

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

From the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith

Editors' Note: Sovereign Grace Churches is a confessional family of churches. Our Statement of Faith represents a summary of the teaching of Scripture on key points of doctrine essential to the beliefs, conduct, and witness of our churches. The following section is on The Church of Christ. The full Statement of Faith is available on our website at sovereigngrace.com.

The Universal Church

The universal church is the true, worshipping community of God's people, composed of all the elect from all time.⁷ Throughout salvation history, God by his Word and Spirit has been calling sinful people out of the whole human race to create a new redeemed humanity,⁸ whom Christ purchased with his blood.⁹ With the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost,¹⁰ God's people were reconstituted as his new covenant church,¹¹ in continuity with the old covenant people of God but now brought to fulfillment by the work of Christ.¹² All of God's people are united in one body¹³— with Christ as the supreme, sustaining, and life-giving head¹⁴— and set apart for God's own possession and purposes.¹⁵

The Local Church

As an expression of Christ's universal church, the local church is the focal point of God's plan to mature his people and save sinners.¹⁶ Therefore, all Christians are to join themselves as committed members to a specific local church.¹⁷ A true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word,¹⁸ the right administration of the sacraments,¹⁹ and the proper exercise of church discipline.²⁰ Even true churches are imperfect: they often

⁷ Heb. 12:22-23; 2:12; Eph. 5:25; Rev. 21:2

⁸ Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 6:7; 19:3-6; Deut. 4:10; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 1:13

⁹ Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 5:25

¹⁰ Acts 2:1-4

¹¹ Acts 2:42-47

¹² Jer. 31:31-33; Rom. 11:25; Eph. 1:23, 2:13-22; 3:6; Heb. 8:8-10

¹³ Eph. 7:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-27

¹⁴ Col. 1:18; 2:19; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23

¹⁵ 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Lev. 19:2

¹⁶ Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 28:18-20

¹⁷ Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1

¹⁸ 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Titus 1:9

¹⁹ Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

²⁰ Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13

contain a mixture of unbelievers hidden among the true flock²¹ and are vulnerable to theological error and moral failure.²² Yet Christ is unwavering in his commitment to build his church and will surely bring it to maturity.²³

Christ has given the offices of elder²⁴ and deacon²⁵ to the church.²⁶ Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord.²⁷ Deacons provide for the various needs of the church through acts of service. God gives these and other people as gifts to serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.²⁸ In keeping with God's created design Scripture reserves the office of elder for men,²⁹ yet men and women alike belong to a royal priesthood in which each member is gifted by God to play a vital role in the life and mission of the church.³⁰

The Sacraments of the Church

The sacraments are precious means of grace that signify the benefits of the gospel, confirm its promises to the believer, and visibly distinguish the church from the world.³¹ The Lord Jesus instituted two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper,³² for faithful observance by the church³³ until his return.³⁴ Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeatable sacrament³⁵ for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection.³⁶ Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,³⁷ the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ.³⁸ Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so

²¹ 2 Tim. 2:16-19; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Tim. 4:10

²² 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 5:1; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Rev. 2:5, 14-16, 20-23; 3:2-3, 15-19

²³ Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9

²⁴ 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Heb 13:17

²⁵ 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1

²⁶ Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:28

²⁷ 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17

²⁸ Eph. 4:11-12

²⁹ 1 Tim. 2:12-13

³⁰ Rom. 16:1-16; Acts 1:14; 9:36-42; 16:14-15; 18:2; Phil. 4:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:9-16; 2 Tim. 1:5; Titus 2:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:9

³¹ Rom. 4:11; cf. Gen. 17:7; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 10:16-20; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 2:11-14

³² Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23

³³ Acts 2:42-46

³⁴ Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 11:26

³⁵ Acts 2:38-41; Gal. 2:16; 3:26-27; 5:2-6; cf. Col. 2:11-14

³⁶ Rom. 6:3-5

³⁷ Matt. 28:19; Acts 19:3-5

³⁸ Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-14; Col. 2:11-14

inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved.³⁹

In the Lord's Supper, the gathered church eats bread, signifying Christ's body given for his people, and drinks the cup of the Lord, signifying his blood shed for our sins.⁴⁰ As we observe this sacrament with faith and sober self-examination,⁴¹ we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, commune with him and receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the Lord's triumphant return.⁴²

The Purpose and Mission of the Church

As the body of Christ, the church exists to worship God,⁴³ to edify and mature his people,⁴⁴ and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world.⁴⁵ Governed by Scripture, the church gathers for the teaching of the Word,⁴⁶ prayer,⁴⁷ the sacraments,⁴⁸ congregational singing,⁴⁹ fellowship, and mutual edification through the exercise of spiritual gifts.⁵⁰ As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the Spirit.⁵¹ The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded.⁵² We do this by proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works. There will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build, guide, and preserve his church to the end of the age.⁵³ When Christ returns, he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a people for his own possession, and he will dwell with them forever.

³⁹ 1 Cor. 10:1-5; 1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 2:28; cf. Col. 2:11-14

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 11:23-26

⁴¹ 1 Cor. 11:26-30

⁴² 1 Cor. 11:26

⁴³ Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-20

⁴⁴ Eph. 4:12-13; Col. 1:28

⁴⁵ Matt. 28:19

⁴⁶ 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:13; Eph. 4:11-12

⁴⁷ Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1-2

⁴⁸ Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

⁴⁹ Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-20

⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 4:10

⁵¹ John 17:18; 20:21; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:5-8

⁵² Matt. 28:18-20

⁵³ Matt. 16:18