the case of failure to attend Lord's Day worship (the minimum for membership is heretofore and onward, fifty percent over 90 days unless they are providentially hindered and in accordance to the method laid out in bylaws). In this case, the member will be notified of their deficiency after 60 days and without response after 120 days, shall be dropped from membership by the church clerk, and the congregation will be notified at the next scheduled business meeting.

Article 4

Meetings

Section 1: Worship Meetings

Worship services shall be held each Lord's Day, and may be held throughout the week as the church determines.

Section 2: Members' Meetings

In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There shall be a regular members' meeting at least once a year. An elder designated by the elders shall preside as moderator at all members' meetings of the church.

The elders shall see that the stated meetings of the church are annually held and that required reports are submitted to the church by the responsible members.

Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum shall be understood to be met by those members present. All votes shall be tallied based on the number of votes cast by members present. A budget shall be approved by the membership at a members' meeting not more than three months after the start of the fiscal year. Prior to this approval and subject to the elders' discretion, expenditures may continue at the prior year's level.

At any regular or special members' meeting, officers may be elected and positions filled as needed, so long as all relevant constitutional requirements have been met. Special members' meetings may be called as required by the elders, or at the written request, submitted to the elders, of thirty five percent of the voting membership. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church within two weeks preceding the meeting. In the event of a written request from the members, the elders shall call a special meeting to be held within one month of their receipt of the request.

Article 5

Officers

Section 1: Summary

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

Section 2: Elders

The elders shall be comprised of not less than two men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in I Timothy 3: 17 and Titus 1: 6.

A majority of the active eldership cannot be composed of church members in the regular pay of the church, and no elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure. Subject to the will of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in the Scripture, the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and shepherding God's flock.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders. An elder need not be re-recognized once established in office.

Elders need only be elected into office once, to serve until dismissed by the elders, or until they resign from the position.

Sabbaticals of extended rest or disservice may be given through membership approval.

An elder's service may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders and, if need be, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18.

Any of the elders may be dismissed by a two thirds vote of the members at any members' meeting of the church.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions.

The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions. The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions. The membership shall approve all candidates to fill the positions of senior and associate pastor.

The scope and approval of job descriptions for any staff position shall reside in the hands of those with hiring authority for that position. The elders shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case by case basis, be delegated to another staff member.

Each year the elders, after consultation with the church council shall present to the church an itemized budget. This budget shall be presented for discussion at a specially called budget meeting.

No money shall be solicited by or on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the elders. The lead pastor (the pastor primarily charged with preaching responsibilities) shall be the chairman of elders' meetings and the senior pastor shall be the moderator at meetings. The elders shall also elect one of their numbers to serve as the president of the corporation.

Section 3: The Senior Pastor

The senior pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2 above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full time ministry of preaching and teaching.

His call shall not be subject to reaffirmation.

His call shall be defined as per Article 6, Section 3.

He shall preach on the Lord's Day, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion (or to delegate them to other elders) and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office, or as set forth in the constitution. In the absence or incapacity of the senior pastor, the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties, any of which can be delegated.

Section 4: Associate Pastors

The church may call additional pastors whose relationship to the senior pastor is that of associate. An associate pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2, above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full time ministry of preaching and teaching.

His call shall be subject to triennial reaffirmation of the congregation, approved at a seventy-five percent vote.

His call shall be defined as per Article 6, Section 4.

He shall assist the senior pastor in the performance of his regular duties and shall perform any other duties as usually pertain to the office of pastor, or as set forth in the constitution, or which may be specifically assigned to him by the congregation.

In the absence or incapacity of the senior pastor for defined periods of time (such as sabbatical or illness), the associate pastor(s) shall assume the responsibility for his duties under the oversight of the elders.

Section 5: Senior Pastoral Assistants

The elders may hire additional staff to assist with pastoral ministry, designated as senior pastoral assistants. These shall not be pastors, though they may be recognized as elders should they be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation, in accordance with Article 5, Section 2.

The senior pastor shall define the responsibilities of the senior pastoral assistant(s). They shall serve at the will of the Senior/lead pastor for an initial term up to two years, though that term may be extended with the approval of the elders.

Section 6: Deacons

The office of deacon is described in I Timothy 3 Acts 6.

The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as

deacons. As with elders, deacons will not have terms, although they may enjoy the privilege of a sabbatical for rest or disservice for a time to be determined by the elder body, with consultation with the deacon body.

Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration. The deacons shall receive, hold, and disburse a fund for benevolence, reporting on its use to the elders at their request, and reporting to the church its total receipts and total disbursements only.

The deacons with the agreement of the elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or committees of members to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

Section 7: Church Council

There shall be a board, henceforth referred to as a church council that shall consist of the Elder and Deacon Bodies and those asked to serve by majority consensus by the existing church council and made eligible by criterion set by said council. The term for church council shall be one year, renewable for indefinite terms. The elder body shall remove one from the council after a completion of their term, should they not be fulfilling their service to the council or expectations set therein.

The church council shall vote on no matter, but shall serve by advising the elder body by consensus of the members and performing functions set forth elsewhere in this constitution.

Section 8: Clerk

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by the pastor, the elders, the deacons, or the church.

The clerk shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year.

In the absence or incapacity of the clerk, the elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the church clerk. The clerk shall serve as secretary of the congregation. The church clerk shall ensure that dated copies of the most recent revision of this constitution shall be available for all church members.

Section 9: Treasurer

The treasurer, who shall not be an active elder, deacon, or paid church staff member, shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as appropriate. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues and expenses of the church at each members' meeting. The responsibility may be delegated with the approval of the elders. The treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The treasurer shall render to the elders annually, or whenever they may require it, an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church. The treasurer shall be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation to serve a term of one year.

Article 6: Elections

Section 1: Principles

The process for church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles: Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the election process; Nominations should proceed with the support of the elders; all candidates for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members; the election process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration that is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Section 2: Selection of Officers

The election of officers shall be held at a members' meeting of the church. Names of nominees to serve as elders, deacons, clerk, or treasurer shall be presented by the elders at the previous members' meeting (providing that previous meeting occurred at least eight weeks prior), and the election shall proceed as directed by the moderator. The elders should seek recommendations and involvement from the general membership in the nomination process. Any member with reason to believe that a nominated candidate is unqualified for an office should express such concern to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the elders as far in advance as possible before the relevant church members' meeting.

The moderator shall declare elected to the office of elder all men receiving a 75% majority of all votes cast. For all other offices, the moderator shall declare elected all persons receiving a simple majority of all votes cast; abstentions will not be considered as votes cast.

The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specifically designated.

Section 3: Calling of the Senior Pastor

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential senior pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the nomination of a man to be elected to membership and called as senior pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

Section 4: Calling of Associate Pastor

In the calling of any man to the position of associate pastor, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential associate pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. Notice of the nomination of a man to be called as associate pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of him and his wife if he is married) must be given at two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

Section 5: Calling of Assistant Pastor

The calling of any man to the position of assistant pastor requires that the man has been recognized and called by the congregation to the office of elder, according to the process described in Article 6, Section 2. Such a man may then be called by the elders to serve as assistant pastor with defined duties, for a fixed period of time, specified by the elders in the terms of his call.

Article 7: Indemnification

Section 1: Legal Indemnification

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

Section 2: Permissive Indemnification

At the discretion of the elders, the church also may indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and not unlawful.

Section 3: Procedure

If a quorum of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination, because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

Article 8

Dispute Resolution

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church, the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities.

Article 9

Amendments

The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended by eighty five percent vote of the members present, voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote. This constitution may be amended, so long as does not pertain to the Statement of Faith or Church Covenant, by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

The revised version of this constitution shall be made available to all church members by the church clerk.

Article 10

Bylaws

The church may enact bylaws for assistance in any matters deemed necessary to help the execution of this constitution, so long as the bylaws do not contradict, negate or transcend the constitution.

Bylaws shall be written by the elder body and approved under the advisement of the church council. They, then, shall be recommended by the church council to the church body at the next scheduled business meeting.

Bylaws, unlike amendments to this constitution, do not require advanced notice before voting may take place. They are approved by a fifty percent vote and may be repealed by two-thirds. Bylaws shall be kept in a binder in the church office, and made available to members by the church clerk.

Bylaws and Homosexual 'Marriage'

Listing all of our bylaws here would be impractical. If you would like access to the bylaws, they are in a red folder in the church office. The church clerk can retrieve them for you, and you are welcome to make copies.

Bylaws are provisions for how the church should operate, that are not within the Constitution, but they're operating within the Constitution.

One bylaw, in particular, is extremely important and you need to be aware "going in."

On Marriage

1. Marriage is defined as between one man and one woman. Nothing else shall be considered marriage. Weddings between one man and one woman *only* shall be conducted on Fellowship Baptist Church property or by Fellowship Baptist Church staff.
2. Only weddings of church members – in which at least one of the engaged couple are members - may be conducted in our facility, beginning May 2016.
3. Church members must uphold our church covenant (see church constitution), and this phrase: "We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort," shall include, but is not limited to, a *prohibition of those practicing homosexuality or any other fornication, as defined as any sexual activity outside the bonds of holy matrimony between husband and wife*. Such behavior is not striving for the advancement of the church in holiness. Those engaging in such practices cannot be members of the church body, and church policies on discipline shall be followed accordingly.
4. Any staff member officiating or attending a wedding that is not between one man and one woman will be terminated under this bylaw, to be dutifully carried out by remaining elder body.
5. Anyone ordained in this church body, officiating or attending a "wedding" between any others besides one man and one woman will have their ordination revoked, and a letter stating such, sent to them and the church they serve, along with any relevant ecclesiastical body. This is to be dutifully carried out by the elder body.
6. No staff member of this church will act as a representative of the State of Montana (or any other state) in the signing of marriage licenses for the purpose of courthouse filings.

7. Officiating or attending a wedding between any others besides one man and one woman, will result in that staff person or church member shall be subject to discipline according to our policies already set forth in church bylaws.

CHURCH COVENANT

The church covenant is signed when becoming a member of our congregation. Members must confirm the statements therein...

COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THIS CHURCH:

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality and to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines;

AS CHRISTIAN STEWARDS:

To contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

ALONE AND AT HOME:

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances;

BEFORE THE WORLD:

To walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

BEFORE ONE ANOTHER:

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay. We moreover engage that when we remove from this place - which shall be in good standing in fulfillment of this covenant - we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Wo

On Outside Bible Studies

We rejoice that individuals desire to take part in or host Bible studies, or other kinds of studies, in their homes or elsewhere. This can be a wonderful, joyous fellowship. However, because elders are held accountable to God for what is taught within the church body, teaching sessions and other organized times of study and reflection need to be approved by the elder body to ensure the doctrine being taught is sound, the teacher is qualified, and the material is sound.

A few extra matters...

Hi! I began teaching Fellowship 101 many years ago, and have rejoiced at those I've seen come and go through our congregation as God moved them to new opportunities. I've always found myself eventually having to explain, one by one, a little 'condition' I have that is both a struggle and a little embarrassing.

You may notice that when I speak to you, I have a hard time looking into your eyes. You may notice that I'm a bit of an introvert or maybe even socially awkward. Well, the truth is I suffer from a sometimes debilitating form of Asperger's Syndrome. Sometimes it's very hard. Please understand this: I like you. I want to speak to you. I want to engage deeply in matters of personal conversation. I can speak to crowds of hundreds and even more, with no problems. Speaking to individuals one on one, however, ranges from problematic to even painful.

I just want to tell you this so you don't take it personally. Thankfully, folks in this fine congregation know I'm just a tad "different" and love me anyway. So, if you're like "that guy's fine until I talk to him in person and then he's kind of strange duck," you're onto something.

If I can in any way assist you, pray for you, counsel you, or help you, please do not hesitate to ask.

Finally, if I haven't answered all of your questions about the day-to-day operations of our church, please download the annual church manual from the website.

Your Fellow Servant,

Pastor Jordan