



GfBC
Grace Family Baptist Church

Constitution

Article I: Name and Nature

We are Grace Family Baptist Church (hereafter known as “GfBC”) and will be defined in name by our purpose, mission, confession (GfBC fully subscribes¹ to the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, hereafter known as “LBC1689”) and nature outlined in our charter. Any changes made to our constitution or bylaws that nullifies any article of our charter requires a new charter under a different name. This protects the future integrity of our religious institution.

Article II: Governing Documents

GfBC acknowledges three governing documents: charter, constitution, and bylaws.

1. Charter

The Charter of GfBC defines the nature of our institution including the Name, Mission, Purpose, and Confessional Alignment.

2. Constitution

The Constitution of GfBC defines the nature, authority and qualifications of officers as well as the qualifications of members. It also defines our stance on associationalism.

3. Bylaws

Our church bylaws outline procedures and processes concerning this elder-led body. This protects the integrity of our documents from future amendments in one leading to contradictions between the two.

Article III: Government of the Church

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18), and He governs His church through officers whom He appoints (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11) and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work (1 Tim. 3:1-13). As a Baptist church, GfBC holds to a congregational form of government led by the officers of the church. There are two kinds of church officers: elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; LBC1689 26:8). It is the duty of the church to seek to discover among its members those to whom Christ has imparted the gifts and graces necessary

¹ See Appendix 1 for a definition of “Full Subscription”

Constitution

for office and, after formally recognizing them by common suffrage, to set them apart by united prayer and then to support and submit to the officers in their given areas of authority (Luke 10:16; John 13:20; Acts 6:3-6; 14:23; 1st Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Article IV: Elder Council

1. Plurality, Duties, and Authority

A. Plurality

The Scriptures teach that normally there should be a plurality of elders in each local church (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5). Therefore the church should endeavor to discover and then formally to recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite graces and gifts for this office, but only such men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:22).

B. Duties

Elders are called “overseers” in Scripture because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:17,28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:2), “pastors” because they shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28), and “rulers” because they govern and care for the house of God (1 Tim. 3:5; Heb. 13:17). The eldership is therefore responsible for the preaching and teaching of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20,21,27; Titus 1:9), the watching out for the welfare of the soul of every member of the church (Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:28; 1 Thess. 2:11; Heb. 13:17), and the directing of the church in all its tasks (1 Tim. 3:4,5). All the decision-making authority of the church is vested in the elders (pastors) who shepherd the church. The objective of any and all decisions made shall be to please the Lord regarding the matter at hand (Acts 15:2-6, Heb 13:7).

C. Authority

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, has given the Scriptures to His church as the infallible and unchanging rule of practice (Matt. 28:20; 1 Tim. 3:14,15; 2 Tim. 3:16,17), to which the elders are always bound in discharging the duties of their office (1 Cor. 14:37,38). Insofar as the instruction of the elders is in accord with the Scriptures, that instruction carries with it the authority of Christ Himself (Luke 10:16). Where the Scriptures give explicit or implicit direction to the church on any issue, this direction is always to be obeyed (John 14:21). Where no regulative word from Christ is given, the elders must exercise their authority in subjection to the general principles of Scripture and to the light of nature and Christian prudence (1 Cor. 7:25; 11:13-15; 14:40). Nonetheless, the elders must exercise this authority with sensitivity to the congregation (Ezek. 34:4; Acts 6:5) and in the posture of servants and examples to them (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:3). Therefore, the elders should seek the support of the congregation respecting any major endeavor. They should also carefully consider congregational input when to do so would serve the interest of the church and would not involve the elders

Constitution

in a sinful relinquishment of their God-given responsibilities or authority (1 Tim. 3:5; Acts 19:30; 21: 11-14).

2. Qualifications

“[A]n overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife², sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

(1 Timothy 3:2–7 ESV)

“if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife³, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

(Titus 1:6–9 ESV)

We believe the Lord Jesus Christ, through His Holy Spirit, appoints men to the office of Elder/Pastor in His churches. That appointment is recognized at GfBC by the current elders and then by the membership. Elders and members of GfBC will consider the following Biblical qualifications when evaluating a man’s recognition to the office of Elder/Pastor: A) calling, B) character, C) competence and D) his confession.

1. Calling

Men considered for the office of elder must demonstrate outward evidence of an inward call by God. Fruit of a man's desire and calling should be demonstrated tangibly in his example of steadfast service to the body, sacrificial attitude, faithful attendance, and current labors in the body of Christ according to the opportunities he has already been given. (1 Tim 3:1; 1 Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor 1:6; 2 Tim 4:5)

2. Character

² **“Husband of One Wife”** - GfBC holds to the permanence view of marriage. According to the permanence view, there are no biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage.

³ See footnote 2 for a definition of this position

Constitution

Men considered for the office of elder will evidence Christ's calling of them by their moral character. To be "above reproach" means there can be no serious and credible charge of deficiency in character established by two or more witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:19, Titus 1:7-9; 1 Tim 3:2-7; Titus 2:2; Titus 2:7-8; Titus 3:1-2)

3. Competence

Men considered for the office of elder will further evidence Christ's calling of them by demonstrating competence in the use of the gifts and graces He has given them for the oversight, and especially the instruction of His church, for the glory of God. (1 Cor 12:18; Eph 4:10-12; 1 Pet 4:10-11; 1 Pet 5:2; 1 Tim 3:4-5; 2 Tim 2:2; 2 Tim 2:24; 2 Tim 4:2)

4. Confession

Men considered for the office of elder must confess sound doctrine. They must have already demonstrated an ability to teach sound doctrine and to contradict error. The Scriptures teach us that sound doctrine is defined by the "pattern of sound words" and "traditions" given by our Lord and by the Apostles. Since GfBC subscribes to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith as a helpful summary of the Apostolic teaching most surely believed among us, any man considered for the office of Pastor/Elder must fully and personally subscribe to the same Confession of Faith (defined in Appendix 1). He will affirm his willingness to teach and defend all doctrines contained therein and has a moral duty to inform the elders of GfBC if he at any future time can not confess and teach these doctrines with a clear conscience. (Matt 28:18-20; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 11:2; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 1 Tim 4:6, 11, 13, 15-16; 1 Tim 6:3; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Th 2:15; 2 Th 3:6; Jude 1:3)

An elder (pastor) must be ordained to the gospel ministry by this church or a church of like faith (Acts 14:23). Prospective elders must undergo an examination by the elder body to assess desire for the office, gifting by the Lord, and biblical qualification including personal piety and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Article V: Diaconate

1. Duties and Authority

Christ, the Head of the church, has instituted the office of deacon as an aid to the people of God in general, and to the elders of the church in particular (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons are responsible to administer the ordinary business, secular affairs, and benevolence concerns of the church so that the elders may devote themselves without distraction to the biblical priorities of their office (Acts 6:2-4). Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and under the authority and oversight of the elders (Acts 6:3; 20:17,28).

2. Qualifications

Each deacon must meet the qualifications for the office which are set forth in Scripture.

Constitution

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.”

(Acts 6:3 ESV)

“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience⁴. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife⁵, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

(1 Timothy 3:8–13 ESV)

Any man called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with our Confession of Faith and his submission to the Constitution of the church. Should he at any time change his convictions respecting these standards, he is under moral obligation to make this fact known to the church (Matt. 5:37; I Cor 1:10; Eph. 4:25).

Article VI: Membership Qualifications: Moral and Ceremonial

There are two requirements for membership at GfBC: a moral requirement and a ceremonial requirement.

1. Moral

The moral requirement includes repentance and faith. To the first of these, we point out the myriad times in Scripture people are called to repentance as a condition of coming to Christ (see Mark 1:15, Luke 13:1, and Acts 26:20 for examples). This is a doctrine of the gospel, knowing it is by the grace of God that a sinner may repent. To the second, we read that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6) and that through this gift from God we are reconciled to Him (Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3). Therefore, to be a member of a local church, one must be moral – have repentance towards and faith in the Lord Jesus. The moral qualifications of membership are private, between the individual and the Lord.

2. Ceremonial:

A. Baptism

Baptism by immersion is one of the first acts of obedience of a new creature in Christ (Acts 8:38 & 39; LBC1689 29:4) and a requirement for membership at GfBC. This ceremonial qualification is a public display of the private work

⁴ Deacons must be able to fully submit to the doctrines set forth in the London Baptist Confession of 1689 with a clear conscience.

⁵ See footnote 2 for this definition.

Constitution

performed by the Lord on the new Christian, symbolizing his death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ. There is an actual, real remission of sins when we believe in Christ and are baptized in the Holy Spirit; there is a declarative, formal, symbolic remission in water baptism (Matt 28:18 - 20).

B. Covenant

Each person coming into membership with the body of GfBC is becoming a covenant member of that community. The statement and signature of a church covenant flow naturally from the relationship being initiated at the point of membership. To become a member of GfBC, one must agree to the Church Covenant (See Appendix 2) by way of signature and declare that oath publicly before God and man during a worship service at GfBC.

C. Vows

“In matter of weight and moment for confirmation of truth, and ending all strife, an Oath is warranted by the Word of God; so a lawful Oath being imposed, by lawful Authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.” (LBC1689 23:2). As membership in a local church is a weighty matter, GfBC asks each membership candidate to take an oath before the church, and for the church to respond by oath to the membership candidate. (Appendix 3)

Article VII: Ordination and Licensing

1. Ordination

Ordination refers to the recognition by the elders and the church of a man's desire and qualifications for ministry as a pastor or a deacon (Acts 6:6, 13:2-4, 20:28). Ordination shall be conferred for life, so long as the man manifests the qualification of the office to which he was ordained and continues to serve in such capacity. Ordination is a requirement to hold the Office of elder or deacon.

Constitution

2. Licensing

A man shall be licensed by the church to the gospel ministry upon the approval of the elder body (provides legality for a man to perform weddings and funerals).

Article VIII: Association

Voluntary association between two or more like-minded churches is a welcomed and wonderful expression of the Christian love we are to have amongst the universal church and before the world. Therefore, GfBC will consistently seek association with other local churches with whom we can share the core of our beliefs and the fellowship that edifies the saints. (LBC1689 26:15).

Article IX: Amendments

Any petitions to amend the constitution must be submitted to the elder body in writing. The elder body must approve any amendment(s) and said amendment(s) must be affirmed by a binding, written affirmation of 2/3 majority of church members present in a congregational business meeting.

Constitution

Appendix 1: What Is “Full Subscription?”

Submitted by Dr. James M. Renihan to ARBCA

Confessional subscription employs three main terms in its nomenclature: absolute, strict/full, and loose. ARBCA has adopted the middle position. According to Dr. Morton H. Smith, “strict or full subscription takes at face value” the terminology used in adopting a confession of faith.

In an article entitled “The Case for Full Subscription” (in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by David Hall, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995; pages 185-6), Dr. Smith provides some helpful insights [albeit in a Presbyterian context with a much more developed tradition of discussion of the issue than among Baptists]. He says, “Note some things that full subscription does not mean. First, it does not insist that all of the teachings of the Confession . . . are of equal importance (just as not all of the teachings in the Bible are of equal importance). The full subscriptionist recognizes that some doctrines are more foundational than others, in accord with the Biblical example. Positively, the full subscriptionist believes that in professing that the Confession . . . [is] his confession, he is subscribing to all of the doctrines in the Confession . . . they are all part of the system of doctrine Second, full subscription does not require the adoption of every word of the Confession . . . but positively believes that we are adopting every doctrine or teaching of the Confession”

One should note the language found in the agreement signed by the messengers of the founding churches in Mesa, Arizona in March, 1997; in the ARBCA constitution; and in the application for membership. The first states, “We declare that our primary rule of faith and practice is the inerrant Word of God, and adopt as our subordinate standards the excellent document commonly known as the London Baptist Confession of 1689, and the Constitution of this Association.” The second states, “While we hold tenaciously to the inerrant and infallible Word of God as found in the sixty-six books of the Bible (this being our final source of faith and practice), we embrace and adopt the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as a faithful expression of the doctrine taught in the Scriptures. This Confession is the doctrinal standard of the Association,” and in the third the applying church signs this statement: “We accept the London Confession of Faith of 1689 as an accurate and reliable expression of what the Scriptures teach and the faith we confess.” In each case, the member churches commit themselves to the Confession as a whole. We maintain the primacy of the Scriptures, and “embrace and adopt” the Confession as a truthful expression of our convictions with regard to the details of Scripture.

Taken at face value, these words imply, even though they do not explicitly state, strict, or full subscription. This does not mean that we treat every doctrine in the Confession as if it were equally important, but we do commit ourselves to all of the doctrines of the Confession. In addition, as Dr. Smith says so well, “full subscription does not require the adoption of every word of the Confession or Catechisms, but positively believes that we are adopting every doctrine or teaching of the Confession or Catechisms.” This is an important distinction, and needs to be understood. It is possible for an individual, a church, or an association to be cautious about the wording used to express a specific doctrine without denying the doctrine that wording seeks to define. Full subscription honestly adopts all of the doctrines expressed in the confessional formulation. In the case of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, this means that by subscribing to the document commonly known as the London Baptist Confession of 1689, we receive all of the doctrines contained in it as true, founded on the Word of God.

Constitution

Appendix 2: Church 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, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

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; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; 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.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; 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; and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and 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, 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.

Constitution

Appendix 3: Church Oath (Membership Ceremony)

Answer “By the Grace of God, I Do (I Have, I Am, or I Will)”

New Members:

1. Do you trust completely in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of your souls?
2. Have you committed yourself to Jesus Christ as Lord of your life?
3. Are you willing to obey Him in every area of your life?
4. Will you make the Bible, not your own or anyone else’s opinion, and not your own preferences or feelings, the standards by which you will govern your life?
5. Are you willing to be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained from the Scriptures?
6. Are you willing to be disciplined by this church according to Matt. 18:15-18 and I Cor. 5?
7. In accordance with the teachings of Scripture, will you be committed to loving the other members of the church as you love yourself and will you attempt to fulfill with them the “one anothers” of Scripture?
8. Will you preserve in this church the unity of the Spirit and will you pursue the things that make for peace and build up other believers?
9. Will you faithfully study the Scriptures and seek to preserve purity in practice and beliefs in your own life and in the life of the church?
10. Will you advance the cause of Christ through this church with your financial contributions, regular attendance and service?
11. Will you faithfully pray for the leadership, people and ministry of this church?
12. Will you respect, support, cooperate with, obey and submit to the leadership of this church as they exercise their biblical responsibilities of shepherding the members of this church in accordance with Scripture?

Existing members:

1. Will you welcome these people into the membership of this church?
2. Will you love them and commit yourself to fulfilling the “one anothers” of Scripture with them?
3. Will you recommit yourself to fulfilling with them the biblical responsibilities of Christians to their local church?