

Integration Analysis of Findings on Grace Community Church, Maryville Tennessee

Prepared for the families commissioning and reporting coercive control, abuse, and spiritual harm incurred during their tenure therein; to explain, address, and offer suggestions for their continuing care and seeking to understand what happened to them.

Number of Displaced Congregants: 204

CONTENT WARNING: This report contains discussions of sexual assault, rape, psychological distress, and content that may be disturbing. This content is not suitable for children. Coping measures for those suffering from Complex Trauma/PTSS/PTSD incurred in religious settings should be in place before proceeding.

Reader discretion is advised.

Prepared By

A.R. Kitko

Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2018
Master of Science in the Psychology of Coercive Control, University of Salford, 2024

© 2024

Table of Contents

I.	Summary of Findings	4
II.	Glossary of Terms	5
III.	Scope of Findings	8
IV.	Historical, Theological, and Psychological Considerations	8
V.	False and Misleading Claims	11
VI.	Polity and Ecclesiastical Organization	14
VII.	Further Analysis	16
VIII.	Recommendations	20
IX.	Further Reading	22
X.	Appendix	24

Author's Note

The *Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information* ("Privacy Rule") establishes a set of national standards for the protection of certain health information. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued the Privacy Rule to implement the requirement of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA").

The Privacy Rule standards address the use and disclosure of individuals' health information—called "protected health information" by organizations subject to the Privacy Rule — called "covered entities," as well as standards for individuals' privacy rights to understand and control how their health information is used. Within HHS, the Office for Civil Rights has responsibility for implementing and enforcing the Privacy Rule with respect to voluntary compliance activities and civil money penalties.

It is for this reason that any HIPAA protected data has been removed from this report. Dissemination is both at the discretion and the legal right of those for whom the report was prepared and is intended by the author for private use.

The purpose of an analysis like this one is to outline the ways in which those who experienced spiritual abuse are truly seen and understood by the people of God. Spiritual abuse is complex, and for this reason many victims never receive validation or healing from their experiences on this side of the veil. They spend their lives second guessing, burying, and suppressing their voices because they believe that their concerns might bring down the name of Christ. The cost of this shadow is the continuing of abuse, and the creeping sense of distrust amongst the people of God, of His bride, the Church. Such a reality is most assuredly the work of the evil one and ought to actively be fought against. Exercises like what is found in these pages is intended to bring light to such a shadow; as giving a voice to the voiceless is precisely what Christ intended for leaders of the church to do. Hence the myriad of warnings from James and Paul regarding the extra measure of judgment that will be brought against the people who claimed to be leaders and then abused and neglected Christ's people (James 3:1).

There is no such thing as a church elder who does not fall under the teaching criteria warnings given by James (1 Timothy 3:2-10). There are many of these that Paul warns will afflict the church, particularly using their pandering "godliness" as a means for personal gain (1 Timothy 6:5). On top of this, the clarifying of the misrepresentation of the gospel is clearly modeled by the Apostles, to be prudent and worthy of hefty enough discussion to warrant public rebuke (Galatians 2:11-14). This means that experiences of spiritual abuse are not to be ignored, minimized, or dismissed as unimportant.

For this reason, this report has not been softened and accurately reflects the candor appropriate for communicating, to the best of the author's ability, the grievous nature of what she has encountered over the course of her research and treatment of spiritual abuse incurred in the setting at hand.

The reader is reminded that the New Testament warnings against false teaching apply to her as well. Judgment of her discernment is therefore heartily encouraged and welcome.

I. Summary of Findings

Grace Community Church, Maryville (hereafter, GCC) has been found to be wielding psychologically and theologically coercive tactics under the guise of a “ruling elders” framework in order to leverage power and control over its congregants in a grievously and abusively unbiblical manner. At no point in the history of the Church have pastors, elders, or deacons held this level of power or leveraged their authority to this degree (without the full consent of the parish therein) without being labelled a cult and dismissed. Since theological coercion, by its very nature, involves the willful withholding of necessary information in order to maintain manipulative prowess over a parish, consent is never fully or openly offered a congregant prior to their membership covenant being signed. This is a clear violation of the scriptural eldership qualifications and responsibilities, and renders GCC squarely in the category of damaging and dangerous cult in spite of the fact that the preaching habits and styles of the leadership fall under an orthodox Protestant perspective.

GCC leadership, despite the claim that the lead Pastor Chris Riser is an elder of equal rank amongst the ruling elders, serve in elective capacities that are still at the behest of Riser and never at the direction of the rest of the elders’ appointments. Riser requires qualifications for eldership that are extra-biblical distinctives and that remain unstated/unlisted on official documentation for the parish to read. He has been found to only appoint “elders” who have presumably less theological education than he has, in spite of the fact that there are several congregants who not only qualify biblically for the position, but also who outrank his theological pedigree therein. The fact that he requires the appointees to attend his personal ministry training school before they can “rule” automatically subordinates them to his personal preferences and maintains an air of authority over them. This means that although there is a claim of equality, what is actually occurring is more closely related to a theological and psychological fiefdom in which he plays the role of feudal lord and the elders play the role of vassals. This is wholly inappropriate, as it forms a pyramid hierarchy of power with the lead pastor at the top; without oversight or accountability, followed by steadily increasing rings of power over which the congregants are trained and intimidated into being beholden through what would appear to the outside to be an otherwise healthy submission to theological authority protocol.

Without a doubt, GCC is, at minimum, a dangerous spiritual environment and coercive cult of personality of Chris Riser bordering on apotheosis, and its ecclesiastical organization appears to be designed to keep it that way.

See Appendix D for an outline of GCC’s structure and disciplinary protocols.

II. Glossary of Terms

Coercive Control

A pattern of controlling behaviors that create an unequal power dynamic in a relationship. These behaviors give the perpetrator power over their partner, making it difficult for them to leave. It describes a pattern of behaviors a perpetrator uses to gain control and power by eroding a person's autonomy and self-esteem. This can include acts of intimidation, threats, and humiliation. Examples of coercive control include but are not limited to isolation from family and friends, threatening to disclose confidential information to the public, tracking or monitoring movements, gaslighting, insisting on compliance to the point of fear, totalistic controlling of finances, preventing access to supports, etc. There is not a definitive list of behaviors that are classed as coercively controlling; rather, coercive control is the attitude or intention of exerting power or control over an individual through manipulation, intimidation, abuse, or fear.

Cult

A group which is typically led by a charismatic and self-appointed leader, who tightly controls its members, requiring unwavering devotion to a set of beliefs and practices which are considered deviant and outside the norms of society. Separate classifications that narrow down the scope of the deviance include but are not limited to "coercive cults," "theological cults," "destructive cults," and "cults of personality."

Dispensing of Existence

The group has the prerogative to decide who has the right to exist and who does not. This is usually not literal, but means that those in the outside world are not saved, unenlightened, unconscious, and must be converted to the group's ideology. If they do not join the group or are critical of the group, then they must be rejected by the members. Thus, the outside world loses all credibility. In conjunction, should any member leave the group, he or she must be rejected also.

Doctrine over Person

Members' personal experiences are subordinate to the sacred science; members must deny or reinterpret any contrary experiences to fit the group ideology.

Loading the Language

The group interprets or uses words and phrases in new ways so that often the outside world does not understand or does not register the alteration to the definition. This jargon often consists of thought-terminating clichés, which serve to alter members' thought processes to conform to the group's way of thinking.

Milieu Control

The group or its leaders controls information and communication both within the environment and, ultimately, within the individual, resulting in a significant degree of isolation from society at large.

Mystical Manipulation

The group manipulates experiences that appear spontaneous to demonstrate divine authority, spiritual advancement, or some exceptional talent or insight that sets the leader and/or group apart from humanity, and that allows a reinterpretation of historical events, Scripture, and other experiences. Coincidences and happenstance oddities are regularly interpreted as omens or prophecies.

Noetic Effect of Sin

The often overlooked aspect of sin affliction in academics and intellectuals, the noetic effect is the theological study of the way in which sin still affects a person's intellectual faculties as a result of the Fall. Christians are more than capable of presenting perfectly logical arguments that they then mishandle in application, believing that what they are doing is being obedient. Examples of this are in the creeping radicalization that many cults endure over time, as each scriptural argument moves from reminder of self-discipline in sanctification to tyrannical exacting and woodenly applied spiritual enslavement by whatever ruling authority is in power. Other examples include the way Christian History can track how entire theological movements that begin well trend downward in sanctity over time.

Pseudodoxy

The unspoken and unofficial norms, attitudes, and practices of a group that are learned through patterned exposure. These are regularly identified by the fact that these patterned norms go uncorrected by leadership as they often serve the leadership's personal preferences and control of the group. Examples include expectations for dress,

communication, behavior, information sourcing, etc., that are not an official requirement of the group, but that operation outside of their given expectation garners negative social pressure, ostracization, or second-class categorization of the individual or family not in compliance.

Sacred Science

The group's doctrine or ideology is considered to be the ultimate Truth, beyond all questioning or dispute. Truth is not to be found, or is immediately suspect, outside the group. The leader, as the spokesperson for God or all humanity, is likewise above criticism.

Thought Terminating Cliché

This refers to a cliché that is a commonly used phrase, or folk wisdom, sometimes used to quell cognitive dissonance. Though the clichéd phrase in and of itself may be valid in certain contexts, its application as a means of dismissing dissent or justifying fallacious logic is what makes it thought-terminating. This includes but is not limited to often or oversights blanket theological statements. Examples include “God is sovereign,” “It is good for your sanctification,” “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it,” etc. So long as the most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed, this qualifies as a thought terminating cliché, in that these become the start and finish of any ideological analysis and their intention is to end any further investigation in the mind of the person critically analyzing a complex issue.

III. Scope of Findings

One full year of research; interviews across over a dozen families from GCC, both active and inactive as of the commissioning of this report, extending from the role of elders and administrators all the way down to parishioners and youths; Master's Seminary Representatives as well as the President of Founders Ministries; a total of over 1000 hours of therapeutic interventions *and counting* comprise the scope of this report's summary of findings. As of the writing of this report, over 200 congregants have been displaced as a direct result of GCC's coercion and totalistic practices.

IV. Historical, Theological, and Psychological Considerations

Epistemic individualism is an observable contextual pattern in the followers of John MacArthur and indeed in the preaching of MacArthur himself. There is a tendency to frame complex emotions, social interactions, and the varietal nature of Christian liberty as overly simplistic axioms, boiling the sacred details of the lives of believers down to sound-byte level theology that is more often than not, a mere shadow of the reality they are experiencing. This form of logical atomism, complete with Judeo-Christian vocabulary woven into it, constructs the bedrock by which serious believers are initially wooed. I am calling this phenomenon, "theological atomism" as the point of this presupposition in the MacArthurites is well attested but currently (and to my knowledge) has yet to be given a name. The point being, that MacArthurites regularly present theological treatises within Christianity as though they can be assessed and demarcated separately from the alternative theological principles that are adjacent or apply as well. Psychologically, this means that Scriptures are freely applied in a completely merciless and exacting pattern that results in an exaggerated coldness that mimics the tomblike dispositions of the Pharisees. While the theological position that is being exacted may be technically scriptural, the theological dispositions of those doing the exacting are a far cry from Christ.

The feature of theological atomism that makes it so compelling is in its presumed dedication to clearly articulated theology. Where progressive forms of Christianity are muddying theological waters that are abundantly clear, MacArthurite theological atomism in contrast, smacks the mind as a firm slap across the face of American Evangelicalism's jellyfish-like sensibilities. For the most part, this is a good thing, and such teaching styles are applauded as the gruff manliness that American Christendom, in a time long forgotten, once possessed. MacArthurites pride themselves upon their tough, no nonsense sort of presentation of the Scriptures: a sort of *suck it up buttercup* bent to the expectations surrounding the experience of sanctification; where Christ, his disciples, and, in turn, present believers are to be viewed, and expect a transformation more akin to forced labor camps than the great many iterations of transformation that the Holy Spirit engages in. Meaning, that the MacArthurites oftentimes devolve into a system that, instead of standing firm on Nicene orthodoxy, mistakes *all* Christian liberty issues into a black and white

system where no nuance is allowed, and that begins exacting secondary and tertiary freedoms as though they are on the same level of markedness as Nicene primacy. This enslavement of Christian liberty to the severe dumbing down of genuinely complex sanctification expectations is in and of itself the great irony of this type of theological atomism. In so doing, the MacArthurites embody the very psychological disposition they initially desired to battle in adopting the mannerisms of the very author of logical atomism: that of Bertrand Russell, the cold, self-isolating intellect of an emotionally absent, albeit jellyfish-like schizotypal Atheist.

The number of people who have left GCC for a life in fear of the Church comes as no surprise, given that GCC leadership appears to be interested in priming people for such a fate under the auspices of that tough and rugged sensibility that often marks MacArthurites. Preserving the truth positions of Scripture in a Christless-society is a wonderful virtue. Preserving the truth of Scripture *absent the demeanor of Christ*, however, is simply a graceless legalism that fuels a merciless narcissism bullying all in its midst into the very spiritual slavery Christ Himself warned us about rearing its head in the last days.

Which brings us to the psychology of narcissism. Another patterned theme to MacArthurites is pertinent to this analysis: no clear locus of final authority exists in this tradition beyond that of John MacArthur's leadership, and by extension, those who belong to his continentally unaccredited seminary. There is a pseudodoxical norm to promote airtight theological echo-chambers led by Master's graduates, themselves functionally satellite campuses of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley. Within these echo-chambers, leadership mimics the Frankenstein's monster ecclesiastical polity found there, and instead of having John MacArthur's presumed benevolent dictatorship over the congregation, is rather at the mercy of whatever Master's Seminary graduate who happened to seize the opportunity to rule as dictator themselves. In it is designed a gambit of sorts where each satellite campus' leadership then takes on the personality of its seminary graduate and one has to simply hope that they are as "benevolent" in their rule as MacArthur is in his; itself a dangerous and fraught expectation.

When narcissism comes to the local congregation, therefore, there are no fail-safes by which to avoid the inevitable turn of the leadership. Since they are primed for submission, psychologically, to the seminary graduate, and since leadership is contingent upon that very graduate's appointments and final nod of approval, the result is an inevitable theological slavery that presents itself as academic seriousness without the serious responsibility of holding the seminary graduate in check from the noetic effects of sin, and the promotion of presumably well-meaning but potentially undereducated elders to the standard of theologian and the ego-stroking social credit that such a ruling position holds in the sphere of the life of the local congregation. What follows is the same thuggishness that every hierarchy of this kind produces: the local congregation begins living in an environment more akin to a gang than anything like a healthy church.

Just like the psychological environment of any gang, congregants will begin to notice a subtle shift of focus away from Christ and onto accolades to feed the narcissism of the leader in charge: the manufacturing and editing of testimonies to include information that was

never there, manicuring the vocabulary of leadership as to how information is to be marketed to the congregation, the policing of personal prayer content in youth circles in order to promote strict compliance to leadership, etc. The point being that leadership focuses more on *compliance to their personal preferences as the goal*, rather than on true sanctification of character for each individual congregant. The result is a theologically neurotic environment where the folks inside are spending more time focused on performing whatever iteration of personal behavior the leadership has called “holy,” as opposed to actually pursuing personal holiness because they want to be nearer to Christ and enjoy the freedom that this reality provides.

What is more, is that just like a gang, each leader’s power is equally neurotic in character as their own behavior, if not *cadavergeforsham*, or slave-like-cognitively-dead-obedience, is highly sensitive to critical questioning. To question an authority, especially someone akin to the Lord’s anointed, is to risk falling from grace. What occurs is a cruel positive feedback loop where genuinely reasonable concerns being raised are received as purported cases of persecution and rebellion, when in reality they are far from that; the leadership slowly devolving into a state where they begin believing that their “rule” is just and accurate, and slowly beginning to act as though their rule is also above the law outside of the sanctuary doors. What ensues is a kangaroo court system of sorts where hell follows quickly for those under its jurisdiction. A hell that, if experienced, grants the defendant only two choices: comply or be functionally shunned.

All of this is supported by an equally frankensteinian systematic theology of what MacArthurites debate is “Dispensationalism.” Congregations of this sort swing wildly along the framework originally authored by John Nelson Darby; itself a highly contentious theology from its inception. But to make matters worse, John MacArthur openly and regularly admits that although he is persuaded by Darby’s metric, he is not entirely so, and therefore is only a “leaky” Dispensationalist. MacArthur rarely actually explains precisely what that means however, leaving open a sort of personal out, as it were, whenever his personal preferences for eschatological applications come into play. For example, his bent toward Reformed Theology and regular presence in and amongst the Ligonier crowd provides him with the clout of sharing a stage with Presbyterian Polity; but his desire to tow the strict nature of Darby’s theology precludes him from ever actually being consistent with Reformed Theology itself. On the other hand, his insistence upon continuing to teach and rely upon a Darbyist theology presents Dispensationalism as though it is a required axiom by which to apply the practicals of that system; without ever admitting to the things that are wrong with it, and therefore permanently maiming the minds of those under his care to be subjected to his personal whims; considering he is the only one who knows what “leaky” even means. This translates to a seemingly permanent and unhealthy reliance of congregants and students upon his isolated wisdom to navigate systematic theology in particular; and the structurally permanent infantilizing of MacArthurites in general.

Therefore, what this feature of MacArthuristic leadership allows is for satellite campuses to do the same. “Leaky” Dispensationalism becomes leaky here indeed as it allows for narcissism to flourish amongst the seepage. Leadership becomes liberated to apply systematic theologies in pieces, and oftentimes without the knowledge of the students

that such things are completely foreign to the history of the church and a dangerous flirtation with contradiction. The very point of systematic theology is that it is indeed a cohesive *system*. Systematic theology is valuable in that whatever systematic theology is being considered has made the active attempt to uphold hermeneutic unity across the entirety of the corpus of the Scriptures. Systematic theology is not an exercise in plucking from whatever is convenient in the moment to facilitate one's agenda for sermon content or church discipline. And indeed, the habit of MacArthurites to do just this, namely, flirt with randomized and cherry-picked principles they merely assert are "biblical," begs the overall theme of their analysis. All they are doing is habituating a posture of superiority that in actuality is merely a superiority complex.

This narcissistic phenomenon is best summarized in MacArthurite's cheery and unquestioned support for their supreme leader to put his own name on the Scriptures themselves. A feat that is so beyond comprehension to the rest of the Christian world, that the only thing really left to do is assume that MacArthur and leaders following his example need serious and ample prayer; as although they are technically teaching a position within the realm of orthodoxy, it is self-evident their dispositions no longer fear God appropriately. May He have mercy on them; for they do not know what they are doing.

V. False and Misleading Claims

"The Great Split"

GCC leadership presents completely false information, if any information is given at all when asked, as to why so great a population of congregants left the church when the membership standards were updated. Letters of resignation, concern, and safety reports where the church has been found to be grievously outside of legal building and fire codes are actively withheld from congregational access even though readily available. This has been shown to be a patterned theme, including but not limited to: pretending that specific congregational exits were mutually decided upon when they were not, pretending that specific congregational exits were part of a batch of church discipline cases when the person in question was not under any church discipline, pretending that specific congregational exits were due to petty theological differences when in actuality they were due to GCC leadership actively breaking the law, etc. Certain GCC leaders have also been found to actively lie about the exits of congregants by asserting that those who have left do not wish to be contacted, when that never occurred.

Church Funds Management

GCC leadership has willfully engaged in allocation of church funds beyond the scope of what was promised to parishioners to be spent on investments. Procedurally, there is a cap on how congregational financial gifts may be spent without the express permission via vote by the congregation. GCC leadership ignores this caveat when and where convenient; to what degree is unknown. Examples of this are the acquisition of church buses without

permission for those funds to be spent in that manner; a clear overstep of leadership to abide by the promises made to the congregation as to how their gifts would be managed. Another is the hiring of ruling elders for unlicensed commercial contract work, personal “mission trips,” etc. to whom church funds were paid directly and from whom receipts were not garnered for proof of expenditure nor were they cleared by the congregation for expenditure. Public repentance for such behaviors appears to only occur *after* congregants notice (as in the case of the buses), but not in cases where there are clear conflicts of interest (such as the hiring of elders and family members of elders for commercial work).

Not a “Founders” Church

GCC leadership has willfully misrepresented their ecclesiastical pedigree to those outside of the congregation attempting to ascertain the type of theological environment they would experience by joining GCC for worship. The website clearly presents the church as a “Founders” church, but after having contacted Founders Ministries directly, they are neither Founders approved nor do they even qualify, since Founders Churches do not permit congregations led by leadership actively espousing Dispensational theology to be members at all. Why GCC leadership attempts to market itself falsely in this way is left for speculation.

A copy of the “Founders” claim can be found in Appendix E.

Not a 1689 London Baptist Confession Church

Along this same vein, GCC leadership also claims to be a 1689 London Baptist Confessional congregation. This is also willfully misleading, as the 1689 London Baptist Confession has no possibility of squaring itself with Dispensational theology whatsoever since it is staunchly Covenantal and based upon the Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapters 7, 19, and 26 preclude this possibility in their entirety. Why GCC leadership would actively attempt to market itself falsely, giving the impression of something they are not, here again, is left for speculation.

A copy of the claim to be a 1689 London Baptist Confession Church can be found in Appendix E.

Elder Distinctives

GCC leadership has actively withheld in their Elder Distinctives documents that one of the distinctives is to hold personally, and actively teach from, an exclusively Dispensationalist framework. What this does is remove the ability for a congregant to fully consent to what they are subjected to by way of the ruling polity that is characteristic of GCC leadership. Withholding of elder distinctives also removes the ability for Christians outside of GCC jurisdiction to understand what is happening to the spirits of those inside, thereby crippling normal theological aids outside of the congregation from aiding those

inside accurately. This phenomenon of what appears to be the active hiding of Dispensational theology from congregants considering membership or indeed from the minds of Christians simply looking for a church to attend locally seems to be a theme; with particular emphasis on the website and how the leadership is marketed to the outside world. Why they would do this instead of be upfront about their Non-Denominational, creedless, and overtly MacArthurite bent is once again, left up to speculation.

Listed Elder Distinctives can be found in Appendix C.

“Forced Sanctification”

GCC leadership has been found to foster an environment for the youth that intentionally subjects minors to grueling situations under the auspices of “forced sanctification” where the leadership, under the direction of Chris Riser, is expected to intentionally limit access to food, water, and personal safety to children under his and their care without the informed consent of their parents. One such example was during the 2016 Youth Summer Camp in North Carolina where the youth were encouraged to enter water containing a brain-eating amoeba, despite the clearly articulated warnings not to by congregants (and the death of a teenager by it a few days prior reported by the media), with the apathetic dismissal that God was sovereign; implying that exposure to brain-eating amoeba was an act of true faith. On top of this there are incidences of heavily restricted meal access for youths engaging in GCC activities such as being limited to only two small crackers, two small slices of meat, and a single cookie as a substitute for an expected evening meal under the regularly uncorrected impression that such things were good for the Youth’s sanctification. Oddly intense gaming expectations such as “Underground Church” and “Outpost” are also incidences where the safety of the Youth is not disclosed to parents, nor does there appear to be any safety protocols whatsoever, and full-consent is withheld. Youths, both male and female, are left unchaperoned and unaccompanied in remote locations, forests, basements, cardboard boxes, etc., in a purported gaming framework where they are supposed to be “captured.” There have been several documented incidences of unrelated individuals witnessing said games and reporting it to police because the game appears to be real incidents of kidnapping, abuse, and harassment. What appears to be promotional videos for said games on YouTube involve players wielding real machetes and duct-taping mouths shut, yet another example of the way in which the games are marketed as promoting deeply unsafe environments for young people to be unchaperoned within. The point being, that there is an inherent inappropriateness to the entire activity being hosted as a church-sanctioned event, and this pattern of severe neglect of basic safety combined with pseudodox norms that such things are forcing sanctification, appears to be kept from the parents and certainly qualifies as a grievously irresponsible subjection of the preciousness of young souls to completely unnecessary and scripturally unjustified exposure to easily dangerous and potentially abusive environments.

A copy of their Theology of Youth can be found in Appendix G.

The reader is reminded that every citizen of the State of Tennessee is a mandatory reporter when encountering incidences of child abuse. Tennessee Code Annotated 37-1-410

provides immunity from civil and criminal liability when reporting. Reporters do have the right to remain anonymous. Failure to report abuse is a Class A misdemeanor.

Tennessee Child Abuse Reporting Hotline: 877-237-0004

Sexual Abuse

GCC leadership has been found to willfully foster an environment providing for marital rape. At the behest of “counselors” advising that wives may often need to “just cry through sex,” congregants seeking aid for broken marriage relationships are being advised by GCC leadership that their own personal definitions for sexual abuse, distinct from every other legally authoritative definition and distinct from well-established Christian Counseling protocols such as the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), is the rule of law under their ecclesiastical polity expectations. Meaning, that GCC leadership not only rules, but also has actively published in an outlined treatise, that elders may choose not to interfere, report, or advise spouses to seek refuge from abusive sexual encounters. The number of instances of this type of occurrence is unknown.

A full copy of GCC’s treatise on Sexual Abuse can be found in Appendix F. The reader is reminded that GCC has no legal jurisdiction whatsoever. Marital rape is a Class C felony and has been illegal on a Federal level since 1993. There are no caveats for the manner in which the rape occurred, coercion included. Further, at no point is it legal for church leadership to claim that a private confession or an instance of sanctuary absolves the “counselor” from the mandatory reporting protocols of the State of Tennessee. Every citizen is, by law, a mandatory reporter, and the reader should be well-versed in their procedural awareness if encountering abuse.

If you or anyone you know is encountering or experiencing sexual abuse in any form including coercion, etc., please seek help. You are loved and not alone. This behavior and environmental support from church leadership is atypical of church governance expectations and exceedingly dangerous for the role of elder.

A copy of the treatise outlining GCC’s abuse definitions and categorizations is included in the Appendices. See also Appendices A and B for full definitions and categorizations of abuse from a healthy and trauma informed counseling protocol for comparison.

VI. Polity and Ecclesiastical Organization

There exists a myriad of frameworks for ecclesiastical polity. For the purposes of this analysis only the three classifications pertaining to GCC’s claim of an “Elder-Led by a plurality of Elders” governance will be discussed. These are: “Elder-Led” or Congregational polity, “Elder-Ruled” or Presbyteral polity, and “Bishop-Ruled” or Episcopal polity. For the most part, discussions surrounding these frameworks can be most clearly differentiated when issues of church disciplinary protocols are compared.

Elder-Led congregations place the onus of church discipline upon the congregation entirely. The role of the elder is not for jurisprudence but rather for administration and theological instruction where appropriate. These distinctions and determinations remain independent of any denominational restrictions, and are at the behest of each individual congregation as the congregants themselves, being the rulers of polity applications, elect and keep accountable each elder. The hierarchy of theological power and control therefore is bottom-up in orientation. Elder-Led congregations are normally independent of denominational classification.

Elder-Ruled congregations place the onus of church discipline upon both the congregation as well as the synod over whom the elders, as elected representatives of the congregations who appoint them, are accountable. Elders “rule” only insofar as they have been appointed and confirmed by each individual congregation and by whom they must submit to the oversight of the synod of elders elected by the denomination as a whole. Elder distinctives are determined by the general assembly of all congregations signing on to the Book of Order in place to define these distinctives and each congregation is entirely free to report elder abuses to the synod over whom they are accountable. Elders are never free to appoint other elders and all elder appointments must be approved by both the congregation and the synod. The hierarchy of theological power therefore flows both from the bottom-up as well as top-down with the elders under severe scrutiny.

Bishop-Ruled congregations place the onus of church discipline upon the overseers of congregations. Overseers (such as Bishops) do not have regular weekly congregational responsibilities and therefore members of local congregations such as pastors, elders, teachers, deacons, and regular parishioners submit to their theological authority trusting that the Bishop or Overseer’s accountability is intact further up the hierarchy. Bishoprics are determined by ever increasing levels of authority in a hierarchy that extends further up the authoritative ladder to its final iteration: Archbishop. Each level in the hierarchy determines the appointments of the hierarchy level below them. Elders therefore neither rule nor lead in any way that is not expressly directed by the level above them (Pastor or Priest depending). Congregants are free to report accountability concerns to any level of accountability. The hierarchy of theological power therefore flows from the top down.

GCC polity is none of these categories. They are instead a hodge-podge of bits and pieces of all three. Taking the independent norms of congregationalism, GCC has very conveniently woven together a top-down hierarchy of power (episcopal) and simply called it “Elder-Led” in spite of it actually being “Elder-Ruled” while simultaneously ignoring every historical fail-safe to keep the authentic presbyteral framework from becoming tyrannical. In effect, GCC is “Elder-Led” only because the leadership has completely rewritten the definition of what that actually means. There is no historically Christian ecclesiastical polity that supports what GCC has done and it seems to me that this is yet again a purposeful maneuver to sound to the outside world that things on the inside are copasetic when in reality, anyone with an actual knowledge of ecclesiastical polity would be sounding the alarm. There are no, as of the writing of this analysis, fail-safes in place to protect the congregation from the sins of those in power. They are entirely at the mercy of men who

believe that they have the spiritual authority to “rule” in any manner they find pertinent in the lives of the congregants. They also appear to be able to elect one another which yet again, opens the congregation up to the impending thuggishness that ensues when that fail-safe is also actively ignored.

For case studies of what occurs when church leadership fails to protect their own congregants from the noetic effect of sin, please see Walter Martin’s *Kingdom of the Cults*. For further clarification of ecclesiastical polity in a ruling elder context, please see *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (1879).

For an outline of GCC’s elder structure see Appendix D.

VII. Further Analysis

What has been endured under the leadership of Grace Community Church (GCC) is nothing short of harrowing. Under the auspices of sound doctrine and the seriousness of the sanctification process, a disciplinarian and totalitarian church government complete with kangaroo court system has been built in order to control, down to the minutia, the lives of their congregants. Leadership is nothing short of popish in their manufacturing of new and convenient “sins” that browbeat parishioners into uncritical silence in order to perpetuate their own obsession for control of others. From isolating congregants, manipulating normal developmental milestones for its young people, restricting nutrition, withholding pertinent information necessary for consent, acrobatic financial practices, and absurdly excessive and dangerous counseling practices, all the way to failing to protect congregants from marital rape, abuse, and exposure of minors to brain-eating amoebas as an implied test of their faith and God’s sovereignty, GCC has faithfully merited its reputation as the local black hole to which God’s love for his children goes to die.

That is not even an exhaustive list. There are so many stories that I had a very difficult time choosing which ones to include and which ones to exclude in this analysis so as to avoid the re-traumatization process in the families for whom this report was commissioned. More victims of GCC’s policies and procedures emerge weekly, including but not limited to the very day I am writing this, as the latest incident of religious trauma to hit my practice’s radar is a spiritual abuse case who cites GCC as the reason they no longer darken a sanctuary door; a case entirely unrelated to the situations disclosed in this analysis. Perhaps, given all of this, we shall join with Spurgeon in saying that here we have before us, in GCC, an example of God’s mercy in that, “these absurdities are being revealed one at a time, in order that we may endure their stupidity without dying of amazement.”

To begin with, GCC leadership is marked by a desperation to be viewed by those within (and seemingly without) as possessing a theological disposition of superiority over the churches in their immediate area. There have been many reports documenting that one of the pseudodoxies is the notion that there are no other good churches in the area, the implication being multifaceted. Firstly, that there is no point in seeking aid or investigating elsewhere when a congregant becomes uncertain of the GCC environment. Secondly, that

GCC has a monopoly on applied theology when that is patently absurd. Dispensational Non-Denominational congregations with no separate Board of Directors to whom the leadership is accountable are a dime a dozen in East Tennessee. This is one of the largest Bible-based cult populations in the world, and almost every single one of them is structured exactly as GCC has chosen to structure itself (a pyramid). Lastly, and even more importantly, that when church discipline is fully levied by GCC leadership, the felt impact to the spirit is tantamount to being put outside of the camp of Christ. The horrifying nature of this pseudodox norm is that it renders the congregation unbelievably vulnerable to spiritual abuse; in particular, that the children of the congregation are forming their spiritual identities in such an exclusivist environment.

Take for example the wielding of “gossip” as a control-of-information mechanism. There are countless stories reporting that literally anything construed as negative criticism, critical reasoning, testing theology, asking for clarification, etc., was considered “gossip.” Yet, the leadership themselves dealt in gossip specifically for control and intimidation purposes. More than once I was told that congregants had been approached by leadership who had “heard from others” reports about said congregants attending Sunday services in alternative parishes. They were also informed that said behavior “looks bad” since it implies that GCC is not all-encompassing in the spiritual life of the congregants. In one of these reports, congregants were approached after word got to the leadership that they had attended only a single service outside of GCC, and that this could not be borne. Moreover, there were reports that leadership at GCC wielded gossip in the reverse, in that members of the Youth were being instructed not to report to their own parents what was happening at Youth events and meetings, compounding the no “gossip” pseudodoxy to include true statements that were actively hidden from parents about and for whom the information would have actively altered the environment of GCC for the better. Phrases like “backsliders are backbiters” were used as a loaded language in this context to further discredit anyone who had experienced this thuggishness and was trying to alert the congregation to the problems. Even more alarmingly, one incident involved GCC leadership rebuking a congregant for firstly, asking for clarification on a ruling’s scriptural basis (the ruling being that they were not allowed to leave GCC for another parish). This congregant was told that confirming scriptures elsewhere and with a second opinion was “gossiping.” Secondly, the congregant to whom the clarification was requested was equally rebuked for the “sin of listening” for attempting to help the first clarify the ruling by requesting a meeting with the very elders who made the ruling themselves. Such an incidence is so beyond abusive that I am at a lack for words, and a clear incident of intimidation, failure to perform the duties of an elder, and coercive bullying of congregants.

Along this same vein of mercilessly inescapable intimidation, the weaponizing of the pulpit was a repeated stand-out in the interviews conducted. This pseudodoxy was the phenomenon of identifying, in what was presented as “expository teaching,” the details of an incident that the leadership was unhappy about in such a way as to wield it in the form of a lesson or the conclusion that sin was involved. Namely, that if you upset the leadership, you could anticipate your actions showing up in the following weeks’ sermon materials. And not just show up, but show up in such an overt way that the rest of the congregation had an idea of what was being referenced. This form of homiletical abuse is something that

is trained against in most seminaries, and is entirely unacceptable. The pulpit is sacred space and reserved only for the exegesis of the Scriptures. It is not a whipping post for whomever the leadership finds personally unruly. This phenomenon is commonplace enough that congregants learn through implication that if they, too, behave in a way that is unacceptable to the leadership, a place reserved for only God's voice will become the megaphone by which they are shamed; a form of intimidation through implication, and yet another example of spiritual abuse. What this framework does is to promote the lie that bullying is part-and parcel of expository preaching, and in turn teaches the congregants that the Scriptures are the heavy-handed weapons of the theologically superior. In truth, the Scriptures are the healing and rejuvenating balm of unconditional love to those experiencing the reality of brokenness, both inwardly and without.

Which leads us to something that is easily the most obvious issue regarding this so-called "church." The fact that during the year that I have been conducting interviews, researching, reviewing documentation, and attending Sunday services, never once was the Gospel preached or presented to me either through listening to GCC sermons, or reading GCC materials; a feat unto itself, given that sharing the Gospel is quite literally the foundational task of all believers. What is truly astounding is that this point is most markedly illustrated by GCC's own website, where under "What We Believe" about "The Gospel," it is never actually explained, and the verses that are referenced there for justification have literally nothing to do contextually with explaining it. Rather, they imply that there is some confusion as to what the true Gospel is, and that it's apparently so complicated that they cannot be bothered with presenting it in the "About Us" section of the website. The very great irony here is that a church called "Grace" is either unable or unwilling to offer its namesake to the very individuals who need to hear the good news and for whom they claim to have been called to serve. If they cannot fathom competency in the basic expectation of every church since the dawn of Christendom, how much worse is their applied theology when things become more complicated?

This remarkable daftness continues with the character of its primary teaching elder, Chris Riser, to whom it appears to me everyone else must subordinate. In every instance, without exception, both from current congregants and from those who had already made their exit, Chris was described as aloof, unapproachable, avoidant, and dismissive. None of these are qualities described by the Scriptures as appropriate for leadership. His preaching was long-winded, far too fast to actually be absorbed, and can be adequately summarized as the cheerless monotony of a speaker more in love with the sound of his own voice than a love for the souls being subjected to such an experience. More than once I was told of having been asked by Riser, "Are you questioning me?" as a form of conversation shutdown and dismissal. His apparently "expository" form of sermon organization was akin to a seminary class; something that I would normally find refreshing but in this case the theology was not expository at all, but rather an excuse to never arrive at any redemptively historical conclusions about Christ and His work whatsoever. Expository preaching is a very specific homiletical framework and one that upholds the integrity of the synthetic unity of redemptive history. What expository preaching is not, is the haughty attempt of a seminary graduate to try to impress those listening with an excuse to leave the context of the passage being studied in order to repeat what he learned in his Intro to Systematic Theology class.

What I encountered at GCC was the latter, and it was sad in that it felt to me like Riser was entirely mismanaged in the role of Pastor. In theory, he might make an excellent academic if he can bring himself to repent of all of the ways that spiritual abuse has flourished under his shepherding.

Along these lines, again, comes patterned and willful oddities authored exclusively by him, it would seem. For one, the fact that he appears to be actively reviewing testimonies prior to them being given and promotes himself by those giving their testimonies, or by extension, his shepherding of them at GCC specifically in said testimonies. This is patently ridiculous and blatantly manipulative. In one case, a congregant's pre-written testimony was rejected and rewritten three separate times because it did not contain enough complimentary descriptions of the individual's time at GCC. Several congregants mentioned the phrase, "that red-headed Pastor" coming up repeatedly in testimonial use which again, lends credence to some sort of review and editing of congregant's faith journeys to include the glorification of Riser and GCC. Who specifically was judging the edits is unknown, but the fact that Riser repeatedly tolerated such obvious glorification of himself during the sacred time of testimonial giving, a time dedicated solely to the glorification of our Great King, is quite a reflection on the internal disposition of his shepherding style. So, too, is the bizarre need to describe before the congregation the sexual purity statuses of young people seeking to be married in the church. It is appalling, the number of times I listened to stories describing the sacred privacy of sexual unions being openly discussed by Riser in front of the congregation as either a part of the wedding ceremony itself, or by the obsessive way the Youth were hounded regarding their dating habits. There were deeply unsettling accounts of courtship procedures arranged and manipulated by certain members of the leadership, the sexualization of non-sexual developmental milestones for the Youth such as male-female friendships, changes of identity, independence, abstract reasoning, etc. Intimacy in general was hyper-sexualized to such a high degree that I could not find an instance where intimacy was not immediately tied to sex, something the Scriptures keep distinct. Indeed, there is a great deal of unhealthiness when it comes to the theology of sex at GCC, and in this category alone GCC would qualify as a cult strictly due to the desire to control the sacred privacy of these things. In a regular pattern of behaviors, the leadership at GCC fails to uphold the sanctity of a covenant household by attempting to "rule over" the spiritual leader in such a way as to usurp his authority and command him on issues that are entirely within his and his spouse's jurisdiction. Elders are to advise, not command. They certainly are not welcome to place themselves between one spouse and the other on issues of Christian liberty, *especially* in the privacy of the marital bed, but also in the stewardship of the Lord's finances. To illustrate what I mean, I have at least three separate accounts of GCC leadership volunteering themselves without invitation to accost congregants in their homes in an attempt to rule that they could not move cities to take jobs in a different context because the elders could not find a church body there that was acceptable in their eyes. Therefore, the congregants were being "ruled" to stay in Maryville. There are obvious implications for what such a ruling would do to secure the budget of GCC by controlling its tithing members in such a way. The concept of tithe versus gift offering is yet another example of hyper-control and attempting to make distinctions without a difference. The membership expectations at GCC include the provision of "giving regularly," which implies

a title expectation despite the firm decrying of such a thing, and one that, when coupled with their “ruling elder” environment, elicits undue influence over the congregants.

This peculiar tendency of leadership to overstep is carried even further into the dark with their bone-chilling “counseling” protocols. It seems that GCC leadership draws absolutely no distinction between counseling and church discipline, meaning that to go to a counseling session privately is akin to having your business paraded before the elders to exact a ruling that you are required to abide by or face the consequences of public shaming. There are no margins for privacy, in spite of the fact that most people seeking counsel are experiencing crisis; itself an extremely complex issue that requires a significant time investment to understand and to read the litany of simultaneous emotions being experienced by the individual. It is hardly difficult to imagine the hellish landscape that would be endured by someone being judged theologically by a series of elders who already carry about their characters a reputation of compassionless thuggery, and who apparently have no independent sense of spiritual discernment they are willing to act upon, with regard to stopping these tyrannies, about them at all. This, given the fact of the abhorrent piece of total drivel published recently on their website, admitting to being willing to knowingly subject women under their care to sexual coercion, rape, and whatever else the ruling elders consider to be within a level of abuse that isn’t worth their precious time to report. Thank God that one of the features of narcissism is that it never can quite keep its astounding arrogance to itself, and has to keep recording its folly for all of us to marvel at. How an entire group of purportedly mature Christian men allowed such a thing to be published as reflective of their attitudes toward the care of even their own spouses is, frankly, unspeakable. Prayerful concern for their well-being is appropriate here as apparently one feature of becoming an elder at GCC is the forfeiture of one’s spine.

In conclusion, and because the obviousness of it should be self-evident to the reader at this point, GCC is without question an environment that is not only cultish but also utilizes every level of thought control available to study for those interested. These include but are not limited to milieu control, mystical manipulation, demand for purity, confession, sacred science, loading the language, doctrine over person, and dispensing with existence. Further, the psychology of perpetration amongst GCC leadership can be measured by the presence of selective inattention, refusal to confront explicit acts of perpetration, denying the extent/intent/consequences/meaning of various abuses (especially in regard to women and children), ignoring the connections of their “theology” to sexual slavery, valuing personal anxiety reduction above all other ethical and moral standards, refusal to confront the realities of mind-control trauma, and the destruction of the autonomy of those they have victimized; replacing their identity with a perpetrator-induced new one.

I have included in the further reading section analyses of narcissism from both secular and Pro-MacArthurite perspectives for comparison. Both sides would describe what I have described here as incidences of narcissism cosplaying as biblical leadership.

VIII. Recommendations

It is highly recommended that for those who were traumatized, abused, or otherwise distressed by their tenure at GCC, that they seek counseling and therapy by a licensed therapist trained in the psychology of coercive control. The International Cultic Studies Association keeps a list of clinicians by state available to do interventions of this sort. Interventions for trauma incurred in religious settings often requires a level of clinical intervention not available to unlicensed counselors regardless of an ACBC certification as many “counseling” programs do not prepare their students for clinical margins that licensure would in this particular field of study. That being said, secular therapies can be difficult and oftentimes dangerous for the mental health of those individuals concerned about the history of psychology and pharmacological interventions. This is entirely understandable and can be solved by being referred to a specialist in whichever state you find yourself in. Another option is mentoring with an international Christian integrationist service that will permit counsel from clinicians who have themselves experienced cultic environments and trained as theological therapists because of it. For specific references and further suggestions, please see the Further Reading section of this analysis.

It is highly recommended that any future spiritual focusing that occurs be incremental and self-driven for those who have experienced trauma. Spiritual abuse is described by clinicians as “the rape of the mind,” and your healing journey should be one marked by patience and kindness toward yourself and others, as your healing is specific to you. You are worth the time investment that it takes to walk out your healing and you need to know that you are not alone. Tell your story when and where you are ready, knowing that your privacy is entirely yours and you are free to encounter Yahweh wherever and whenever you are ready. You are not a failed Christian for wanting to stay away from church, nor is your attendance in a local church a requirement for your salvation. Please consider exploration and learning on the topic of Christian Liberty and the History of Church and cultic environments to learn about how instances of such things in the past were handled by the people of God. Consider also doing a deep-dive into the theologies that formed the bedrock of the abusive control you have experienced so as to understand for yourself the distinctions between sound doctrine and doctrinal abuses.

Further, it is highly recommended that victims of spiritual abuse in Bible-based cults utilize a specialist Bible called a *New English Translation: Full Notes Edition* in which the totality of translation and interpretation debate across the spectrum of translation theory is provided for you to make up your own mind on contextually controversial Scriptures. Ideally, you would do this by studying the ancient languages comprising the Scriptures (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek); however, this can be too daunting a task for many, and thusly, this Bible permits study to that level of depth but entirely in English. Proof-texting is rampant in cult settings, so feel comfortable purging from your senses the knee-jerk reaction of chiding yourself with verses you have not yet confirmed that you understand correctly, or that were wielded as weapons against you from “authorities” who were not actually called by God to do that job.

On that same note, it is recommended that when you get to a point where you are comfortable enough in your healing journey to study MacArthurite theology, that you track the original Grace Community Church, so that you can anticipate what will happen to

GCC Maryville. Since they appear to be functionally a satellite campus, what happens in California will inevitably happen here. For instance, Grace Community Church and Master's Seminary have dropped off of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) standard for transparent record keeping. The implications there are vast. So too, MacArthur's ruling elders are currently under investigation for willfully protecting a leader in the church they knew had molested his children; and they had disciplined the wife and mother for going to authorities to stop the abuse. On top of this, Bill Shannon, the head of counseling at both Master's Seminary and Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, has recently been removed from ACBC accreditation. Additionally, Master's Seminary's local accreditation is on recent temporary hiatus for conflicts of interest between John MacArthur and the Board over Master's Seminary. Grace Community Church and what tendrils it has elsewhere are showing the signs of the pathological decisions they have made. The rest is up to the Lord to expose. We ought to pray, for the sake of those there, that they are experiencing an environment that is trending upward in spiritual health and not downward. There are reasons that historical fail-safes in churches were established. There are consequences when those fail-safes are ignored, even if the reason behind the ignorance was due to undue influence, coercion, intimidation, or manipulation, and not necessarily consciously or maliciously intended.

These issues are still in their infancy, but they are excellent predictors of what to expect behaviorally in the GCC of the future (and indeed in Bible-based cults in general). They are also a great way to compare and contrast personal experiences with those reporting out of Grace Community in California. Continue to tell your story to this end. If there are others who feel trapped, have internalized their abuse as a sanctification metric, or have family ensnared in a way where they feel it is detrimental to their spirit to leave, hearing your story may be the very key to their deliverance from tyrannical narcissism. You have eyes and they function. Those two facets to your existence are not sin. There is also no sin in reporting the truth of what you experienced.

Finally, pray for GCC ardently. No one inside, including the leadership, Chris Riser, or anyone else is an enemy. Our great enemy is only ever Satan. Those inside may be experiencing an environment that is far worse than even those for whom this report was commissioned. Be patient, be kind, and reflect the true grace of Christ here and everywhere. Your honest assessment of what happened to you is valuable and important.

Soli Deo Gloria.

IX. For Further Reading

Bridges, J. (2014). *Respectable sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*. Tyndale House.

DeGroat, C. (2020). *When narcissism comes to church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. InterVarsity Press.

Garrett, K. J. (2020). *In the House of Friends: Understanding and Healing from Spiritual Abuse in Christian Churches*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Hassan, S., PhD. (2022). *Freedom of mind: helping loved ones leave controlling people, cults, and beliefs*. Freedom of Mind Press.

Holmes, A. R. (2006). *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840*.

In *Oxford University Press*

eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199288656.001.0001>

Johnson, E. L. (2013). *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views (Large Print 16pt)*.

ReadHowYouWant.

Kruger, M. J. (2022). *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church*.

Zondervan.

Lifton, R. J. (1961). *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism : a Study of Brainwashing in China*. New York : Norton [1961].

Meerlo, J. a. M. (2023). *The Rape of the Mind: the psychology of thought control, menticide, and brainwashing*. Must Have Books.

Robertsson, D. (2019). *The first will be last: A Biblical Perspective On Narcissism*.

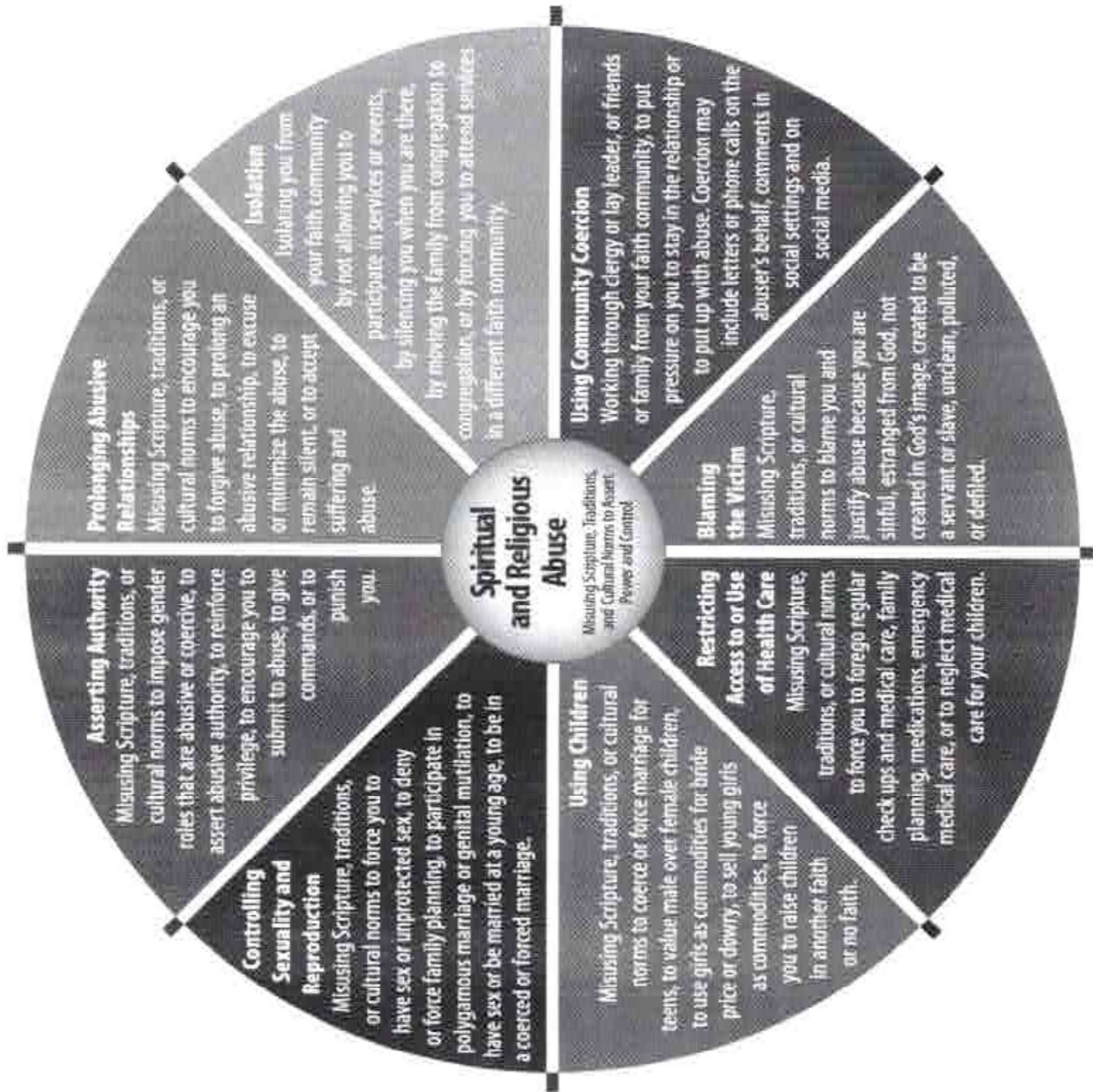
Independently Published.

Schwartz, H. L. (2013). *The Alchemy of Wolves and Sheep: A relational approach to internalized perpetration in complex trauma survivors*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203079331>

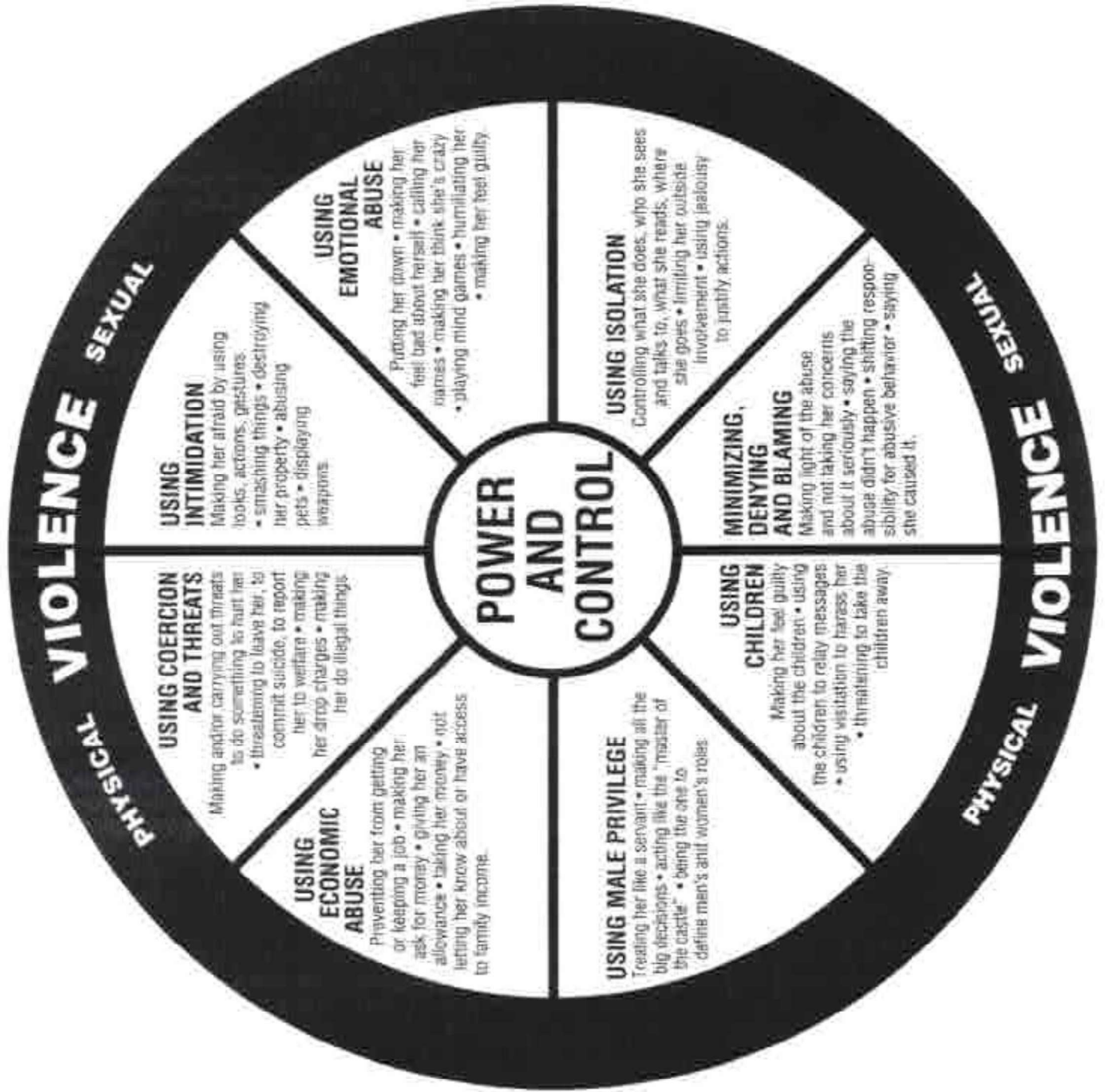
Van Der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Penguin Books.

International Cultic Studies Association: <https://www.icsahome.com>

APPENDIX A:



APPENDIX B:





[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

Elder Qualifications

The Bible prescribes that the church be led by a plurality of elders who are equal in authority and who are characterized by the following biblical qualifications (taken from 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Although every member of the church should aspire to these qualities – every man who serves on the elder board is required to have them. A man cannot become an elder at Grace unless he has first gone through a period of testing to determine if he is biblically qualified.

Above Reproach

A man of holiness. The word means blameless, unrebukeable, so that no one can accuse this man of wrong doing and be correct. This does not mean that an elder never sins, but that when he does he is quick to repent and his sin is not such that it brings a permanent reproach upon his character.

The Husband of One Wife

A faithful husband. Literally, a "one woman man." This is a man who is married to only one woman and has demonstrated ongoing faithfulness to her throughout his lifetime.

Temperate

A clear thinker. The word means to be sober, vigilant, not easily swayed by outside influences, not caught off guard. Free from excessive influence of passion, lust, or emotion.

Prudent

A man of wisdom. The word means sober, discreet, of sound mind, thus able to apply the truth of God in a timely manner to difficult situations (all situations). Having the mind of Christ. Quietly and carefully fulfilling the responsibilities given to him.

Respectable

A model for others. The word means well arranged, model, of good behavior, orderly and exemplary conduct. One whom others can wholeheartedly follow.

Hospitable

A man who welcomes others. The word means, lover of strangers, generous to guests. One who loves to give of time and resources, especially to those who cannot benefit him directly.

Able to Teach

A skillful communicator of truth. The word means apt and skillful in teaching. He understands and delights in the profound truths of God's Word and is able to clearly communicate them.

Not Addicted to Wine

Not controlled by wine or any substance. The word means, "one who sits long at wine," or given to drunkenness. The elder does not yield control of his life to any substance – alcohol or drugs of any kind.

Not Pugnacious

Not easily given to contention. The word means, "a striker" one who hits another with his fists. The elder is not quarrelsome, contentious, or ready for a fight – either verbally or physically.

Gentle

A man of compassionate strength. The word means patient, fair, moderate, appropriate, yielding or forbearing. A quiet, compassionate, merciful strength characterizes the dealing of the elder in every situation.

Peaceable

A man who delights to bring resolution. The word means not contentious or abstaining from fighting. The elder is not simply someone who longs for peace, but a man who is willing to give of his time, gifts, and effort to see that peace becomes a reality.

Free from the Love of Money

A man who holds material things lightly. The elder must not be motivated by desire to acquire material wealth and possessions. This will render his judgment poor and his decisions suspect.

Must Manage His Own Household Well

A man who excels at family leadership. The term demands an effective exercise of authority in the home bolstered by a character of integrity and sensitive compassion. An elder should be excellent in discipline, always thinking about and executing effective ways to develop the discipline and obedience of his children. If an elder is not able to manage his family, he cannot be qualified to oversee the church family.

“Believing” Children – Titus 1:6

In Paul's epistle to Titus, he lists the qualifications for elders beginning in Titus 1:6. One of those qualifications is: *“having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion”* (NASB). Clarifying passage in 1 Timothy 3:4-5: *“He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)”* 1 Ti 3:4-5 (NASB). Recognizing that there are good men on either side of the interpretive issue of “children who believe” versus “children who are faithful,” we agree to support the Grace Community Church position on this elder qualification as follows:

Concerning children in the home:

A man *meets* this qualification if his children:

- a. Are believers in Christ and not given to dissipation or rebellion
- b. Have not yet made a profession of faith but are trustworthy in behavior, that is, responsive to the authority of their parents (1 Tim 3:4-5)

A man *does not meet* this qualification if he has a child who:

- a. Is a professing believer in Christ but not under control (1 Tim 3:4-5)
- b. Is an unbeliever who openly professes rejection of Christ and/or is given to dissipation or rebellion

Concerning children no longer in the home:

A man *meets* this qualification if his children:

- a. Are believers in Christ
- b. Are Unbelievers yet do not destroy his good reputation with those in or outside the church (1 Tim 3:7)

A man *does not meet* this qualification if his children:

- a. Destroy his good reputation with those within or outside the church (1 Tim 3:7)

This qualification, as all others, must be reviewed in the context of the total life and character of the man

Not a New Convert

Spiritually mature. The word literally means, "newly planted." The elder must not be new in the faith but must be drawn from the most spiritually mature men in the congregation. This maturity will guard him from pride and keep him from falling into the trap of Satan.

Having a Good Reputation With Those Outside the Church

Without hypocrisy. The elder cannot lead a double life, but must have a good reputation both inside and outside the church. He must be known in the community for righteousness, moral character, love, kindness, generosity and goodness.



[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

The distinctives of Grace are those things we teach at Grace that are not explicit in the statement of faith. These include positions on Scriptural issues over which good and godly men may disagree, but we feel are important and Biblically clear enough to be affirmed by anyone who teaches at GCC. The Statement of Faith of Grace Community Church contains the foundational biblical tenets to which every member of the church must agree (or be favorable towards). There are, however, other areas of doctrine and practice on which the elders have reached a general position through prayer and consultation of the Word. We have chosen to call these positions the distinctives of Grace Community Church. These distinctives are used by the elders, and others attending GCC, to provide assistance and boundaries in making decisions on church business, church practice, and church teaching.

Biblical Accommodation

While it is our sincere belief that the distinctives we have drawn from Scripture are the proper understanding of Biblical truth, we recognize that good and godly men disagree on some of these important issues. Therefore in several areas we have chosen to allow for the differing understanding of some believers in order to encourage our fellowship and participation with them in worship. This accommodation does not at any time extend to the fundamentals of the Scripture such as are contained in the Articles of Faith.

The Lord's Supper

We hold that partaking of the Lord's Supper is an essential act of obedience and worship that carries with it all the blessings associated with glorifying Christ through faithful adherence to His commands.

Baptism

Baptism is a symbolic act of obedience and worship that carries with it all the benefits of loving obedience to Christ's commands. Baptism is in no way necessary for spiritual regeneration but is a public proclamation of it.

Pre-Millennial

While there are good and godly men on both sides of the millennial issues, we believe a pre-millennial viewpoint allows for the most consistently literal interpretation of both Old and New Testaments.

Elder Qualifications

Creation

The Holy Spirit

Sunday Worship

We do not consider Sunday to be the "Christian Sabbath" to which some form of OT or NT regulations apply. However we do believe that the designation of a day for us to commit together to worship as a congregation corresponds to Biblical pattern and is a vital part of church life.

Marriage Statement

In keeping with our commitment to the veracity of the Scriptures and their application to all areas of faith and practice, we affirm the following:

Elder's Statement on Physical and Emotional Abuse in Relation to Divorce and Remarriage

The Bible speaks often of protecting and guarding the afflicted and the needy from those who abuse and harm them. The Scriptures also speak of the injustice of refusing to stand up for the rights of the oppressed.



[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

Pre-Millennial

While there are good and godly men on both sides of the millennial issues, we believe a pre-millennial viewpoint allows for the most consistently literal interpretation of both Old and New Testaments. Our pre-millennial view may be stated as follows:

At Jesus' second coming he will set up an earthly kingdom over which he will reign for 1000 years

1. OT prophecies that indicate Christ's return to the present earth to set up his kingdom – Zech 14:1-5, Ezekiel 39:28-30
2. Prophecies that indicate a future earthly state that is not eternity – Isaiah 65:20, Isaiah 11:6-9, Isaiah 11:10-11, Psalm 72:8-14, Zechariah 14:5-17
3. NT Prophecy that predicts a 1000 year reign – Rev 20:1-10

A restored nation of believing Israelites will be the lead nation of this earthly kingdom with Gentile believers and believing Jews reigning with Christ

1. Prophecies to national Israel that remain to be fulfilled – Gen 12:3, Gen 15:1-11, Zech 12:10, Zech 14:9-11, Zech 3:1-10, Zech 2:1-10, Jer 30-31
2. NT teaching that indicates a future plan for a "saved" Israel – Romans 9-

11. "With a view to individual salvation and election"

3. NT Teaching that speaks of the saints ruling with Christ – Matt 19:28, Luke 22:29-30, Rev 2:26-27

At the end of the 1000 years Satan will be released to deceive the nations, there will be final battle, and a final Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers. After this the eternal state is ushered in

1. NT prediction of Satan's release and war – Rev 20:7-10

2. NT prediction of the Great White Throne Judgment – Rev 20:11-15

3. NT prediction of the new heavens and new earth – Rev 21

About Us	Worship with Us	Resources	Ministries
History/Affiliation	Sunday	Video Archive	Adult
Home	Grace Live!	YouTube	Instruction
Worship	Grace Live!	Podcasting/TV	Men's
Objectives	Music	Prayer Archive	Ministries
What We Believe	Exemplars of	Podcasts	Women
FAQ's	Christian Living	Diary	Ministries
Constitutional	Worshiping	Church	Youth
By Law	Prayer	Images	Marriage
Instructions	Prayer	Calendar	College
Missionary	Map	Live	Youth
Relationship	Contact Us	Recommendations	Children
Philosophies of Ministry	Membership	Gifts	Relationship
			Group Counseling



[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

Constitution and By-Laws

Our Constitution and By-Laws will provide more information on how our church is structured and how we relate to the governing authorities that have been placed over us.

I. Article I – Name

The name of this part of the spiritual body of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be Grace Community Church of East Tennessee.

II. Article II – Purpose

A. Statement of Purpose

To be a part of the family of God that brings glory and pleasure to our Heavenly Father through obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. Objectives to Accomplish our Purpose

1. **Worship** – To promote, encourage, and strive after worship of God our Father and His son our Lord Jesus Christ with all of our heart, soul, mind

Father and His son our Lord Jesus Christ with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

2. **Teaching** – To teach and preach the whole council of God as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures; that the pride of man might be humbled and the grace of God in salvation might be exalted to the praise of His glory, and that genuine holiness in heart and life might be promoted.

3. **Discipleship** – To nurture those entrusted to our care that we may each attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ.

4. **Holiness** – To pursue holiness in our personal lives, in our families, in this part of the Lord's body, trusting the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ

5. **Service** – To reach out to our body, our community, our nation, and the world in acts of service that will demonstrate the love of Christ, and to promote this service in such a way that all members have the opportunity to serve Christ according to their measure of giftedness.

6. **Evangelism** – To share the unsearchable riches of our Lord Jesus Christ individually, in our community, in our nation, and in the world.

7. **Submission** – To subject ourselves to such spiritual authority that may be placed by the Holy Spirit over us and to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.

8. **Prayer** – To commit ourselves to prayer, both personal and corporate, trusting the Holy Spirit to intercede for us and to guide us into all truth.
Personal, family, and corporate

III. Statement of Faith

The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God in the original manuscripts. They are the revelation of God's will for man, being the divine and final authority for all Christian knowledge and obedience in the faith.

The doctrine of Grace Community Church is according to the Statement of Faith which is a modification of the "Abstract of Principles" found in "Systematic Theology" by James Boyce (see the document containing the full Statement of Faith).

IV. Leadership and Organization

A. Definition

Under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, The Council of Elders, the Deacons and the Congregation work together to see that the church accomplishes the work to which God has called her. The governance of the church is undertaken through the selection of a Council of Elders who exercise final authority according to the mandates of 1 Peter 5:1-3. This involves a commitment to communication with the congregation and mutual accountability. In light of this accountability, the vote of the membership of this Church at a properly called meeting, as provided in the statement on Church Government below, shall be required to effect the following actions:

1. Approve any transactions regarding real property;
2. Adopt, amend, or repeal the Constitution or By-Laws of this church.
3. Approve the call of Vocational Pastors and Ministers.

At the Elders discretion a vote of affirmation will be solicited for the annual budget or for large non-budgeted expenditures.

B. Offices of the Church

The offices of the Church shall be Elder and Deacon. The purpose of the officers of the Church is to lovingly govern, care for, and equip the membership to do the work of the ministry.

C. Function of Elders

The leadership of the Church shall be vested in the Council of Elders who are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and shepherding the flock of God in this Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function.

D. Function of Deacons

Deacons shall assist the Council of Elders by performing services of advice, benevolence, administration, and implementation.

V. Church Government

A. General Statement

1. **Officers** – The Officers of the Church shall be a Council of Elders and the Deacons. All officers of the Church shall be members of the Church in good and regular standing. The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, the Deacons shall also be men. Except as provided for in (2) below, the Council of Elders is the only governing body and Deacons are the only additional officers provided for in this document.

2. **Ministries and Appointees** – The Council of Elders has the authority to create ministries and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. The Council of Elders has the authority to dissolve any ministry or position which it created. The Council of Elders also has the authority to appoint Elders, Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such ministries and to act as its agents in such positions. Individual Deacons may nominate candidates for any ministry or position, with appointment by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate to the individual Deacons the authority to appoint Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such ministries and as agents of the Council of Elders in such positions. Every ministry shall have a chairperson, responsible for the overall operation of the ministry who shall be appointed by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to an individual Deacon or to the ministry.

B. Vocational Pastors and Ministers

1. **Definition** – Vocational Pastors are the ordained Elders of the church, who in response to God's call, have devoted their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word and prayer in the service of the church of Christ. Vocational Ministers are the non-ordained ministers of the church who, in response to God's call, serve the church of Christ as their primary vocation. Both Vocational Pastors and Vocational Ministers are supported financially by the church in return for their vocational labors.

2. **Duties** – In addition to the duties of their office as described in Sections 4 and 5 below, Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall perform the duties determined by the Council of Elders. The duties shall be in writing at the time of the call to service. The church's call of a Vocational Pastor is a call to the Eldership of the church. Therefore Vocational Pastors shall be members of the Council of Elders and have all the Biblical qualifications of an Elder. Vocational Ministers are not necessarily called to the Eldership, but as assisting partners in the ministry. Vocational Ministers may, when appropriate, be called by the church to the Council of Elders or to the office of Deacon.

3. **Vocational Call by the Church** – The members shall call Vocational Pastors and Ministers (1) upon recommendation of the Council of Elders and (2) by at least a two-thirds majority of those members voting at the meeting with at least thirty percent (30%) of the membership of the Church present. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting.

C. Non-Vocational Officers

1. **Duties** – Non-vocational Elders and Deacons shall have the duties of their offices as described below.

2. **Calling** – The Council of Elders shall recognize, interview, investigate and appoint candidates for non-vocational Elder and Deacon. The Council may provide for individual members of the Church either to nominate candidates or to present themselves to the Council as candidates for office and for the Council's further investigation. The Council of Elders shall publish for the congregation a ballot of candidates for calling as Elders or Deacons at least three weeks prior to appointing those candidates to office. It is the responsibility of the congregation to evaluate the candidates according to the qualifications of Elders and Deacons as found in Titus 1:6-10 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and they are encouraged to contact the elders if concerns arise. After this three week period, and after all received input has been acted on by the Council of Elders, the candidates for Elder or Deacon may be approved at any regular or special meeting of the Council of Elders. The new officers will then be presented to the church.

3. **Terms of Service** – Non-vocational Elders and Deacons shall be called according to the procedures described in section 2 above and shall serve as long as they maintain biblical qualification for this office.

D. Termination of any Office

1. **Resignation** – An officer may resign his office at any time if he finds he is no longer able and willing to discharge the duties of the office.

2. **Grievance from Congregation** – Where a grievance exists against any officer either due to his preaching or teaching contrary to the beliefs of the Church as set forth in the Statement of Faith or to alleged conduct on his part in violation of specific Scriptural principles, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedures laid out in Matthew 18 and 1 Timothy 5:19 (see Church Discipline section). The Council of Elders must then determine if the grievance will result in removal according to the guidelines in section 3 below.

3. **Removal by Council of Elders** – Any Elder may be removed from office at any regular or special meeting of the Council if he is found to be physically or mentally incapacitated or spiritually unqualified (according to pertinent Scripture, including 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), after thorough corroborating investigation by the Elders (or a duly appointed Committee of the Council, per Article V, Section 2 of these Bylaws, at the sole discretion of the Council), in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Timothy 5:19. When an Elder is removed because of sin that is deemed sufficient to disqualify him from shepherding, and if he refuses to repent from that sin, the removal shall be accompanied by a public rebuke, and notice shall be made before the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly-scheduled worship service as prescribed in 1 Timothy 5:20.

4. **Restoration** – An officer who has been removed from office through disciplinary action, yet remains within the church, may be eligible for office under the following conditions:

1. A waiting period as determined by the Council of Elders
2. True repentance has been clearly demonstrated.

3. The above process for the calling of an Elder or Deacon is followed if and when it is determined that he again meets the qualifications for office

E. Council of Elders

1. Composition, Term, and Calling – The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, both Non-vocational Elders and Vocational Elders. The Council of Elders shall be composed of at least three members, with the number of Elders at any time determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church. The number of Vocation Elders on the Council may not exceed fifty percent.. Each Elder shall be called by the Council of Elders to serve as long as they remain Biblically qualified for the office.

2. Qualifications – Elders and nominees for Elder shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and I Peter 5:1-4. He shall be:

1. Blameless as a steward of God; above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6-7)
2. Husband of one wife; a one-woman man (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)
3. Temperate, sober, vigilant (1 Timothy 3:2)
4. Sober-minded, prudent (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
5. Of good behavior; orderly, respectable (1 Timothy 3:2)
6. Given to hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
7. Apt to teach; able to teach; he can exhort believers and refute false teaching (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9)
8. Not given to wine (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
9. Not violent; not pugnacious (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
10. Patient, moderate, forbearing, gentle (1 Timothy 3:3)
11. Not a brawler; uncontentious; not soon angry or quick-tempered (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
12. Not covetous; not a lover of money; not greedy of base gain (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
13. Rules well his own house; his children are faithful, not accused of rebellion to God (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:7)

14. Not a novice; not a new convert (1 Timothy 3:6)
15. Has a good report or reputation with outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7)
16. Not self-willed (Titus 1:7)
17. A lover of good men and things (Titus 1:8)
18. Just, fair (Titus 1:8)
19. Holy, devout (Titus 1:8)
20. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8)
21. Eager in his service (1 Peter 5:2)
22. Not "lording it over" the flock (1 Peter 5:3)

3. **Elder Distinctives** – Elders are also required to be in agreement with the Grace Community Church Elder Distinctives. The Elder Distinctives shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Council of Elders to the church, following the same procedure to amend the By-Laws.

4. **Responsibilities** – The fundamental responsibility of the Elders is to devote themselves to prayer and the Word. The Elders are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and shepherding the flock of God in this Church. The responsibilities of the Elders shall include: examining prospective members and acquainting them with the Statement of Faith and Church Covenant, overseeing the process of Church discipline, examining prospective candidates for office, scheduling and providing a moderator for business meetings, providing for reporting and recording of official Church business, overseeing the work of the Deacons and appointed church agents and ministries, conducting worship services, administering the ordinances of the Gospel, equipping the membership of the Church for the work of the ministry, teaching the whole counsel of God both formally and informally, correcting error, overseeing, coordinating and promoting the ministries of the Church, and mobilizing the Church for world mission.

5. **Organization** – The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to be best to achieve the mission of the Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The Elders must meet at least once per month. Meetings of the Elders may be held at any location and may be conducted by means of electronic communication through which the Elders may simultaneously hear each other. Unless the Council provides otherwise, meetings of the Council may be held

immediately upon notice. A quorum for meetings of the Elders is defined as at least one-half of the Non-vocational Elders plus at least one-half of the Vocational Elders, except for matters on which only Non-vocational Elders are entitled to vote in which case a majority of the Non-vocational Elders shall constitute a quorum. The Council shall annually select its Chairman and Vice-Chairman from among its Non-vocational Elders.

6. Decision making – Decisions shall be reached after prayerful consideration by unanimous vote in a spirit of humility, with each Elder regarding one another before himself. If, after a specified period of time, one member of the council holds a dissenting view from the other members, he will be asked to graciously yield to the decision of the other Council members.

F. Deacons

1. Composition, Term, and Calling – The Deacons shall be men. The number of Deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church. Each Deacon shall be called by the Council of Elders as described in Section C above and shall serve for as long as they remain biblically qualified for the office.

2. Qualifications – Deacons and nominees for Deacon shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:8-12. These qualifications are the same as those for elders except that a deacon need not be gifted to teach. There must also be a period of testing as prescribed by the Council of Elders.

3. Responsibilities – The Deacons shall advise and be ready to assist the Elders in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the Word, new and existing ministries of the Church, and the care for the members of the congregation. Their responsibilities may include:

1. Administering a fund to assist the poor and needy and otherwise providing aid in times of crisis or distress;
2. The greeting and welcoming ministries of the church;
3. Assisting in administering the ordinances of the Gospel;
4. Assisting at fellowship gatherings of the church;
5. Caring for and maintaining the Church properties;

6. Administering the business affairs of the Church that pertain to its material assets.

G. Licensing, Ordination, and Commissioning

1. **Ordination** – Ordination refers to the unanimous recognition by the Council of Elders of a man's call to the ministry, preparation as a shepherd, and qualification to serve. Ordination shall be conferred for life, so long as the man continues to manifest the qualifications of the elder.
2. **Licensing** – The license is issued by the Council of Elders and is given in recognition of a man's call to that ministry. Its aim is to allow a man to perform the ecclesiastical duties and functions of the church. Licenses are issued for life, so long as a man continues to manifest the qualifications of the office.
3. **Commissioning** – When local-church certification is required for ministry where ordination would be unnecessary or inappropriate, as in the case of deacons, a person is commissioned by the Council of Elders to minister. This authorization continues as long as the opportunity to minister remains in effect and as long as the person maintains the qualifications for ministry.
4. **Procedure** – In the matter of licensing or ordaining any person to the Gospel Ministry, the church shall follow, as far as possible, the following process
 1. A period of testing as determined and defined by the Council of Elders
 2. A public commissioning service which includes prayer and the laying on of hands by the current members of the Council of Elders

VI. Teachers

Those who teach at GCC must be members in good standing who consent in writing to submit to and be bound by the Constitution, Statement of Faith, Elder Distinctives, and leadership of GCC. All teachers must be approved by the Elder Council or its designee. Visitors must agree not to teach against the doctrinal statement

VII. Church Membership

A. Active Membership

Persons desiring to unite with this church by profession of a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord shall be examined as to their Christian faith and experience by at least two members of the Council of Elders or a duly appointed committee. Membership requirements are:

1. Believer's Baptism
2. Completion of the membership class
3. Submission to the GCC Statement of Faith and Constitution

B. Denial of Membership

If, upon review of an application for membership, after meeting with a prospective member, or after a concern raised by a member (as designated in section C below) the Council of Elders determines that the applicant does not credibly confess Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior, or that there is a lack of evidence of a godly lifestyle, membership shall be denied. The decision made by the Council shall be final and there shall be no appeal to any court from that decision.

C. Admission of Applicants

Applicants admitted to membership shall, if possible, present themselves at a worship service, or business meeting, or meeting designated by the Council of Elders, at which service such applicants shall proclaim their testimony. After this public testimony the names of the applicants shall be published in the bulletin for at least two weeks, during which time members are encouraged to bring any concerns they may have to the attention of a member of the Council of Elders. If, after this period, there are no unresolved concerns, then the applicants will be asked to publicly commit to upholding the covenant of Grace Community Church and be acknowledged as members.

D. Responsibilities of Members

The members of the church shall be responsible for faithful support of the body of Christ, the church (2 Cor 9:6-15, Heb 10:24-25), for submission to

leadership (Heb 13:17, 1 Pet 5:5) and for the exercise of their spiritual gifts in support and encouragement of one another (Gal 6:2, Col 3:12-17).

E. Voting Privileges

Membership in this church shall not vest in any member any proprietary rights in the Corporation, but shall only entitle the member to vote at a meeting of the members on those matters that the Council of Elders chooses to submit to the church membership for affirmation. In such cases, voting privileges are restricted to members who are in good standing, who are not under any disciplinary action, and who have passed their eighteenth (18) birthday. Membership shall not be assignable inter vivos by any member nor shall membership vest to any personal representative, heir, or devisee.

F. Inactive members

A member shall be declared inactive if for at least six months they have failed to regularly attend services of this church and have not, after having been contacted, given satisfactory explanation of such absence. Inactive members shall have no right to hold church office. Inactive members may be dropped from the membership at the discretion of the Council of Elders.

G. Termination of membership

Membership may be terminated for the following reasons

1. Voluntary termination at the request of any member in good standing. No member may withdraw his/her membership during the process of church discipline of that member as set forth in Article IX.
2. Involuntary termination as a result of church discipline as described in Article IX or due to being inactive according to section F above.

VIII. Meetings

A. Business meetings

Notice shall be given during the worship service on at least two consecutive Sunday morning services prior to the business meeting. Business meetings shall be called for member input. A business meeting shall be called to

review any item for which the members of the church must vote as designated in Article IV, Section A.

B. Voting

The privilege to vote is restricted to active members of this church 18 years of age and older. The Council of Elders shall determine the method of voting. Unless stated otherwise in this Constitution, a two thirds majority is required for the adoption of any resolution or motion or any item designated under Article V for congregational approval.

IX. Church Discipline

A. Purpose

The threefold purpose of church discipline is to

1. Glorify God by maintaining purity in the local church (1 Corinthians 5:6).
2. Edify believers by deterring sin (1 Timothy 5:20).
3. Promote the spiritual welfare and restoration of the offending believer by calling him or her to return to a biblical standard of doctrine and conduct (Galatians 6:1).

B. Subjects

Members of this church and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church who substantially, consistently, err in major point of doctrine, or who unrepentantly, engage in conduct that violates Scripture as determined by the Council of Elders, shall be subject to church discipline, including dismissal according to Matthew 18:15-18.

General Procedure:

1. **Step One** – It shall be the duty of any member of this church who has knowledge of the erring individual's heresy or unrepentant sin to warn and correct such erring individual in private, seeking his or her repentance and restoration.
2. **Step Two** – If the erring individual does not heed this warning, the warning member shall again go to then the erring individual, seeking his or

her repentance, but accompanied by one or two individuals who shall confirm that the sin has occurred or is continuing to occur, and/or that the erring individual has been appropriately confronted and has refused to repent. The first and second warnings may occur with no specified time interval.

3. Step Three – If the erring individual still refuses to heed this warning, then it shall be brought to the attention of the Council of Elders, if the elders determine—after thorough investigation in accord with the procedures prescribed by pertinent Scripture, including Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Timothy 5:19—that there is corroborating evidence that the erring individual has sinned or is continuing to sin, that he or she has been appropriately confronted, and that he or she has refused to repent, then the Elders shall inform the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service in order that the church may call the erring individual to repentance. If the erring individual demonstrates repentance, then notice to that effect may be given at a regularly scheduled worship service.

4. Step Four – If, however, the erring individual does not repent in response to the church in its collective call to repentance, then he or she shall be publicly dismissed from the fellowship and/or membership of the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service.

5. Restoration – If the erring individual, after such dismissal, heeds the warning, demonstrates repentance, and requests reinstatement before the Council of Elders then he or she shall be publicly restored to all the rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities of fellowship and/or membership.

6. Ministry responsibilities – Protection of the flock as well as each individual will always be carefully considered by the Elders. Removal of the believer subject to church discipline from ministry responsibilities will be by the decision of the Elders, and will always be necessary whenever a public confrontation is required. After restoration of fellowship for this believer, time to restore trust and credibility (1 Tim 3:7) with opportunities to serve and to be proven (1 Timothy 5:22-25) will be provided before resumption of ministry responsibilities.

C. Special Procedure

Notwithstanding the discussion in Section C, the elders in the exercise of their discretion may proceed directly to the third stage of church discipline, (i.e. the informing of the church and the congregation thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service in order that the church may call the erring individual to repentance) or to the fourth stage of church discipline, (i.e. the dismissal from the fellowship and/or membership of the church) when one or more of the following have occurred:

1. **Public offense** – Where the transgression and the refusal to repent have been public, i.e. openly and to the offense of the whole Church (1 Cor. 5:1-5).
2. **False doctrine** – Where the disciplined party has taught or otherwise disseminated doctrine deemed false or erroneous by the elders, then chosen to disregard the direction and reproof of the elders (Romans 16:17).
3. **Factious conduct** – Where the disciplined party has been warned twice to cease from factious and divisive conduct and has chosen to disregard that warning (Titus 3:10-11).

D. Response to Discipline

The members of this church, and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church, agree that there shall be no appeal to any court because of the dismissal or because of public statements to the congregation at the third or fourth stages of church discipline. Members who are under discipline by the church, as defined in the previous paragraphs, forfeit and waive the right to resign from this church. Resignations from membership are possible only by members who are in good standing and who are not under any disciplinary action.

E. Restriction from premises

Separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the elders (or a duly constituted subcommittee thereof), a member, non-member regular attender, or other individual may be notified that he or she is not to be present upon church premises for such a period of time as is deemed necessary for the safety and well-being of others on church premises. Such required absence may, but need not, be concurrent with church discipline of that person.

F. Removal from membership

Separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the elders (or a duly constituted subcommittee thereof), the names of any members who have not attended a worship service, Sunday School class session or Fellowship meeting at Grace Community Church for a period of six months or longer may be removed from the membership roll.

X. Corporate Membership

The corporation shall have no members as that term is used in the Tennessee Non-Profit Corporation Act.

XI. Corporate Board of Directors (Elders)

A. Powers

The affairs of the corporation shall be managed by its Board of Directors which shall be identical with the Council of Elders and shall be referred to as the Council of Elders hereinafter. Elders need not reside in Tennessee.

B. Number, Tenure, and Qualifications

The number of Elders shall be no less than three (3). In the event the Council of Elders falls below the number three (3) the remaining Elders are authorized to appoint such men from the active Deacons to temporarily serve with the Elders until qualified men are approved as Elders. The duration of the terms of service of the Council of Elders shall be as set forth in Article V above.

C. Meetings

Meetings of the Council of Elders may be called by or at the request of the Chairman of the Council of Elders or the majority of the Elder Council. The place and time of the meeting shall be specified in the notice of such meeting.

D. Notice

Notice of any meeting of the Council of Elders shall be given at least one day prior thereto by oral or written notice to each Elder. Regular meetings shall be held without notice to any Elder at the time and place for such regular meeting as is from time to time designated by the Council of Elders.

E. Manner of Acting

The unanimous act of the Elders present at a meeting in which a quorum is participating by either personal presence or electronic medium shall be the act of the Council of Elders, unless the act of a greater numbers is required by law or by these bylaws. Two thirds of the members of the Council of Elders shall constitute a quorum.

F. Vacancies

Any vacancy occurring in the Council of Elders and any Eldership to be filled by reason of an increase of the Council of Elders shall be filled according to the provisions of Article V above.

G. Compensation

Non-Pastoral Staff Elders shall not receive any stated salaries for their services.

H. Informal Action by Elders

Any action required by law to be taken at a meeting of the Elders may be taken without a meeting if a consent in writing setting for the action so taken is signed by all the Elders.

I. Removal

Elders may be removed by the Council of Elders in accordance with the stipulations of Article V above.

XII. Officers of the Corporation

A. Officers

The officers of the Corporation shall be a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The Corporation may also have, at the discretion of the Council of Elders, other officers as are deemed necessary and to have the authority and person the duties described, from time to time, by the Council of Elders.

B. Election and Term of Office

The officers of the corporation shall be elected annually by the Council of Elders at a regular meeting of the Council of Elders. Provided, however, that the duration and terms of the officers as may be elected by the Council of Elders shall be for one year. Provided, further, that all incumbent officers shall be deemed to have been re-elected to successive terms of similar duration in the absence of an election appropriately held. New offices may be created and filled at any meeting of the Council of Elders.

C. Removal

Any officer elected or appointed by the council of elders may be removed by the Council of Elders whenever in its judgment the best interests of the corporation would be served hereby, but such removal shall be without prejudice to the contractual rights, if any, of the officer so removed.

D. Vacancies

A vacancy in any office because of death, resignation, disqualification or otherwise, may be filled by the Elders for the unexpired portion of the term.

E. Chairman

The Chairman shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation and shall, subject to the control of the Council of Elders, have general supervision, direction, and control of the activities and officers of the Corporation. He shall preside at all meetings of the Council of Elders, which are to be conducted according to the scriptural principles such as set forth in Philippians 2:2-8. He shall be an ex officio member of all the standing committees, if any, and shall have powers and duties as may be prescribed by the Council of Elders or the Bylaws.

F. Secretary

The Secretary shall keep, or cause to be kept, a book of minutes at the principal office or such other place as the Council of Elders may order, of all meetings of the members, the Council and its committees, with the time and place of holding, whether regular or special, and if special, how authorized, the notice thereof given, the names of those present at the meetings, the Council and committees' meetings, and the proceedings thereof.

The Secretary shall keep, or cause to be kept, at the principal office in the State of Tennessee the original and a copy of the Corporation's Articles and Bylaws, as amended to date. The Secretary shall give, or cause to be given, notice of all meetings of the Council and any committees thereof required by these Bylaws or by law to be given, shall keep the seal of the Corporation in safe custody, and shall have such other powers and perform such other duties as prescribed by the Council.

The Secretary shall keep, or cause to be kept at the principal office of the Corporation, a church membership register, or a duplicated membership register, showing the names of the members and their addresses.

G. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall ensure the stewardship of the physical and financial resources of the Corporation, "taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration...for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). He shall select "men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3) to implement and accomplish this responsibility.

The Treasurer shall keep and maintain, or cause to be kept and maintained, adequate and correct accounts of the properties and business transactions of the Corporation or his agent or attorney.

The Treasurer shall deposit, or cause to be deposited, all monies and other valuables in the name and to the credit of the Corporation with such depositories as may be designated by the Council of Elders. He shall disburse, or cause to be disbursed, the funds of the Corporation as may be ordered by the Council of Elders, shall render, or cause to be rendered, to the Chairman and the Elders, whenever they request it, an account of all the transactions and of the financial condition of the Corporation, and shall

have such other powers and perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the Council of Elders. He shall make, or cause to be made, the financial reports at each regular Council meeting and at the annual meeting of members.

XIII. Committees

The Council of Elders, by resolution adopted by a majority of the Elders in office, may designate and appoint one or more committees, each of which shall consist of two or more Elders, which committees, to the extent provided in said resolution shall have and exercise the authority of the Council of Elders in the management of the corporation. However, no such committee shall have the authority of the Council of Elders in reference to amending, altering, or repealing the bylaws; electing, appointing or removing any member of any such committee or any Elder or officer of the corporation; amending the articles of Incorporation; adopting a plan of merger or adopting a plan of consolidation with another corporation; authorizing the voluntary dissolution of the corporation or revoking proceedings therefore; adopting a plan for the distribution of the assets of the corporation; or amending, altering, or repealing any resolution of the Council of Elders which by its terms provides that it shall not be amended, altered, or repealed by such committee and the delegation thereto of authority shall not operate to relieve the Council of Elders, or any individual Elder of any responsibility imposed on it or him by law.

XIV. Contracts, Checks, Deposits, and Funds

A. Contracts

The Council of Elders may authorize any officer or officers, agent or agents of the corporation, in addition to the officers so authorized by these bylaws, to enter into any contract or execute and deliver any instrument in the name of and on behalf of the corporation. Such authority may be general or confined to specific instances.

B. Checks and Drafts

All checks, drafts, or orders for the payment of money, notes, or other evidences of indebtedness issued in the name of the corporation shall be

signed by such officer or officers, agent or agents of the corporation and in such manner as shall from time to time be determined by the Council of Elders. In the absence of such determination by the Council of Elders, such instruments shall be signed by the Treasurer.

C. Deposits

All funds of the corporation shall be deposited from time to time to the credit of the corporation in such banks, trust companies, or other depositories as the Council of Elders may select.

D. Gifts

The Council of Elders may accept on behalf of the corporation any contribution, gift, bequest, or devise for the general purposes or for any special purpose of the corporation.

XV. Books and Records

The corporation shall keep correct and complete books and records of account and shall also keep minutes of the proceedings of its Council of Elders and committees having any of the authority of the Council of Elders, and shall keep at the registered or principal office a record giving the names and addresses of the elders. All books and records of the corporation may be inspected by any elder or his agent or attorney for any proper purpose at any reasonable time.



[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

About Grace Community

We exist to teach and preach the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures; that the pride of man might be humbled and the grace of God in true salvation might be exalted, to the praise of His glory; and that genuine holiness in heart and life might be promoted.

We desire to bring glory and pleasure to our Heavenly Father in Christ-centered worship, fellowship and ministry. Our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with a loving, caring and giving fellowship with families spread out over five counties surrounding Knoxville and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

We invite you to worship with us if you are vacationing in the Smoky Mountains or moving to this area!

ABOUT GRACE ...

We are ...



- An evangelical "Founders Church"
- Built on a reformed foundation reflecting the Second London Confession of 1689
- Committed to preaching the whole counsel of God through exegetical preaching
- Practicing plurality of elder leadership with deacon-led ministries.

Our History

Our church began in the mid-eighties as a home Bible study in the Maryville area to meet the need for Biblical exposition that is accurate, detailed, comprehensive, and challenging. Over time we have grown in numbers to have need of a building and a more defined structure, but our emphasis has always been on the spiritual growth of each member of the body.

Our Elders

Grace is led by a plurality of elders who are considered to be true equals.

Each elder is a pastor with varied shepherding responsibilities within the body. The elders direct the affairs of the church through prayer, study and teaching of the Word, and careful communication with the congregation.



**Chris
Riser**

Pastor/Preaching Elder



**Ron
O'Dell**

Elder/Family Ministries



**Andy
Smith**

Elder



**Paul
Edmisto**

n

Elder



**Justin
Smith**

Elder



**Jay
Brown**

Elder

Our Objectives

The objectives of Grace Community Church help us to clarify, Scripturally, how we will live out the theological implications of our statement of faith. Our ultimate goal is to glorify God in all things, our objectives serve as Biblical guidelines to help us accomplish this.

Worship

To promote, encourage, and strive after worship of God our Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with all of our

Holiness

To pursue holiness in our personal lives, in our families, and in this part of our Lord's body, trusting the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of our

heart, soul, mind, and strength.

God's Word

To teach and preach the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures; that the pride of man might be humbled and the grace of God in true salvation might be exalted, to the praise of His glory; and that genuine holiness in heart and life might be promoted

Spiritual Authority

To humbly subject ourselves to such spiritual authority as may be placed over us under the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ.

Discipleship

To nurture those entrusted to us in personal discipleship, helping every man, woman and child to be fully equipped for the works of service and to have the maturity necessary to recognize and refute error.

Evangelism

To reach out to other parts of our nation and the world in support of faithful missionary endeavors

Prayer

To undergird our every endeavor with alert, thankful prayer, thereby recognizing our absolute dependence upon the power of God to accomplish His own will.

What We Believe

The most important thing about a church is not the facilities, the programs, the numbers, or the vision. The greatest imperative of any church is the theological principles that lay the foundation for every facet of church life and ministry. A church must have properly

understood, firmly held, doctrinal convictions, or it will be swept away into error and cultural conformity.

The Gospel

There is much confusion over the gospel today – yet without a biblical understanding of the gospel no one would ever be converted (1 Peter 1:23, Romans 10:14-15). Therefore we believe it is essential to get the gospel right as the foundation of all that we do as a church.

Statement of Faith

Our statement of faith outlines the basic Biblical doctrines we hold to. We ask every member of our church to affirm their agreement with these scriptural mandates. We believe these principles to be the essential foundation on which a solid, God-honoring, church is built.

Distinctives of Grace

The distinctives of Grace are those things we teach at Grace that are not explicit in the statement of faith. These include positions on Scriptural issues over which good and godly men may disagree, but we feel are important and Biblically clear enough to be affirmed by anyone who teaches at GCC.

Our Covenant

The church covenant is a

bringing up children, teaching women and children, etc.), but are not to be official ministers (i.e. pastor, elder, deacon) within it. This is based on teaching found in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

Church attire

We do not believe that the Bible specifies any particular style of clothing to wear to church. According to 1 Peter 3:3-4 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10, however, women (and by implication, men) are to dress in a modest way. It is not our intent to promote a "casual" atmosphere by refusing to specify a particular code of dress. The worship of the Holy God is not something to be taken lightly and it is left to the conscience of each member of the congregation to wear that which will enable them to worship in a joyful fear of the Lord (which includes love, awe, reverence, and humility).

Elders, deacons

We believe that the church is to be led by a plurality of elders whom the Lord has raised up. The function of elders is to lead, oversee, teach, and shepherd the flock of God under the authority of the Lord Jesus. This

believe that our Lord gave two provisions for divorce (Adultery – Matt 5:31-32, Matt 19:3-12; Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse – 1 Cor 7:13-16) and that remarriage (in the Lord) of the innocent party is within the will of God in these cases. Remarriage is also within God's will for one whose spouse has died (Romans 7:1-3). Additionally, we believe that those who were divorced/remarried before conversion are new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:16,17) and are free to remarry in the Lord or hold church office (elder, deacon).

Music

We believe that music is to be used in worship of our God and that God's Word presents both singing and instruments in a favorable light (Psalms, Col 3:15, Eph 5:18-19, James 5:13). Music is a tool to express worship, and as such the lyrics of each song must present the truth of God's Word with absolute adherence to Biblical doctrine and principles. However, we do not believe that the Bible provides specific guidelines as to the style of the music. Therefore we seek to use the giftedness that the Lord has provided in our congregation to play and sing

commitment that each member makes to one another as to how they will conduct their relationships in the body of Christ. We believe that it is vital for our members to understand and be absolutely committed to the 'one another' commands in Scripture. Without this commitment a church body cannot grow properly.

Ephesians 1:7,8a

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

Frequently Asked Questions

Women as ministers

We believe that God's Word teaches that women have many vital functions in the local church (overseeing women's ministries, serving the body,

Divorce and remarriage

We believe that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), that marriage is to be held in honor among all, and that the marriage bed is to be undefiled (Heb 13:4). We also

leadership must come with input and accountability from the congregation. Deacons are also raised up by the Lord to assist the elders in caring for the body of Christ. As mentioned above, the offices of elder and deacon are reserved for men. The central passages that teach this are: Acts 6:1-6, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-12, Hebrews 13:7,17, and 1 Peter 5:1-5

with the purpose of bringing glory to God. We believe that those who lead music are to worship as they play and sing and in this way they are "lead worshippers" in our singing time (1 Cor 10:31). We do not hold to the what is sometimes called the "regulatory principle" of worship as we do not see it specified in Scripture.

Constitution and By-Laws

Our Constitution and By-Laws will provide more information on how our church is structured and how we relate to the governing authorities that have been placed over us. ...



[Home](#) [About](#) [Sermons](#)

[Ministries](#) [Worship with Us](#)

[Contact](#)

GCC Elder's Statement on Physical and Emotional Abuse in Relation to Divorce and Remarriage

I. A Biblical Perspective on Harmful Behavior

The Bible speaks often of protecting and guarding the afflicted and the needy from those who abuse and harm them. The Scriptures also speak of the injustice of refusing to stand up for the rights of the oppressed. God's judgment comes upon nations and individuals who ignore those rights. These fundamental principles are found in both the Old and New Testament.

A. Old Testament principles of care for the afflicted

Specifically, the word means to force submission and to punish or inflict pain upon (TWOT). In general, the word Hebrew "afflicted" refers to one who has been exploited and wrongfully impoverished (NIDOTTE). The word can include mental and emotional anguish such as Sarah brought upon Hagar

(Genesis 16:6) or intense economic deprivation and physical abuse such as that which the Egyptians brought upon the Israelites (Exodus 1:11-12). Thus, the word has a broad range and identifies the victim of some pain, injury, or harm, either physically or mentally, often associated with recurring treatment or events (Logos)

1. God hears and does not forget the cries of the afflicted

Ps 9:12 For He who requires blood remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

2. God's care and provision provide hope for the afflicted

Ps 9:18 For the needy will not always be forgotten, Nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever.

3. The Lord rescues the afflicted and brings them to safety

Ps 12:5 "Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, Now I will arise," says the Lord; "I will set him in the safety for which he longs."

Ps 18:27 For You save an afflicted people, But haughty eyes You abase.

Ps 35:10 All my bones will say: "Lord, who is like You, Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him, And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?"

Ps 72:12 For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.

Ps 149:4 For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation.

4. The Lord has compassion on the afflicted

Is 49:13 Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people And will have compassion on His afflicted.

5. The afflicted can and should cry to the Lord for his salvation and rescue

Ps 40:17 Since I am afflicted and needy, Let the Lord be mindful of me. You

are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.

Ps 69:29 *But I am afflicted and in pain; May Your salvation, O God, set me securely on high.*

Ps 70:5 *But I am afflicted and needy; Hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.*

6. God will bring justice for the afflicted

Ps 72:2 *May he judge Your people with righteousness And Your afflicted with justice.*

Ps 72:4 *May he vindicate the afflicted of the people, Save the children of the needy And crush the oppressor.*

Ps 82:3 *Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.*

Ps 140:12 *I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor.*

7. The Lord brings judgment on those who harm the afflicted

Pr 31:9 *Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.*

Is 11:4 *But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.*

8. The Lord commands his people to care for the afflicted

Is 58:6–10 *"Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you: The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the*

finger and speaking wickedness, And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.

B. New Testament Principles of care for the afflicted and needy

While much of this biblical discussion takes place in the Old Testament concerning the laws and actions of the nation of Israel, it is clear that God cares deeply for the needy, afflicted, and oppressed. God's concern in this regard certainly flows into the principles of behavior for those in the New Testament church. God's people have a responsibility to care for fellow believers with love, comfort, justice, and protection. We have the fullness of the Scriptures and the indwelling Spirit of God to give us wisdom, grace, strength, and empathy.

1. Jesus had compassion on the weary and afflicted

Mt 9:36 *Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.*

2. Jesus made provision for the physically afflicted and needy

Mt 4:24 *The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.*

3. We are to love and care for the afflicted and needy in the church

Jas 1:27 *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Mt 25:34-40 *"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and*

invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 'The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

4. We are to do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ

Ga 6:9–10 *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

5. We are not to afflict one another with anger, malice, bitterness, disputes, or strife; but to be kind and forgiving

Eph 4:31–32 *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Ga 5:19–21 *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

II. Biblical Commands to Shepherd the Flock

A. Shepherds are to Protect the Flock from Harm and Affliction

Whether it is a child harmed by a parent, a spouse harmed by their partner, or a church member harmed by another person (believer or unbeliever), the biblical commands for love, justice, compassion, protection, and deliverance for the afflicted most certainly apply. This is not an issue that the church can overlook and expect to be blessed and strengthened by Christ. To overlook affliction is to hate our brother and thus to demonstrate lack of love for God.

1 Jn 4:20 *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

A true shepherd will not abandon the sheep to those who might do them harm.

Jn 10:12–13 *“He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”*

While it is true that God uses certain kinds of affliction to strengthen and mature his children, it is equally true that this affliction must never come from believers harming other believers or allowing them to be oppressed when it is in their power or responsibility to bring protection and provision. God Himself will hold the shepherds of the church accountable if they ignore the wolves who come among them.

Je 23:1–2 *“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,” declares the Lord.*

B. Abuse Constitutes a Unique Harm Against the Flock

The difficulty in the discussion of abuse is that the term “abuse” is not commonly used in English translations of Scripture and concepts such as affliction, oppression, and harm do not carry the same general connotation that the word “abuse” has taken on in our culture. Essentially, the term abuse is used of behavior so harmful that special (and often immediate) action must be taken to protect the one being abused. This is especially true in the case of marriage. When spouses’ sin against one another or their children, they are to be confronted and dealt with through the processes described in Scripture. However, the term abuse carries a special connotation of the kind of harm that requires significant or immediate intervention to protect the one being abused from inordinate danger.

Pr 24:11–12 *Deliver those who are being taken away to death, And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back. If you say, “See, we did not know this,” Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He*

not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?

Thus, while the term abuse is not “biblical” it seems clear that there is a level of harm, oppression, or affliction, that requires the direct intervention of the shepherds of the church to protect members of their flock from a uniquely dangerous situation. It is this level of harm to which the elders of GCC are assigning the term abuse, as this is the word most commonly used in society for the inordinate kind of harm being guarded against.

One of the primary reasons for taking such great care in defining abuse is that many of the behaviors that society labels abuse would not fit a biblically informed definition.

C. Abuse in Marriage Presents a Unique Difficulty

Dealing with abuse in marriage is made even more difficult by the fact that there is no direct discussion of what should happen in a marriage when a spouse or children are being endangered to an inordinate degree (abuse). The uniqueness of the Biblically defined marriage relationship requires the family to live together in the same household with no direct provision made for the dissolution of the family – except in the case of death, adultery, or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse.

However, we are convinced that the Bible provides the necessary principles to protect the flock from abuse in God-honoring ways. For this reason, the elders of the church must use Biblical wisdom and discernment to determine the level of harm in a relationship that requires direct intervention, possible separation, and even dissolution of the relationship. They must have plans in place to bring justice, protection, comfort, and provision in all ways that are biblically prescribed.

1 Pe 5:2–3 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock,

This is not to say that the primary work of the church is to eliminate suffering and affliction in the world, or that what now constitutes the demands of the social justice, “woke,” or “me too,” culture must be accommodated. However, for the church to ignore affliction and foster a

climate of abuse is an absolute travesty. The principles of Scripture, properly understood and followed, will enable Grace Community Church to create a proper atmosphere of justice, compassion, transparency, and truthfulness, while quickly and discerningly dealing with the harm and abuse of its members.

2 Ti 3:16–17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

D. Acknowledging the Harm of Abuse and the Sanctity of Marriage

The following definitions and resulting actions are an attempt by the elders of Grace Community Church to clarify the nature of physical and emotional abuse with particular attention to issues in marriage.

As a general rule, it is the elder's stance, that when physical or emotional interaction in a marriage reaches the level defined as abusive, it is grounds for marital separation, church discipline and, if ongoing, divorce. In clear cases of abuse, separation and church discipline may be immediately enacted. The biblical case for this is presented in detail at the end of this distinctive.

Where the issues are less clear, intentional, ongoing counseling will be required to determine if abuse is involved. In nearly every case, however, it is important to have a significant amount of time in which the situation is monitored and solutions brought to bear before divorce will be discussed or approved.

The elders take seriously their mandate to protect and preserve the sanctity of marriage as a fundamental building block of society and the church even as they bring protection and provision to individual members of the church.

The general rule of marriage, "*what God has joined together, let no man separate* (Matthew 19:6b)" applies in all situations unless or until it has been determined that sinful behavior on the part of one or both spouses allows for the biblical dissolution of a marriage in divorce.

III. General Definitions of Abuse

A. General definition

Abuse is defined as sinful, selfish, dominating, controlling behavior against another person which is intentional, habitual, and harmful to the point of creating an inordinately dangerous situation from which the individual must be protected or removed.[1] While abuse is not necessarily defined by its results, in every case of abuse there is significant, measurable harm caused to the individual being abused.

B. Distinction between harmful and abusive

In this document, there is a differentiation made between harmful and abusive behavior. It is our understanding that a physical or verbal/emotional behavior may bring a certain level of harm without being categorized as abusive. This is particularly true of verbal/emotional behavior.

In some cases, harmful behavior, when conducted in an ongoing, intentional way, can rise to the level of abuse.

A behavior classified as harmful is not necessarily grounds for marital separation or divorce. Behaviors classified as abusive may be grounds for separation and possibly divorce.

C. Distinction between difficult and dangerous

Additionally, this document makes a distinction between a difficult home environment and a dangerous one. A home in which some level of harmful behavior is taking place is considered to be difficult. This situation may require ongoing counseling for a couple but is not grounds for the removal of the spouse or children from the home. For example, if a wife yells at her husband, lies to him, and tries to get him to admit wrongdoing when he is innocent, this is certainly harmful, but would not necessarily be considered abusive.

A home in which abusive behavior is taking place is considered to be dangerous and may result in counsel for the spouse and children to be removed from the home until it is determined that the dangerous situation no longer exists. For example, if a husband were to physically harm his wife, the elders might counsel immediate separation while they work through the details of the situation.

D. Use of psychological terms

Psychological terms such as narcissism, gaslighting, etc. may be helpful in identifying abusive behavior in some cases. However, an ongoing diagnosis of the situation must use biblical terms for sin so that the behavior can be properly identified and dealt with. We desire to avoid attaching psychological labels to individuals which then mandate some particular response in every case.

IV. Specific Definitions of Harm and Abuse

A. Physical Harm and Abuse

The elders recognize that each particular situation carries its own nuance, intensity, complexity, frequency, tone, progression, etc.. To appreciate these multiple factors, it is helpful, and even necessary, to systematize and standardize behavior to some degree in order to have a quantifiable means of measuring these myriad variables. Rather than just coldly codifying behavior, the lists below are meant to serve as a helpful guide for the leadership on the proper responses and courses of action.

1. Physical Harm – not automatically labeled as physical abuse

a) Physical Intimidation

(1) Definition

(a) To purposely use one's physical presence or the environment to produce fear or force submission – this includes physical forms of sexual coercion.

(2) Behavior

(a) To approach menacingly

(b) To do damage to objects in the vicinity of the person

(c) To raise a hand or object as if to strike

(d) To stand close to, or over, with intent to dominate

(e) To throw objects toward the person "without intent" to hit

(f) To refuse to stop a sexual encounter if lack of desire is communicated (sexual coercion)

(3) Levels

The level of a certain kind of harmful behavior can be very difficult to determine. Again, the purpose of assigning levels is to provide some kind of guide for church intervention.

- (a) Level 1 – One-time intimidation
- (b) Level 2 – Occasional Intimidation

- May be considered abuse based on level of violence involved in the intimidation.

- (c) Level 3 – Consistent Intimidation

- Nearly always considered abusive.

b) Physical roughness

(1) Definition

(a) To purposely and physically touch another in a rough or potentially harmful way – this includes unwanted physicality in sexual engagement.

(2) Behavior

(a) Put hand on the body in a threatening way.

(b) Try to take something from the person (phone, car keys, etc.).

(c) Restrain the person from leaving in a rough manner.

(d) Push, trip, or shove a person (but not into something or onto the ground in a way which causes further harm).

(e) To engage in rough sexual behavior that is not desired or to use greater strength to continue in sexual behavior that is not desired.

(3) Levels

(a) Level 1 – One-time roughness.

(b) Level 2 – Occasional roughness.

- May be considered abusive based on the severity and frequency of the behavior.

(c) Level 3 – consistent roughness

- Almost always considered abuse at this point.

2. Physical abuse

a) Definition

(1) Actions that bring definitive harm to the body (bruise, injury, broken bone, other measurable physical result) including but not limited to beatings, sexual assault, sleep deprivation, starvation, and confinement.^[2]

b) Levels

Not all levels of physical abuse are the same and some are much more dangerous than others. However, all forms are considered potentially dangerous.

(1) Level 1

- (a) Slap – open hand
- (b) Violently shake
- (c) Shove – to the ground or into something

(2) Level 2

- (a) Hit with an object
- (b) Punch
- (c) Tackle
- (d) Drag

(3) Level 3

- (a) Sexual assault

- To force sexual behavior when it is being actively resisted

- (b) Starvation
- (c) Confinement

c) Classification

- (1) Any level of physical abuse is immediately classified as dangerous.
- (2) No level of physical abuse is tolerated within Christian marriage and church discipline is to be started for any level of physical abuse.

3. Church leadership response to intimidation, roughness and physical abuse

- a) Warning and possible counseling for level 1 and 2 intimidation issues.
- b) Warning and required counseling for any occurrence of physical roughness.

- c) Warning, counseling, possible separation for level 1-2 physical abuse and level 3 intimidation and roughness:

- (1) Possible report to authorities.
- (2) Possible period of separation based on the nature of the offense, the level of frequency, and level of danger discerned.

- d) Immediate separation considered for any level 2 or 3 physical abuse offense – often long-term.

- (1) Immediate consideration of separation.
- (2) Authorities immediately contacted.

B. Verbal/Emotional Harm and Abuse

1. Verbal Harm

- a) Definition: The use of speech to purposefully bring harm to another by sinfully degrading or dehumanizing them in any form.¹³¹

2. Verbal manifestations

a) Level 1

- (1) Silent treatment
- (2) Making fun of, put downs, belittling
- (3) Harmful sarcasm
- (4) Swearing
- (5) Constant criticism
- (6) Lying
- (7) Crying/pouting
- (8) Denial of the obvious
- (9) Attempts to cause questioning of one's sanity
- (10) Constant blame; reversal of blame
- (11) Constant questioning, accusing
- (12) Demanding immediate responses or particular responses
- (13) Refusing to let the conversation lapse or drop
- (14) Forced verbal agreement
- (15) Forced acquiescence to wrongdoing
- (16) Constant interruption, overtalk
- (17) Misuses/misinterpretations of Scripture

b) Level 2

- (1) Screaming, yelling
- (2) Evil, vile name calling
- (3) Blackmail
- (4) Threats
 - (a) Self-harm/suicide
 - (b) Harm to the spouse
 - (c) Harm the kids
 - (d) Harm reputation

3. Emotional Harm/Scheming[4]

a) Definition – the intentional use of sinful manipulation and control behaviors that bring harm to a person's mental, emotional, or physical state.

b) Manifestations:

- (1) Requiring constant knowledge of whereabouts
- (2) No privacy
- (3) No outside friendships, isolation from family.

- (4) Withholding finances
- (5) Dictating a personal standard and demanding performance up to that standard
- (6) Limiting or denying exercise of personal freedoms
- (7) Limiting access to benefits
- (8) Demanding complete obedience
- (9) Demanding full disclosure of all behavior
- (10) Limiting access to the abusers resources, assets, personal items

4. Clarification: Verbal/Emotional harm

- a) Some level of verbal/emotional harm occurs in nearly all marriages.
- b) Ongoing counseling and encouragement for the spouse are encouraged where there is verbal/emotional harm.

5. Verbal/Emotional Abuse

a) Definition

- (1) The verbal/emotional harm is intense, habitual, and coercive, for the purpose of dominating and controlling the spouse and/or children.
- (2) The verbal/emotional harm is intense, habitual, and coercive, causing damage that produces true danger to the welfare of the spouse and/or children.

6. Manifestations

- a) The verbal/emotional harm causes a destructive sense of fear, obligation, shame, or guilt.[5]
- b) The verbal/emotional harm overwhelms the ability to carry on basic life functions (eating, sleeping, etc.).
- c) The verbal/emotional harm causes ongoing anguish and despair.
- d) The verbal/emotional harm causes physical deterioration.

7. Clarification

- a) The line between verbal/emotional harm and verbal/emotional abuse is much more difficult to determine than physical abuse.
- b) It may take many counseling interactions to determine what level of harm is actually taking place.
- c) Emotional abuse is real and can be even more dangerous and have longer ongoing consequences than physical abuse.
- d) Verbal/Emotional abuse does not force an abuser to respond in a certain manner.

Every case of verbal/emotional abuse is different and has unique manifestations. Additionally, there is a level of responsibility that must be maintained by the one being abused. The abuser cannot force the abused

to respond in a certain way either mentally or emotionally. This understanding allows the victim to retain the proper freedom of conscience before God. However, it must be acknowledged that even the strongest of believers is often overwhelmed by the constant verbal/emotional attacks of an abuser and may manifest symptoms that are not directly within their control such as: inordinate fear, panic attacks, sleeplessness, upset stomach, post-traumatic stress, and others. Additionally, even when anguish and despair are properly acknowledged through lament to God, Biblical shepherding may require a removal of the victim from the situation to grant them rest and relief.

8. Verbal/Emotional abuse classifies the marriage as dangerous

- a) When the stipulations for verbal/emotional abuse are met the marriage is classified as dangerous.
- b) Church discipline is then enacted on the basis of the danger ongoing pattern of sin inherent in emotional abuse.

9. Difficult vs. Dangerous marriage

- a) Marriage in which there is emotional harm, but not physical or emotional abuse, are classified as difficult but not dangerous. That is, the verbal/emotional harm does not rise to the level of abuse and can be dealt with through a strong spiritual walk and the spiritual strengthening that the church helps provide.
- b) This is often a wisdom/discernment decision on the part of the elders/counselors involved in the situation and may not be agreed upon by the person being counseled.
- c) This classification often involves the willingness of the person being harmed to take hold of spiritual resources they possess and the help that the church can offer. When this is refused, the person grows weak and may feel like they are being abused, when the situation does not warrant that classification.
- d) Additionally, the one being harmed must be encouraged and strengthened to think Biblically. Otherwise they are unable to properly assess the nature of their situation. This often happens when they have been exposed to secular counseling and advice concerning the nature of abuse.

10. Church Leadership Responses to Verbal/Emotional Harm or Abuse Within Marriage – Short-Term

- a) Warning and required counseling for any demonstrated pattern of verbal/emotional harm.
- b) Warning, required counseling, and possible separation for any

verbal/emotional harm which is determined to rise to the level of verbal/emotional abuse.

V. Elder Responses to Abuse Within Marriage – Long-Term

A. Physical and Verbal/Emotional abuse – Dangerous marriage

1. The elders will pursue church discipline for physical abuse and/or verbal/emotional abuse.

a) If the abuser does not repent, they are put out of the church through the levels of church discipline.

b) If the abuser does repent, then careful monitoring is put in place to determine if/when the couple can be safely put back together.

c) If the abuser repents and is not put out of the church, the spouse does not have Biblical grounds of pursuing divorce.

2. If an abuser does not repent and is put out of the church they are treated as an unbeliever.

The nature of the final step of church discipline is that the church has corporately declared that the disciplined person is acting like an unbeliever and therefore they are treated as such.

If a person has been declared to be an unbeliever, then Paul's allowance for a believer to be divorced from an unbeliever who abandon's the marriage comes into effect. This counsel is found in 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Co 7:12–17 *But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and **he consents** to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is **sanctified** through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is **sanctified** through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet **if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave**; the brother or the sister is **not under bondage** in such cases, but **God has called us to peace**. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will **save your husband**? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will **save your wife**? Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.*

a) If an abusing spouse is considered to be an unbeliever and they want a divorce, then the innocent spouse is commanded to "let them go."

b) If an abusing spouse is considered to be an unbeliever and yet does not want to leave the marriage, then the innocent spouse may pursue divorce on the grounds of 1 Corinthians 7:12-17.

(1) The spouse is an unbeliever.

(2) The spouse is not "consenting" to live in the marriage.

The elders believe that "consent" is more than just a desire on the part of the unbeliever to physically remain in the marriage.

(a) Consent seems, at least, to be an agreement to abide by the marriage covenant as fundamentally described in Scripture. Even unbelievers are capable of basic acts of commitment, communication, concern, and change of behavior.

- Basic care and concern
- Basic communication and provision
- Basic changes in harmful behavior

(b) Consent must be more than just wanting the benefits of marriage without the commitments.

c) Additional reasons for considering abuse to be a violation of the "consent to be married."

(1) The marriage couple is called in this passage to "peace" which is fundamentally breached when one spouse is unbelieving and practically breached when the unbelieving spouse refuses to make a sincere attempt to live out the covenant of marriage.

(2) The elders believe that "Letting the unbeliever leave" can include initiating divorce when the unbelieving spouse is not truly "consenting" to the marriage yet refuses to leave because of the benefits of having a spouse (no child support, physical intimacy, care and provision). In this case the unbelieving spouse would be seen as already having left the marriage in any true sense by refusing to live consent to its responsibilities and requirements.

(3) Additionally, a reason to allow for divorce in the case of an unbeliever who is being abusive in the marriage yet refuses to leave, is that the sanctification God provides may not be in effect.

(a) The primary reason for having the unbeliever stay is that they might come to a saving knowledge of Christ and that God can provide "sanctification" through the believing spouse which allows the children to be "holy." While, admittedly, this is a very difficult passage, the "sanctification" and "holiness" described seem to be, at least in part, based on the "consent" of the unbeliever in not violating the marriage covenant in substantial ways. If the unbeliever is violating the marriage covenant, then there is question as to whether the "sanctification" that God provides is still in effect and thus the children will be harmed in ways that violate God's design for marriage.

(4) Another reason for allowing divorce in the situation of a dangerous marriage is that the purpose of seeing the unbeliever saved through the marriage is broken when the unbeliever is breaking the marriage covenant.

(5) Finally, Paul states that "God has called us to peace" and uses this as a reason for allowing an unbeliever to leave a marriage. This seems to indicate that the unbeliever was unable to mask hatred and anger over the spiritual state of the believing spouse.

thus causing a lack of peace which warrants their leaving. In the case of unrepentant and unchanging physical abuse, there is certainly not "peace" and there seems to be warrant for the believer to "let the unbeliever go" for that reason.

d) The elders believe that remarriage is allowed when divorce is pursued on the grounds described above.

(1) The passage states that a spouse who has "let the unbeliever leave" is not under bondage in such cases. We would take this to mean, at least, that there is nothing hindering the abandoned party from remarrying in the future.

B. Verbal/Emotional harm – difficult marriage

1. Church discipline enacted for ongoing, habitual manifestations of verbal/emotional harm.

a) Even if the level of emotional harm is not considered abusive, the individual will be confronted by the leadership of the church to change their behavior. If they refuse to do so then church discipline is enacted and if there is no repentance then the spouse will be put out of the church and declared to be an unbeliever.

b) This, in and of itself, however, would not allow for the spouse who is being harmed to pursue divorce. If the unbeliever consents to live in the marriage at a level deemed within the "marriage" covenant agreement – i.e. emotional harm, not abuse – then, according to 1 Corinthians 7, the believing spouse is required to continue in the marriage.

c) This would be termed a difficult, but not dangerous marriage.

C. Closing Thought

All of these cases involve difficult decisions which must be made in the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the Word of God, and after much careful discussion. It is the elders' desire to honor the Lord in both protecting the flock and guarding the sanctity of marriage.

[1] ACBC's definition of abuse forms the basis for this definition. However, we believe it is necessary to specify the uniquely dangerous nature of behavior that is to be called abuse so that the definition cannot be interpreted loosely to include behavior that is harmful but not abusive. The ACBC statement reads: Abuse is the pattern of sinful, selfish mistreatment of another made in God's image, whereby moral agency, freedom of conscience informed by God's Word, and God-given human dignity is violated by harmful acts (physical, sexual, verbal) or schemes to perpetuate oppression and unbiblical control (Exodus 3:9-10; Deuteronomy 26:6-8; Psalm 10; Isaiah 19:20; Isaiah 30:12-13; Isaiah 49:26; Matthew 20:25-28).

Acts of abuse are vile practices arising from selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, born from sinful desires in the heart (James 3:16).

[2] Part of this definition is drawn to ACBC Statement on Abuse. The category of physical or sexual coercion was removed as we believe this would come under physical intimidation, not abuse.

[3] We believe that the ACBC definition of verbal abuse is too broad and fits our definition of verbal harm. We do not believe that a single, or occasional act of most of these behaviors can be considered abuse. The ACBC definition is as follows: Verbal abuse involves patterns of degrading and dehumanizing communication in all forms, including threats of violence to spouse or child, threats of continued abuse, threats of suicide and self-harm, lying, and manipulation. Spiritual manipulation may happen when misuses or misinterpretations of Scripture are enforced in order to be a stumbling block, oppress, or control another person.

[4] The ACBC statement on abuse uses the word "scheming" for forms of "abuse" that are not verbal or physical. The ACBC definition of scheming is as follows: Scheming includes intentional efforts and plotting by the abuser to inflict harm by threatening future abuse, continuing abusive behaviors, concealing past abuse, or hiding the scope of the abuse. Scheming against another can consist of limiting access to material assets, isolating from social relationships, and controlled monitoring of the individual. While scheming can take many forms, it is marked by evil intentions and using resources to inflict harm (Psalm 5:6; Psalm 7:14; Psalm 35:4; Psalm 40:14; Psalm 70:2; Psalm 71:10). Restricting material assets in order to perpetuate abuse may include, but is not limited to, intentionally cutting off access to finances, neglecting familial fiduciary responsibilities, limiting ability to communicate and travel, and blackmailing. This obviously does not include the biblical stewardship of resources like budgeting. Restricting relational support in order to perpetuate abuse may include, but is not limited to, isolating the abused from family, church, friends, and other social connections and deceiving outsiders for the purpose of concealment. This does not include the clear biblical principle of leaving and cleaving. Monitoring the abused in order to perpetuate abuse may include, but is not limited to, surveillance through cameras, cellphone activity, financial transactions, other technology, or co-conspirators.(3) This does not include

the use of technology for safety or proper stewardship of such things as security cameras, cellphones, bank statements, etc.

[5] Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2020), 24.

APPENDIX G:

(865) 984-0116



Home About Sermons

Ministries Worship with Us

Contact

Theology of Youth Ministry

GCC Theology of Youth Ministry

A. Purpose

1. Assist Parents in Ministry to their Children

The church is not to assume the role of the parent or to compete with them, but to assist parents in bringing up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Deut. 6:4-8, Eph. 6:4).

- a) Help evangelize unbelieving youth of church members
- b) Help disciple believing youth of church members
- c) Support and encourage biblical parental authority
- d) Involve parents in all levels of leadership
- e) Provide resources to parents

2. Fulfill the Ministry of the Church

The church's mandate is to equip all saints for the works of service, this includes children. The family unit was not designed to be the sole source of instruction for children or their parents (Heb 10:24-25, 1 Tim 3:15,16, Eph

4:11-16).

- a) Equip youth for the works of service
- b) Present every youth complete in Christ
- c) Protect youth from false doctrine
- d) Prepare the next generation of faithful believers

B. Uth Ministry Goals

1. Exaltation of Christ

Teens are in desperate need of a clear, compelling view of Christ so that they can understand the reason that they are being called to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow after Him. It is our passion to teach the love, grace, truth, and power of Christ so that our teens will find their satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment in the Lord Jesus alone. Only when our young people are satisfied in Christ will they be able to resist the pleasures of the world which constantly clamor for their attention.

2. Powerful Bible Teaching

We are convinced that the powerful, accurate, compelling applicational, and consistent teaching of the Word of God is to be the foundation of every ministry in the church, including ministry to youth. Only as our teens hear the Word of God can they come to faith in Christ and be conformed to the image of Christ. To this end the teaching of God's Word is the focal point of our youth ministry.

3. Parental Involvement

We rely heavily on parent involvement in all aspects of youth ministry, and in no way encourage youth to disassociate, or distance themselves from parental involvement in any area of their lives.

4. Church Integration

Additionally we see our young people as a vital part of the church as a whole, not a separate entity pursuing a different spiritual agenda. To this end we encourage and provide opportunities for ministry and involvement within the church as well as in partnership with other church ministries.

5. Christ-Honoring/Mature Environment

We desire to provide a youth environment in which the fear and love of God, obedience to parents, passion for ministry to believers, and intentional evangelism for the lost are promoted. Although we understand that our teens will include a mix of believers and unbelievers, we in no way desire to pander to the popular culture in order to entertain those who have no interest in Christ. We are convinced that the powerful teaching of the Word of God and an atmosphere of true love for Christ and love for others are the most powerful ways to reach unbelievers and encourage believers. When a joyful, sincere, Biblical love is exhibited by both young people and leaders then the character of Christ will be powerfully present.

C. Message

1. A Right Relationship with God – Fear/Love of the Lord

Je 10:7 Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Your due! For among all the wise men of the nations And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You.

Mk 12:29-31 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, "HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH." "The second is this, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." There is no other commandment greater than these."

2. Right Relationship to Parents – Honor, Respect, Obedience

Eph 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise). SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.

3. Right Relationship to Others – Love in Truth

Eph 4:14-15 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.

4. Right Relationship to the World – Holy, Evangelistic Separation

1 Jn 2:15-17 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

D. Method

1. Teaching – Psalm 119:9-11

- a) Expository teaching – verse by verse and topical
- b) Applicational teaching – students know how to grow

2. Prayer – Eph 6:18

- a) Consistent prayer for teens/parents
- b) Awareness of joys/needs/struggles for informed prayer

3. Leadership v 1 Timothy 4:12-16

- a) Spiritually mature leaders with a love for teens
- b) Godly role models who will draw the teens towards maturity in all areas
- c) Well-trained, well shepherded leaders who love accountability

4. Discipleship Relationships – 1 John 4:20, Col 3:12-17

- a) Personal contact
- b) Personal care and concern
- c) Personal accountability

5. Ministries – 1 Timothy 3:15

- a) Sunday School
- b) Wednesday Night
- c) Monthly Activities

- (1) Fellowship
- (2) Ministry
- (3) Evangelism

- d) Yearly Camps and Retreats

- e) Music Ministry
- f) Bible Quizzing
- g) Evangelism
- h) Student Leadership

About Us	Worship with Us	Resources	Ministries
History/Affiliation	Sunday	Video Archive	All
Join	Grace Live!	YouTube!	Instruction
Beliefs	Grace Live!	Preaching to	Men's
Objectives	Misc	aching Audio	Ministries
What We Believe	Complete a	Podcasts	Women's
Core	Contact Card	Blog	Ministries
Constitutional	Wednesday	Church	Young
By Law	Events	Center	Ministries
From 1868	Parking	Calendar	College
Mission	Map	Give	Young
Renewal	Gifts List	Recommend	Children
Elaboration	Membership	of	Fellowship
of Ministry			Groups
			Counseling
			Discipleship