

**THE FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS  
of  
GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**PROLOGUE**

The *Foundational Documents* of our church are: (1) the ‘Confession & Creed,’ (2) the Statement of Faith, (3) the Constitution & By-Laws and (4) the Amendments.

The purpose of the ‘Confession & Creed’ is to provide a brief and concise statement for those truths from the Scriptures that we hold to be non-negotiable and essential to the beliefs of the members of the church.

The purpose of the Statement of Faith is to provide a more detailed description of the core beliefs of Grace Community Church and of God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. This Statement of Faith centers around a ‘New Covenant’ and ‘Grace’ perspective.

The purpose of the Constitution and By-laws is Designed to show who the members are, how the church governs itself, who its principal officers are, and how these officers are to relate to one another and the body as a whole.

Amendments

Amendment 1: A paper is amended as a *model* of ‘a guideline for understanding Biblical truth and current Issues regarding human sexuality.’

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**THE CONFESSION & CREED**  
**of GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
(‘The Apostles Creed’ for the *New Covenant*)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,

God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived  
by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under the Jewish Leaders and Pontius  
Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
experienced true death under the wrathful hand of  
God, provided a vicarious atonement for the sins of  
mankind, destroyed the power of sin and death.  
On the third day He rose again; He ascended into  
heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
He offers eternal life as a free gift to anyone who  
trusts in Him by faith alone.  
And He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

Who applies the benefits of Christ to each one who  
believes. I believe in the New Birth into a New  
Creation by the regenerating power of the Holy  
Spirit, the complete and accomplished forgiveness of  
all sins of each unredeemed body, the Universal  
Church as the Holy Bride of Christ, the fellowship  
of the saints in His Church as the means for life  
transformation. And I believe in the life everlasting.

Yes, I do believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen

## THE STATEMENT of FAITH

(Biblical references will be provided for all ‘articles’ in a forthcoming version.)

### ARTICLE-1

... the ‘eternal *plan*’ of God begins, in that the ‘One & Only’ God initiates that ‘eternal *plan*’

### ARTICLE-2

This *plan* of God ‘has been’ and ‘is being’ brought to *reality* through His personal *creation*, a seemingly infinite and immensely complex ‘time-space-matter-life’ entity called ‘the Cosmos.’

### ARTICLE-3

A –sufficiently observable *essence-of* this God– and His *plan* have been revealed through four fundamental means:

- a) a ‘**Silent Word**’: God being observed in, through, and by His very *creation* itself, such that the *Cosmos* by its very nature “reveals the eternal power and deity” (Rom. 1:20) of its Creator.
- b) a ‘**Written Word**’: God and His *plan* being observed in, through, and by His ‘carefully crafted’ and ‘Divinely Guarded Message,’ the *Bible*, both the Old and New Testaments. This being provided ‘inerrantly’ by God the Holy Spirit.
- c) a ‘**Living Word**’: God and His *plan* being observed in, through, and by His Eternal Son, Who through an unknowable *mystery* –*became an incarnation*– and in this ‘incarnate form’ was literally born into His own *creation* ‘as a human baby.’ This *Incarnate One* was simultaneously fully God and fully man, the God-Man Christ Jesus.
- d) a ‘**Spirit Word**’: God and His *plan* being observed in, through, and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world. The Holy Spirit provides this through:
  - 1) a ‘spiritual communication’ in the form of an authoritative, convincing, and sufficient ‘witness to truth:’

-the primary focus of this ‘witness to truth’ regards the ‘Story, Mission, and the Message-of’ the *Incarnate Son of God*

-this ‘witness to truth’ manifests itself specifically in relation to “sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8);” and these three as relating to ‘belief’ and ‘dis-belief’ in the *Incarnate Son of God*

- this 'witness to truth' was also a direct message from 'God the Father' that the Holy Spirit provided to the *Incarnate* Son and that the Son then delivered to His disciples
- this 'witness to truth' ultimately brings "glory" (John 16:14) to the *Incarnate* Son of God

2) a ministry of enabling, guarding, and guiding the Apostles of the *New Covenant* in:

- correctly discerning 'the Word' that the Son had presented to them
- the formation of the early church
- the writing of the Holy Scriptures for that church

3) a ministering in, through, and 'on behalf of' all persons who place faith in the *Incarnate* Son

#### ARTICLE-4

This 'Revelation' has been 'procured-through' the infinite capacity of the Creator. This Creator God has revealed Himself to be a *Trinity*. This *Trinity* is 'a *mystery*' in that three distinct persons; the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit exists as "the One & Only God."

#### ARTICLE-5

The object of this *plan* was the *creation* of a 'God-like creature', now called a 'human being,' who was fashioned in the very 'image of' the Creator God Himself.

#### ARTICLE-6

This human being becomes rationally aware of, encounters, and experiences that "sufficiently observable essence-of this God" (see Article-3) and His *plan*,

–exclusively through the means of *faith*–

This 'limitation' to faith is designed as such by the very will of the Creator. The human being therefore always has a 'trust relation' to and with every aspect of 'knowing' this God and thus through *faith* finds a sufficient source for the "evidence of the unseen" (Heb. 11:1).

#### ARTICLE-7

This *plan* of the *Creator God* for His 'image bearer,' the human being, began with a simple test for *obedience*. This test was a contract, a contract wherein 'obedience' would bring certain life and 'disobedience' would result in certain and *immediate death*. The first human being and his created mate failed the test. The man was held ultimately responsible for this failure before his Creator, and he and his wife, a woman, both experienced a true or "sure death" (Gen. 2:17) immediately.

**ARTICLE-8**

This first human, a *male*; and his mate, a *female*; began the first *family* of humanity and this by the Creator's specific design in the joining of a 'male and female' into a 'union-of-one.' This union, called 'marriage,' is said to be a "profound *mystery*" (Eph. 5.32) in the Scriptures, and its spiritual and physical 'oneness' is indeed *sacred*. It is through this *sacred* union wherein children are born. Despite the *sacredness* of this union, an 'irresistible-propensity-for-disobedience' was and is inherited by all who carry their *DNA*. This results in each and every human sinning, and therefore all humans falling captive to 'death and separation' from their Creator, thus being fully 'dead to' or 'completely separated from' their Holy Creator God.

**ARTICLE-9**

Various tests and 'obedience models' were introduced by the Creator into this time-oriented *plan* for the human being, and the result was always failure and more and more disobedience. The *plan* appeared to be very dark and virtually hopeless except for 'the promise' of a *Savior* who was to come into the *Cosmos*. This 'promise' was shared many times and in many ways in the 'Written Word' as given through the centuries.

**ARTICLE-10**

God's 'eternal *plan*' from before the very *Creation* itself was to send His Son, *the 'Promised-One,'* into the *Cosmos* as an *Incarnation*; to be born of a virgin girl through a miracle of conception by the Holy Spirit; to be named 'Jesus;' to be sent into this *Creation* as a second or 'new' and 'true' —Image Bearer of the Creator God—. This *Incarnate One* being fully God and yet simultaneously fully man would provide *the only* means for:

—the restoration of 'life'— for all of those —existing-in and destined-for 'death'—

This 'death' as experienced by all the offspring of the first man 'Adam'.  
This 'death' as resulting from that "propensity-for disobedience" (see Article-8) as inherited from that first 'image bearer.'

**ARTICLE-11**

The means 'for restoration of life' was achieved through the literal 'life,' 'death,' and 'resurrection' of the *Incarnate* Son of God, Jesus. All of this being done 'in the place of' fallen humanity and 'as a *substitute*' on their behalf. This being fully and sufficiently accomplished on behalf of God's *ultimate-plan* and because of God's great love for all the children of His fallen *creation*.

**ARTICLE-12**

It was always the *plan* for God's *creation* that 'new and eternal life' be offered to fallen humanity. This is offered 'exclusively through' the substitutionary work of His Son Jesus and offered 'exclusively as a gift' through and through and offered exclusively 'by *faith*'

**through and through.** Here **'alone'** the humans may be saved from their inherent inability to comply with any and all forms of obedience as demanded by the *plan* and 'Righteous-Character' of their Creator. Here alone the humans may be delivered from their *'state-of death.'* This Creator God in fact commands all humanity to comply with His *plan* and to be placed **"into-the-obedience-of-faith"** (Rom.1:5, 16:26) This *state* of — existing-in an obedient-*faith'*— is that uninterrupted reality of *'the New Creation Being'* of the *New Covenant*. This *'uninterrupted reality'* is also referred to as "the New Life of the Spirit" (Rom. 7:4), or as "Walking in newness of life" (Rom. 6.4), or as "the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8.2), or as being 'in Christ' in the New Testament.

#### **ARTICLE-13**

This freely bestowed *'state'* and *'gift'* is instantly given to any human who *'turns from'* any other source for salvation and places *'faith'* in Jesus Christ **'alone'** as *Savior*. This gift is instantly brought to a *'true, endless, and perfect reality'* by the Work of the *Holy Spirit* of God in His miracle of *New Creation*; wherein He 'baptizes' and securely 'seals' that human into their *'New Creation Being'* state of *reality* and then 'indwells' them forever. This 'seal' of the Holy Spirit fully secures the *New Creation Being* until:

- the *plan* of God for the Cosmo and *Creation* is complete
- Creation* and time and space as it is now seen ends
- the final judgment of all humans.

Then, all *New Creations Beings* will continue beyond this *Creation* 'in their already acquired state of eternal life' as they enter into that **—experiential-reality—** of the literal presence of the very Glory of their Creator God forever.

#### **ARTICLE-14**

These *New Creation Beings* while living in the *Cosmos* and having been *'sealed'* and *'baptized'* by God the Holy Spirit into *'one body'*

—*'appear'* to have retained the *sinful habits* of their *unredeemed body'*—

a body that does indeed and in fact *'observably appear'* to continue to sin and disobey. Each *'unredeemed body'* will retain this *'apparent practice'* of disobedience and sin until it experiences physical death.'

It is a **mystery** therefore how 'God the Holy Spirit' creates a *'Regeneration,'* a *'Baptism,'* and a *'Sealing,'* wherein this *'Newly Created Being'* has been *effectually* and truly separated from that very observable and perpetual 'sin and disobedience' of its *unredeemed body*. The Holy Scriptures precisely state that this "sinful body was annihilated" (Rom. 6:6) in one's union with Jesus' death. This 'union' is fully accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit as He "puts to death the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13). This *'mysterious work of the Spirit'* places one sufficiently, completely, and truly "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1); and in that *'effectual-state-of-reality'* the *New Creation Being* shares in

all the benefits of Jesus' 'death' and His 'resurrection-life,' therein as to exist presently in the 'reality' of possessing:

- all the goodness
- all the perfect obedience
- and all the infinite Righteousness of God the Son, Christ Jesus himself

and therewith, the *New Creation Being* safely persisting "in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom. 7:6).

–in absolute 'reality' becomes–

the very "Righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21) Himself. This is received as a 'gift alone' and by '*faith* alone' without any human merit nor agency beyond a simple faith in Jesus as Saviour.

#### ARTICLE-15

These *New Creation Beings*, while living in the *Cosmos* and having been *sealed* and *baptized* by God the Holy Spirit into 'one *body*', are the eternal mate or '*bride-of*' the *Incarnate Son*; thus, being both heirs and joint heirs with the Son of God, Jesus the Christ. This *body* is called 'the Church.'

#### ARTICLE-16

It is the ultimate purpose of this entity, the Church, to share this *plan* and the '*Good News*' of God's 'totally free gift' with all humanity, by faithfully proclaiming the '*Story of Jesus*' and doing so in dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God to affirm and 'make alive' His very Own Word, as being *proclaimed* and as being *heard* 'in all the world.'

#### ARTICLE-17

It is the practical purpose of this entity, the Church, as the living *Body* of Christ on earth:

- a) to become fully aware of the *reality* of their *New Creation State* through discipleship and the ministry of the Word of God as proclaimed in the church and affirmed by the Holy Spirit
- b) to duly and consistently teach, preach, and *disciple* –this '*reality*'– as indeed it is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures to be

–an accomplished fact–

- c) to do so until this perception of that very 'reality,' through the ministry of discipleship, through the power of the declaration of God's 'written Word,' and all the while this 'process' being "mightily" (Eph. 3:16) affirmed by God the Holy Spirit, results in the "renewal of one's mind" (Rom. 12:2), that in effect mirrors –*the*

'reality' of their *New Creation state*–. This is described in the Scriptures as a 'process' of "having been rooted" and "having been grounded" (Eph. 3.17) in such a way as to "empower one to comprehend the incomprehensible" (Eph. 3.18) and thus to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3.18).

d) to through this 'renewed mind' continually experience a *transformation* or *metamorphosis* of the '*unredeemed body*,' this *transformation* resulting in the presentation of the human beings' '*unredeemed body*' as a living sacrifice whose service on earth is "used for" God and thus "pleasing" (Rom. 12.1-2) and honoring to God and His *plan* for the church as a witness on earth (see Article-13)  
This '*effectual process*' upon the '*unredeemed body*' never comes to a completion while one is living on this earth and is described in the Scriptures as "trying to learn" (Rom. 12.2, Eph. 5:10) how to please the Lord. Therefore, all *New Creation Beings* "groan inwardly as they wait for the redemption of their body" (Rom. 8:23).

e) to faithfully, accurately and with great 'earnestness and validity' teach and guard over the Truths of God's *plan* and all guidelines that He has provided in His 'Written Word' for His Church

#### **ARTICLE-18**

**This *plan* of God will continue as according to that very eternal *plan* itself, God brings His *creation* as it now exists to completion, wherein all humans who have ever lived will be judged for 'their works' and therein "God's righteous-judgment" will be revealed.**

Herein there will be only two classes of persons and two rewards offered.

a) **the *New Creation person***, having *been born anew* and thus from the moment of '*new birth*' and forevermore fully conformed to the image of Christ, no longer an heir of the first man 'Adam' but an 'heir of' Christ Jesus, will receive the reward for their gift of –Jesus's inherited perfection–. This reward being the affirmation of that 'already acquired gift' of 'righteousness' and 'eternal life', the only reward or payment that God the Righteous-Judge can render for their possession of personal righteousness. And they having received the 'redemption of their bodies' wherein their 'groaning' and 'hoping' while previously living in the *Cosmos* is over, will 'fully share in' and 'participate fully in' the incomprehensible pleasure of living in the presence of the Glory of God forever.

**This reward is called 'Eternal Life' in the Written Word of God.**

b) **all humans who are *not New Creation persons*** will be judged by God based on their 'personal works' and as a human, and as an heir of the first man 'Adam,' and they will receive a reward for "what they have done" (Rev. 20:12) during their life on earth. This reward being 'eternal death,' the only reward or



payment that God the Righteous-Judge can render for their possession of personal sin. This *state* of death is the incomprehensible reality of eternal banishment from God and from the great pleasure of living in His Glorious presence forever.

This reward is called 'the Second Death' in the Written Word of God.

#### ARTICLE-19

The fulfilment of the *plan* of this Creator God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit will actually never come to an end as through the eternal ages this Triune God's purpose is continually exhibited and realized

in order that "God can point to us, His *New Creation Beings*, in all future ages of eternity, as examples of the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus..." (Eph. 2:7).

#### ARTICLE-20

And herein and into the eternal ages, all *New Creation Beings* shall bask in and "share in the Glory of God" as his own sons and daughters, as the 'bride of His Son'; to the praise of His Infinite Glory, Amen and Amen.

. . . as the eternal *plan* of God continues forever and ever and ever . . .

**THE CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS  
OF  
GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**THE CONSTITUTION:** The objectives, purposes, and powers of the corporation are defined as follows:

- I. It is the mission of our church to carry on the ministry of reconciliation, according to the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are to reach out to those in need, seek for the salvation of those who are lost, and minister the gospel to those in our community and all those who know not Christ. We are to both win others to Christ and to build disciples. This is to be done through the establishment of deep relationships for the purpose of encouragement, accountability, and admonishment. All this should happen within the context of the ideal of fellowship rooted and grounded in the agape love of Christ.
- II. To acquire by purchase, lease, gift, wills or otherwise, all kinds of classes of real, personal, or mixed property.
- III. To borrow money in such amounts and for such periods of time and upon such terms and conditions as may be considered in the best interest of the fellowship.
- IV. To engage in, or encourage, any activity which is in agreement with the Holy Bible as inspired by God and not in contradiction with the purposes heretofore set forth.

**THE BY-LAWS**

I. MEMBERSHIP

- A. Membership in Grace Community Church shall be open to anyone who has confessed Christ Jesus as Savior, is endeavoring to live a Christian life, agrees to the church's Doctrinal Statement, agrees to the Church's *Statement-of-Faith*, and agrees to support this constitution and the by-laws of the church. Membership may thus be defined as 'an active and participating commitment' to this local body and to its Savior and to its LORD.
- B. Manner of admission and transfer of membership shall be handled in accordance with the following procedures:

1. Upon profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and upon agreeing to and meeting the requirements above, a person shall be received into the fellowship through the affirmation of the congregation by the recommendation of the Board of Elders and the acceptance of and commitment to the following *Membership Covenant*:

I believe God has led me to become a member of Grace Community Church and I commit to the following:

-I will endeavor to believe for myself and affirm in others the truth of the *New Covenant* as preached and taught from the Holy Scriptures at Grace Community, and as presented in the *Statement-of-Faith*.

-I will endeavor to live as one who has been --saved by grace through faith-- in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His death on the cross and in His resurrection from the grave.

-I will endeavor to follow Christ according to the truth of God's Word and in humble reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

-I will be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace because I know that my personal relationship to God affects the rest of the church.

-I will serve faithfully in and support financially the ministries of this church according to the grace and the gifting that God has provided to me.

-I will faithfully attend all regular meetings of the church when I am physically able.

-I will submit to the leaders of the church as they minister the Word and as they submit to Christ.

-If God should lead me to another church, I will discuss this with my leaders as desiring their blessing upon my decision.

2. Members may not sell, assign, or in any other manner transfer their membership. All rights of a member shall cease on death, resignation, transfer, failure to comply with the *Membership Covenant* or expulsion. Those who fail to comply with the *Membership Covenant* will be encouraged to continue participating in the body-life and in the ministry of the Word at Grace Community but will no longer be a member and will thus not be able to vote.
3. Members may be removed from the fellowship by expulsion in accordance with the teachings of Eph. 5:3-14, 1 Timothy 1:20, II Thessalonians 3:6 and 14-15. Those who publicly or privately espouse or support '*world views*' that are fundamentally in opposition to the clear teaching of Scripture will be patiently counseled and if there is no submission to the teaching of the Scriptures as presented by the elders, nor repentance, they will be disciplined by being expelled from the local body.

Examples of this 'espousing and supporting world views' would be:

- the denial of the literal *Incarnation*, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- the denial of the doctrine of 'Faith Alone in Christ' for salvation
- rejection of the Bible as the 'Inspired Word of God'
- the unrepentant practice of any private and or public forms of sexual immorality that violates the sanctity of marriage as presented in Article 7 of the Statement of Faith\*
- and the practice of a life of greed as presented in the Scriptures

The final step will involve a 2/3's vote of confirmation of removal by the congregation at the recommendation of the Board of Elders. With this consideration of 'expulsion, it 'is' and 'always will be' the desire of Grace Community Church and Fellowship to love, support, and experience spiritual healing for all sins of each member's 'Unredeemed Body.' It is also understood that all believers struggle with various issues and beliefs throughout their Christian experience. Members will not be expelled for their 'struggles in life' but for their 'espousing and supporting' what is clearly in direct opposition to the Holy Scriptures.

(\*See the position paper of Fellowship Church that has been officially amended to the By-Laws as a model for a sound Biblical perspective of God's plan for human sexuality)

## II. ELDERS/OVERSEERS

- A. Office: The Biblical leaders of the local church are men identified variously but synonymously as "elder" and "overseer" (bishop) (see Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and Philipians 1:1).
- B. Number: We believe the Scriptures teach us to have a plurality of elders. There will be as many elders as are biblically qualified and recognized by the elders.
- C. Qualifications: Those prayerfully desiring the office of Elder shall demonstrate the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:2. Thus, an elder must be the husband of one wife, have children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion, keeping his children under control with all dignity, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, holding fast the faithful Word, able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not contentious, gentle, free from the love of money, not a new convert, not self-willed, not quick tempered, and having a good reputation outside the church.

- D. Recognition: We believe the Holy Spirit will direct this fellowship, through prayer and the study of the Word, to recognize each man He has brought to the forefront for the position of leadership. It is imperative that all members of this fellowship be thoroughly instructed in the Biblical qualifications of the office. Furthermore, we believe that each man who the Holy Spirit directs to serve in the office of elder will be impressed by the Holy Spirit, through prayer, the study of Scripture, and the counsel of other godly believers to desire the office.
- E. Length of Term: There is no indication in the New Testament of a limited term for elders. We believe that each elder is to be appointed according to the instructions as laid down in the Scriptures and then commissioned by the other elders as a confirmation for that role by Holy Spirit. An elder is therefore deemed to be an elder for as long as he is actively engaged in that role in this local body, with these exceptions:
1. When for personal reasons (e.g. family, health, others) the elder, under prayerful direction of the Holy Spirit and with advisement of the elder board, may rotate off the active list until such a time that he feels ready to resume. He should then request for an advisement once again from the elders to resume an active role as elder.
  2. Each elder may preferably serve an active term of three years and rotate to inactive status for a year or less as a form of 'a personal Sabbath.' While on inactive status, an elder would normally have no voting privileges on the board. The exception to this would be when the elder board requests that he participate in what is deemed to be an important issue.
  3. When an elder 'ceases to perform in his commissioned role' as elder, either by practice or by absence, or fails to meet any of the general guidelines as laid down in the '*Membership Covenant*' that apply to all members of this local body, his role of elder in this local body shall end when and as his membership does (See '1. MEMBERSHIP' for details that apply to all members).
  4. When an 'elder ceases to meet the Biblical qualifications for his office:
    - a. The elder should voluntarily resign. When an elder either resigns or humbly submits to the unanimous directive of the elder board to resign, he shall continue as a member of this local body.
    - b. When an elder refuses to resign upon failing to meet the Biblical requirements for his office and upon failing to submit to the unanimous consent of the other elders, he is to be removed from his role as elder by a two-step process:
      - Step-1 -by his fellow elders' unanimous decision, and then
      - Step-2 -by a 2/3's vote by the congregation

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- c. The failure to submit to the unanimous directive of the elder board will be viewed as a sin and thus treated as any other sin that presents itself within this local body.
- F. The duties of the elders are the following:
1. The elders will oversee all functions of the church. The Lord's will should be sought in every decision, discovered through the study of Scripture, prayer, and the counsel of other godly believers. The goal of seeking the Lord in this way should be a unanimity among the elders. When such course has been followed and unanimity has been reached, the decision will be implemented as part of the policy of the church with the following exceptions:
    - a. The elders should submit any decision involving a purchase of \$5,000 or more for a majority vote (2/3) to the congregation.
    - b. The elders should submit any policy decision involving more than \$5,000.00 in one year (such as adding staff positions or financing a building program) to the congregation for a majority vote.
    - c. The elders may bring any other decision that they feel needs the approval of the majority of the congregation. This would be done after the elders had reached this conclusion through unanimity. However, if the elders are discussing a serious matter, and find unanimity difficult to achieve, a 3/4 majority of the elders may request that the issue be brought before the congregation at a specially called meeting for discussion by the whole body. The elders will address the congregation saying they are dealing with a serious matter upon which they are having difficulty coming to unanimity. They will not necessarily reveal how each elder stands on the issue. They merely want to hear from the members of the congregation. After hearing from the body, the board of elders will take the matter under advisement for another two weeks during which they will again seek unanimity. If a consensus opinion cannot be reached in two weeks the congregation will be reconvened to vote on the matter with a 2/3 vote necessary to carry the matter.
    - d. The elders will call the congregation to meet every year for the purpose of giving a "state of the church" report, and to answer questions from the members. This meeting will be announced in advance for at least three weeks. Additional meetings will be called as necessary.
  2. An elder has numerous ministry responsibilities, some of which are listed below:
    - a. feed the flock (see John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2)

- b. guide the flock, and take responsibility for its well being and direction (see Acts 20:20-21)
  - c. encourage the flock (see Titus 1:9)
  - d. visit and pray for the sick (see James 5:14)
  - e. be an example before the flock (see 1 Peter 5:3)
  - f. guard the church from heretical doctrine (see Titus 1:9, 13)
3. The elders will act as trustees of the church and hold title to the church property in trust for the corporation.
  4. As the church will be chartered as a corporation, the elders will serve as its officers. These will be elected by the elders according to the provision of the charter. Thus, the elders bear ultimate responsibility for the corporate body, spiritually, in its physical needs, and in its financial actions. It is incumbent upon the elders to utilize the best qualified people to carry out various tasks (such as instruction or bookkeeping) to ensure the goals of the church are met and its integrity preserved. They must exercise careful oversight of the stewardship to which they are entrusted.
  5. The corporation shall not be liable for acts of any elder performed in excess of his authority.
  6. No elder of the corporation shall have any right, title, or interest in or to any property or assets of the corporation either prior to or at the time of a liquidation or dissolution of the corporation, all of which properties and assets shall at the time of any liquidation or dissolution vest as provided in the Charter of Incorporation of the corporation.
  7. The private property of the elders shall be exempt from execution of other liability for any debts of the corporation and no elder shall be liable or responsible for any debts or liabilities of the corporation.
  8. Neither elders nor officers shall receive any compensation for serving on the board. Any elder or officer of the corporation may perform other services for which they may receive compensation for serving the corporation.
- G. Pastor staff: The elders may designate one or more of its members as pastors of the congregation through a unanimous decision of the elders and a confirmation vote of 2/3 of the congregation. This would not preclude the elders calling a man from outside their number if they felt it necessary. In this case, this man's election to

elder and pastor by the congregation would come at the same time. Being “worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17), a pastor may be compensated for his duties as the pastor with the amounts set by the elders and approved by the congregation [see II.F.1.b. above]. The responsibilities of a pastor differ none from other elders, but he should have more time to pursue these duties due to his compensation. Thus, his schedule of duty (or job description) should be set by the elders, and he should report to and be responsible to them. The sabbath rest described in II.E. would not apply to the pastor, but the elders can make provision for extended leave for education , mission experience, and rest as deemed necessary.

### III. DEACONS

- A. Office: The word “deacon” means servant and identifies those officers of the church who serve officially as helpers to the elders in ministering to the needs of the church (see Acts 6:1-6).
- B. Number: The number of deacons shall consist of as many as the elders deem necessary to assist in the ministry (see Acts 6:3).
- C. The deacons shall evidence their qualifications for office according to the provisions set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, “Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”
- D. Appointment: The following procedure shall be used to establish and expand the deacon body when need demands.
  - 1. The elders will determine the number of active deacons needed each year.
  - 2. The elders will submit names of qualified men for consideration to the congregation. These names shall be published for at least three weeks before a vote is taken to confirm these men as active deacons.
  - 3. The congregation will vote on the slate of names put forward by the elders with a 2/3 majority needed to confirm the group of men.
  - 4. After the congregation has approved the slate, the new deacons will be ordained and current deacons affirmed before the congregation, by the elders.
- E. Duties: The duties of the deacons are the following:



1. assist the elders in the ministries of the church.
  2. seek to develop ministries to orphans, widows, the poor, and needy.
  3. be responsible for the upkeep, protection, and management of the property.
  4. able to purchase or dispose of real property or its fixtures according to the budget of the church or in amounts up to \$100 off budget without the approval of the elders.
- F. Length of Term: There is no indication in the New Testament of a limited term for deacons. We believe that each deacon is to be appointed according to the instructions as laid down in the Scriptures and then commissioned by the elders as a confirmation for that role by Holy Spirit. A deacon is therefore deemed to be a deacon for as long as he is actively engaged in that role in this local body, with these exceptions:
1. When for personal reasons (e.g. family, health, others) the elder, under prayerful direction of the Holy Spirit and with advisement of the elder board, may rotate off the active list until such a time that he feels ready to resume. He should then request for an advisement once again from the elders to resume an active role as deacon.
  2. Each deacon may preferably serve an active term of three years and rotate to inactive status for a year or less as a form of 'a personal Sabbath.' While on inactive status, a deacon would normally have no voting privileges on the deacon board. The exception to this would be when the elder board requests that he participate in what is deemed to be an important issue.
  3. When a deacon 'ceases to perform in his commissioned role' as a deacon, either by practice or by absence, or fails to meet any of the general guidelines as laid down in the '*Membership Covenant*' that apply to all members of this local body, his role of deacon in this local body shall end when and as his membership does. (See 'I. MEMBERSHIP' for details that apply to all members)
  4. When a deacon ceases to meet the Biblical qualifications for his office:
    - a. The deacon should voluntarily resign. When a deacon either resigns or humbly submits to the unanimous directive of the elder board to resign, he shall continue as a member of this local body.
    - b. Then a deacon refuses to resign upon failing to meet the Biblical requirements for his office and upon failing to submit to the unanimous consent of the elders, he is to be removed from his role as a deacon by a two-step process:

Step-1 -by the elders' unanimous decision, and then

Step-2 -by a 2/3's vote by the congregation

- c. The failure to submit to the unanimous directive of the elder board will be viewed as a sin and thus treated as any other sin that presents itself within this local body.

#### IV. VOTING RIGHTS

A. Only members of the church at least 18 years of age may vote on church matters. Voting rights are limited to those who actively fulfil their agreement to the *Membership Covenant*. Membership in the local body of Grace Community Church and 'active participation' in the body are co-dependent. There will obviously be exceptions to this policy. Exceptions such as: mandatory work requirements, long term health issues and temporarily living outside of the geographical sphere of Grace Community Church (see: By-Laws' "Membership A. 1" for details of the *Membership Covenant*).

B. Before a vote may be held, a quorum, which consists of at least 1/4 of the voting age membership, must be present. Otherwise, the vote must be postponed.

V. AMENDMENTS: The membership of the corporation may amend or repeal the articles of this constitution and the by-laws by a 2/3 majority of those voting, provided that this procedure is followed:

A. that copies of the proposed amendments have been distributed and discussed at a duly called (that is announced in two consecutive regular meetings of the congregation) meeting of the congregation.

B. that the vote on the proposed amendments or deletions comes no sooner than two weeks after the matter is discussed with the congregation.

## Amendments

### Amendment 1 of 1: Paper on 'Human Sexuality'

This paper is amended to the 'THE *FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS* OF GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH' as a sound *model* of "A Guideline for Understanding Biblical Truth and Current Issues Regarding Homosexuality". It is used with permission by both the author and Fellowship Church of Knoxville, Tennessee.

It is to be understood that this paper is presented as a 'sound *model*' for the specific topic that it treats, and that various theological elements and statements may differ from both the 'Statement-of-Faith' and 'The *Foundational Documents*' of Grace Community Church.

The amended paper begins on the next page. Its full content is included just as published by Fellowship Church on 9/30/2012 and as currently presented on their web site on 3/3/21.

(paper begins on the next page)

# FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

## A Guideline for Understanding Biblical Truth and Current Issues Regarding Homosexuality

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### Position and Policy 09/30/2012

This document represents the understanding and position of the Elders and Pastors of Fellowship Church concerning the issue of the homosexuality

### Preface

We believe the Bible is the Word of God; verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and that it is the supreme, final, and infallible authority in doctrine and practice. By inspiration we mean God's superintendence of human authors, so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. We further believe that there is but one method of Bible interpretation----- the literal, or historical-----grammatical, method. This method recognizes the fact that the authors of Scripture meant what they said. Therefore, we consistently apply the rules of grammar, literature, history, and culture to Scripture in order to unlock and understand the author's meaning (Matt. 5:16---18; II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:20, 21).

### Introduction

The rapid rise of the issue of homosexual rights has been one of the fastest cultural changes in Western Civilization's history. If one tries to find a suitable reference or template, one will fail. Homosexual rights were not even a thought in broader culture in the 1990's but by the 2010's they have become one of the culture's hot topics. The charge has been swift, calculated and determined. The cultural impact and debates are beginning to be no less contentious than those of the 1960's.

How the Church has chosen to respond is as widely varied as the Church itself. Some denominations have largely acquiesced, ordaining openly gay priests and pastors and allowing the performing of homosexual weddings. Other more conservative religious groups and denominations are increasingly being hounded for being "intolerant" or "hate groups" for adhering to what they understand as the Bible's teaching about sexuality and marriage. Additionally, and sadly, still others have espoused the Bible's clear teaching but have done so in a relational manner that is inconsistent with biblical teachings on how to speak the truth in love.

It is the desire of Fellowship Church to be a place where all who seek to know and serve the Lord according to His commands will be welcomed and loved. We understand, because of the Bible's clear instructions, that there are none that are righteous but the grace of our Lord forgives all

sins. We would never claim that any sin made someone ineligible for the grace and mercy of our Lord. Anyone confessing their sins and claiming the Lordship and grace of Christ will be loved and accepted just as the Lord commands. We desire to love and respect those who do not confess the Lord though we may have to disagree with their actions and beliefs. We hope to be a support and resource to all who try to live with the burden of any sin while trying to obey the Lord. We long to be a brotherhood and sisterhood of believers, loving and correcting one another as the Lord would have us to as members of His body.

Sexuality is a creation of God meant to be a blessing to humanity with the ultimate purpose of pointing to Christ (Ephesians 5:31---32). A sexual life lived according to the commands and will of God is meant to be a blessing (Proverbs 5:15---23). Sexual sin, of any kind, is one of the most warned against in Scripture. The apostle Paul points out the singular nature of sexual sin in 1 Corinthians 6:15---20. One could write many pages on all that the Bible teaches regarding sexuality. This paper will be focusing specifically on homosexuality. It should be clearly and plainly stated that the Bible warns against all types of sexual sin, whether hetero--- or homosexual in nature. The Elders and Pastors of Fellowship Church would warn all to carefully guard their hearts when it comes to the issues of sexuality. Sin, of any kind, easily entangles (Hebrews 12:1). One might ask, "Why write about homosexuality at all?" The current issue of homosexuality needs to be addressed because of the unique challenge that is being presented to the Church in the area of homosexuality. Homosexuality is an activity that has been understood as sinful that is now pushing forward and demanding to be received as not sinful. The unique response of the Church towards homosexuality comes from the unique presentation of homosexuality. One would no doubt see the same type response if, say, theft was suddenly asking to be received as normal and not sinful. Beyond these reasons, making sure that we are people that are trying to live out the example of Christ by loving all people is a key concern to the leadership of Fellowship Church. We desire to treat all with compassion and love, as commanded by the Lord, while never allowing our obedience to the Lord to wane because of social pressures.

This paper hopes to address many of the concerns surrounding the issue of homosexuality and whether or not it is sinful. "What is the nature of marriage?" has been addressed in a previous position paper ("Marriage: Our Position and Policy" found at [http://fellowshipknox.org/#/we\\_believe](http://fellowshipknox.org/#/we_believe)) so this paper will not engage that particular point. It will rather engage the Bible on the issue of homosexuality and the relevant Biblical texts and interpretations that are springing up because of the current debates.

## **Biblical Texts**

### 1. Old Testament references

Leviticus 18:22--- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13--- If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

### 2. New Testament references

Romans 1:26---27--- For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

1 Corinthians 6:9--- Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality.

1 Timothy 1:9---10--- understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

### 3. Summary

One will immediately note the absence of such texts as the Sodom incident or the event recounted in Judges 19 which are commonly referred to in reference to the issues of homosexuality. These will be dealt with in an apologetic fashion but are not listed here as the point of the grouping of these present texts is to show regulative, or “command,” texts. The Sodom and Judges texts are narrative in purpose. We will now consider each text singularly. (Please note: we will deal with questions about the nature and relevance of these texts below. The immediate context is just a strict look at the wording and syntax of the commands.)

## Textual Analysis and Contexts

### 1. Leviticus 18:22

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

The context of Leviticus 18 is the giving of the Mosaic Law to the Israelites. It is a normative and commandment laden context. The immediate predecessors are all laws regarding sexual conduct and prohibiting certain sexual actions. The commandment against homosexuality is within this vein. The underlying Hebrew is unambiguous.

### 2. Leviticus 20:13

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

The context of Leviticus 20 is the giving of the Mosaic Law to the Israelites. It is a normative and commandment laden context. The section in Chapter 20 is more focused on the punishment to be doled out for the breaking of the commandment as well as the commandment itself. The

immediate predecessors are all commandments and punishments regarding sexual sin. The underlying Hebrew is unambiguous.

### 3. Romans 1:26---27

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

With the switch to the New Testament, we have a switch from the straight out commandment format of the Levitical law to the epistolary format of the Apostles, namely Paul. The context of the reference in Romans is important so as to see why it was included in the list above.

The context for Romans 1:26---27 is set in Romans 1:18. It states, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Paul’s beginning purpose is to show why the wrath of God is being revealed among humanity. The reason, he argues, is sin, which he calls ‘unrighteousness’ and ‘ungodliness.’ Verses 26---27 flow from verse 25, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” Paul’s obvious point is that the wrath of God, stirred by sinfulness, is being revealed. One of the ways he points out, in verse 25---26, is homosexuality. This is, of course, not the only reason.

Paul’s clear opinion is that homosexuality lies outside God’s intent. The underlying Greek is unambiguous. Recent arguments regarding Paul’s intention of using the word “natural” will be dealt with later. Recent arguments that Paul was speaking of male prostitution will be dealt with later.

### 4. 1 Corinthians 6:9

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality.

The context for 1 Corinthians 6:9 is Paul’s reprimand to the Corinthian church that they are to live by different standards than the world around them. The scope of this call to different living is wide and varies from everything from issues in lawsuits to being defrauded. It is within this context that the reference to homosexuality is made. It is clear that Paul considers it an action of unrighteousness. The underlying Greek is unambiguous.

### 5. 1 Timothy 1:9---10

understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, Paul is discussing false teachers who have infiltrated the Ephesian church in which Timothy is serving. They were using the Law

in some way that was counter to Paul's teaching of the Gospel. Paul is discussing the Law and points out that the Law's purpose was to point out human behaviors that were unacceptable. Homosexuality is one of those behaviors. The underlying Greek is unambiguous.

## 6. Summary

These texts are clear and unambiguous. They clearly state that homosexuality is against the Law and purposes of God. This does not end the discussion, as many groups and individuals have questions about how relevant these texts are and how to properly interpret them. These points will be dealt with below. As it stands, the references in the Bible that directly speak to or reference homosexuality are unequivocal in their denouncement of the action. It can only be rhetorically argued that the texts don't mean what they plainly say. To do so is to completely ignore basic reading comprehension. "Are they still relevant?" is another question.

## Practical Questions and Applications

Many questions and concerns have arisen regarding the issue of homosexuality and the interpretation of Bible. We hope to, in this section, answer some of the more prevalent questions and give a more secure footing in why we believe the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin.

1. "I was born/God made me this way." "God wouldn't give me a desire He didn't want me to fill."

This is one of the most prevalent arguments against the Church and its stance against homosexuality. Christians have, rather unthoughtfully, ceded ground on this argument by answering, "no, you weren't born this way," rather than letting the Bible speak to it. While we can never claim that God is the author of sin, the Bible clearly teaches that all humanity is born into sin (Ps 51:5, Rom 5:12, Eph 2:3) and is sinful by nature from birth. While we are not completely sinful in every way possible, the Bible is clear that we are not born righteous. For anyone to claim that any action they take that seems natural to them is right with God because they have felt that way from birth is to disregard the Bible's teaching as to what is the human condition. A person could claim, "I have been gay since birth," and be within what the Bible describes as the human condition because the Bible says humanity is sinful from birth. The issue is that just because these feelings have been innate does not excuse them. "There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is death"--- Proverbs 14:12. The first commandment of God to all is to repent, meaning to turn from one's sinful ways (Acts 17:30).

In a related point, there is no one whose sexuality is not regulated by the Bible. All are called to some kind of sexual regulation. Those who are single are called to wait till marriage. Those who are married are called to keep sex within the marriage covenant. Within the frame of the argument that God would not give desires that could not be met, anyone could argue that any sexual regulation from the Bible was irrelevant because of the desires for sex which fall outside of Biblical lines, namely heterosexual marriage. Anyone, married or single, who found themselves with desires for another who was not their spouse could claim they were excluded from the commandments of God based on that desire. Clearly, this is an untenable point.



2. "Homosexuality would be ok if homosexual marriage was allowed. The fact that homosexuals can't marry is the reason for their sinfulness."

From Fellowship Church's position paper on marriage ("Marriage: Our Position and Policy"--- available at [http://fellowshipknox.org/#/we\\_believe](http://fellowshipknox.org/#/we_believe)) "Marriage was God's idea, not man's. God defines what marriage is, not man. He created marriage at the same time He created man and woman. And He created marriage to achieve his purposes in and through their union. The primary purpose of marriage is not man or woman's happiness or personal fulfillment; marriage, including the idea of family, is of God's design----- His divine deliberate, purposeful plan to display His glory and create and sanctify a people for Himself to enjoy and worship Him forever" (Marriage--- pg. 1).

Also from the position paper----- "God instituted marriage to be a lifelong covenantal relationship between Himself and two willing adults, one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39; Eph 5:31). The Bible views a marriage covenant as more than a legal contract between two people. It views it as an unconditional commitment between a man and woman to serve God through the fulfillment of their biblical responsibilities as a husband and wife until death or God release them from this commitment (Matt. 19:4-----6)" (Marriage--- pg. 2).

3. "Jesus never mentioned homosexuality."

Jesus also never mentioned: pedophilia, bestiality, having sexual relations with one's mother, having sexual relations with one's father, having sexual relations with one's siblings, rape, etc. (This list does not, of course, suggest that to be engaged in homosexuality necessarily suggests participating in pedophilia, bestiality, etc.). The list could go on and on. Do we think these things lay inside the realm of things that Jesus would approve of? Of course not. Argument from absence is a poor exercise.

Furthermore, we do see Jesus address the sexual ethics of his time in certain ways. For example, in Matthew 15:16-----20 we see Jesus speaking specifically about the nature of condemnation. In a list of things that will condemn a person, Jesus uses the Greek word *porneia*, translated as 'sexual immorality.' *Porneia* is used some 25 times in the New Testament, usually translated as 'sexual immorality' or such. The word in Greek was a catch all phrase used to mean any action which fell outside of moral sexual behavior. For example, Paul uses the word in 1 Corinthians 5 for an incestuous relationship and in the same letter, 1 Corinthians 7, to mean extra-----marital sexual activity. It is a broad term. Jesus and Paul would use it in the context of the Law and its moral precepts regarding sexuality. This would, because of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, refer to homosexuality as well. The arguments today about the validity of these commands are whether or not we would have to follow them, not whether or not Paul and Jesus would. It is beyond credulity to suggest that Paul and Jesus were not orthodox Jews of their time. Jesus' use of the word *porneia* would encompass all the things his audience understood as sexually impermissible. Homosexuality would be on that list because of its direct inclusion in the Law of Moses.

4. "Why don't Christians also follow the commandment against 'x?'"

One of the arguments against using the Bible's commandments against homosexuality today are typified in the refrain that Christians hold to one part of the Law but not another. For example, the Law forbids the wearing of cloth woven from different fabrics (Lev 19:19). The Law forbids sowing two types of seed in the same field (Lev 19:19). If Christians are so serious about keeping God's laws, why aren't these commandments kept?

This argument is made because of an ignorance of, or ignoring of, Scripture. The answer lies in understanding the nature of the Law. There were three types of Law given by God to Moses and Israel. The first type was the national law. Those specific laws were given to the nation of Israel and are applicable only to them. They went out of 'enforcement' with the Fall of Israel before the time of Christ. The religious laws of Israel were the second and third types of Law given to Moses. They were the ceremonial and moral law groups. Actually, one of the first controversies in Christianity was whether or not the ceremonial law group applied to Christians. Types of the ceremonial laws were the prohibitions of the dietary law, commands to keep the

Sabbath and the command for circumcisions. The commandments regarding seeds and cloth would fall into this category. It is specifically in the commandment regarding circumcision that the controversy in Christianity came to light first. Both Acts and Galatians recount the debate. In both places, it is determined that the ceremonial law about circumcision did not carry over from the Old Testament to the New. In fact, Paul forbids Christians from reverting to the ceremonial law. In Galatians 5:3-----6 Paul in no uncertain terms denies that circumcision still has any merit and in fact asserts that the one who reverts to it has denied the very essence of Christianity. We see him make the same sorts of statements about the food laws in Romans 14. He tells the Christians in Rome that if they choose to eat foods that lie outside the dietary code of the Law, then they are fine as long as they are not violating their or their neighbors' conscience. Further than that, Paul condemns Peter when Peter tries to make others adhere to the dietary code (Galatians 2:11---14). Peter himself had a vision regarding the ceremonial food laws and the overturning of that branch of the Law (Acts 10 and 11). Paul commanded the Colossians to not allow ceremonial Law regarding the Sabbath to be used against them (Col 2:16---17). It is a clear teaching of the Apostolic tradition that the ceremonial Law was ended when Christ fulfilled the ceremonial aspects of the Law (Matt 5:17; Rom 10:4).

So it is clear that Paul and the other apostles did not consider the ceremonial code something that survived into Christianity. The same cannot be said of the moral code. In order to stay within the scope of this paper, let's look at the sexual commands written by Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does he relax the sexual codes of the Law like he does the ceremonial commands. For example, in the book of Galatians where he has spent so much ink showing that the ceremonial law has passed he quickly supports the prohibition against "sexual immorality" (again the word *porneia*) in Galatians 5:19. Paul goes to great lengths in his epistles to warn Christians against sexual immorality while at the same time going to great lengths to show Christians the ceremonial Law has passed. Christians can rightly conclude that the command against homosexuality is within the scope of the moral law which is still in effect within the bounds of Christianity.

5. "Romans is not referring to actual homosexuals but heterosexuals acting homosexually."

As referred to above in the listing of Romans 1:26---27, the crux of this objection centers on Paul's use and meaning of the word 'natural.'

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error."

To begin with, this is a prime example of the logical fallacy called begging the question. In other words, the person making this argument is already assuming that homosexuality is not a sin in order to make this argument. Paul, an orthodox Jew, would have no category of homosexuality being a moral act in any instance. So to make an argument that Paul is saying that the immorality being addressed is heterosexuals acting against their nature in a homosexual manner and that it would not be immoral for homosexuals to act thusly is to assume homosexuality is moral. Paul, an adherent to the Law, would not have these categories in any sense. Philo, a Jewish writer from the time of Jesus and Paul, and other Jewish writers contemporary to the time continually show that one of the main Jewish criticisms of the Roman culture was the homosexuality within it.

More specifically to the text, homosexuality advocates question the use of the word 'natural' and Paul's meaning. The use of this Greek word, and Paul's usage of it and its relatives, generally means the way things "should" be because of their intrinsic state or birth. It is because these references have no immediate connotation of divine purpose or intention that homosexual advocates have said this is not a claim of the immoral nature of homosexuality. In other words, the homosexuality advocate critiquing this passage is saying that Paul is not using these words to mean that homosexuality is wrong. But a closer look at Paul's intent in the passage overwhelms this line of thinking.

Paul's immediate point is that humanity, in seeking unrighteousness, has done many evils including rejecting God as Creator. Note the phrases Paul, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, uses as indictments: verse 19----- For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.; verse 21--- For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.; verse 25--- because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. Paul's clear context is that our Creator, God, has been rebelled against in hearts of humanity. Paul's use of 'natural' must be seen in its immediate context of being a rebellion against what the Creator intended.

This point is highlighted further by the use of the Greek word *chresis*. There is no direct English translation but its meaning is "the sexual use of a woman" or "how one has sex with a woman." Combining the word 'natural' with this word, Paul's meaning is 'how one would naturally have sex with a woman.' Furthermore, Paul does not use the standard words for 'man' and 'woman' here but rather 'male' and 'female,' a more graphic physiological description. Paul is not arguing orientation but physiological design. "Sexual orientation" is a modern construct, not a Biblical one. Paul's intent of showing God's creation of male/female sexuality is clear both thematically and linguistically.

6. “Paul was not speaking of homosexuality in Romans 1 but rather male prostitution.”

That homosexuality occurred in the shrines of Gentile pagans is not in dispute. There are some homosexuality advocates that are attempting to show that Paul is in fact condemning Gentile pagan and shrine worship in Romans 1. They point to references like verse 23’s “. . . exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” The ultimate point, they claim, is not that Paul is condemning homosexuality but rather idolatry.

Not only does this claim fail to overturn the larger point Paul is making about natural relations (see above point) but if that is true then Paul is also not condemning the list of things that he points out in Romans 1:29--31 that includes things like murder, deceit, hating God and being “inventors of evil.” Could anyone seriously argue God only condemns these activities if they are associated with pagan shrine worship? No. Paul, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is making the larger point that neglecting to worship God as God will lead to an individual and cultural rejection of God the more it plays out.

Some of the arguments used about language and the words Paul uses, particularly about the Greek words *malakos* and *arsenkoites*, focus their critiques by drawing from extra-Biblical sources. They tend to limit their references to places where other authors use these words to mean “male prostitution.” Critics using a source, say Philo, to redefine Paul’s meaning typically neglect to mention Josephus (another contemporary of Paul) and his use of the words that agree with a reading of Paul that condemns homosexuality as sin. Space does not allow for a full discussion but the point would be the same: it is highly likely the words for homosexuality would include ideas of male prostitution. Philo using the words for male prostitution would fit into the larger scale of how Paul and Josephus use the words. If the words meant only male prostitution, then how Paul and Josephus use the words would make no sense.

7. “Isn’t love more important than condemning people?” “How can love ever be wrong?”

Love is the central virtue of the New Testament. It is the primary commandment given to people regarding one another (Matthew 22:39). Christians consider Jesus as the prime example of humanity. Jesus commanded us to walk just as he walked (John 13:15). Peter understood this exemplary model of Christ (1 Peter 2:21). One would be well within the bounds of Christian thinking to say that Christ was the most loving person who ever lived and we are to emulate Him in that action. Within that framework we see that Jesus never shied from calling sin “sin.” He confronted the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11). He confronted the rich young ruler of his covetousness (Luke 18:22). He confronts the disciples of prideful ambition (Mark 10:37--45). Being loving has never meant not calling sin “sin.” One can rightly argue that there is no such thing as love without truth.

8. “The Church is only calling out homosexuality. They don’t treat other sins like this.” “Christians are discriminating against homosexuals.”

Some feel the Church is singling out homosexuality and ignoring other sins. There is no question that the Church has not pursued purity with the passion that it should. Church members that should have long ago been disciplined by their congregations have perpetrated much of the

testimony of hypocrisy charged to the Church. Many of today's congregants are so removed from any sense of church discipline that any call of repentance toward a church member seems unbiblical rather than orthodox. It is within this culture that the teaching of many churches regarding the sinfulness of homosexuality seems undue. In some, but not all cases, the voices of the culture are specifically militant against the Church, perceiving Christians as the primary enemy of their cause. Homosexuality advocates and questioning church members, however, are right in one sense about homosexuality being treated singly.

The distinction one might observe regarding the way the church is being forced to deal with homosexuality comes from the way in which homosexuality is being presented by significant voices in our culture, particularly through the popular cultural media. In other words, other sins are not being brought to the church and demanding acceptance. No one is coming into the church saying "I am an adulterer. I have no plans to change so accept me as I am." Or perhaps, "I am a liar and have been one as long as I can remember so I am not going to change." Any such person would, in any church that treats the Bible seriously, be met with stern opposition. The Church is treating homosexuality uniquely because it is being presented uniquely.

As to the charge of discrimination, as stated earlier there is no one whose sexuality is unregulated by Biblical mandate. To argue as some have that heterosexual promiscuity is not prosecuted in churches is to count as irrelevant that the Bible teaches sexual immorality is wrong. Any church that treats the Bible seriously is active in its teaching of the Biblical mandates regarding sexuality. Churches that are subjugating the Bible underneath human wisdom and human desires will not treat this subject with the severity it requires. Fellowship Church actively teaches the Biblical mandates of sexual purity, of all types, before marriage. For example, couples cohabitating are required to cease that activity and are counseled as to its inappropriateness before a Fellowship pastor will perform a marriage ceremony.

9. "The events in Sodom and Gibeah were not about homosexuality but inhospitality."

The well-----known attempted homosexual rape in Sodom accounted in Genesis 19 has a lesser-----known echo in Judges 19 and the men of Gibeah. In each case, visitors are attacked by crowds whose intentions include homosexual rape. Homosexuality advocates will argue that the sin being committed here is transgression against the hospitality code of the time, not the homosexual aspect of the attack.

These objections fail to accomplish a lasting dent against a Biblical warrant against homosexuality because there is no reason that, even if one removed all reference to the homosexual activity, the Levitical code is changed regarding its ban against homosexuality. In other words, even if Sodom is not about homosexuality, Leviticus 18 and 20 are clearly referring to it. The Sodom event changes nothing regarding how one must deal with the moral issues of homosexuality. This does not even include a critique of the rather spurious claim that the crime in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 is not about homosexuality after all.

10. "The Bible condemns lust, not love. When two homosexuals love each other, the Bible is not talking about them." "The Bible is condemning homosexual promiscuity, not homosexuality itself."

Again, we see a begging of the question (refer to “Romans is not referring to actual homosexuals . . .” above). It assumes that homosexuality is right and then shows how the Bible is not really addressing a form of homosexuality we know today. Is lust condemned in the Bible? Yes, clearly (Matthew 5:27---28). Is homosexuality condemned in the Bible? Yes, clearly. To say that “being in love” changed the laws against homosexuality, or made them not count, is to deny the teaching of the condemnation of homosexuality. In order to see this more clearly, let’s look at the premise removed from the realm of homosexuality and place it in a heterosexual context. Suppose a couple began having sex outside of marriage. They claim that they are in love so the clear Biblical teaching against pre----- marital sex does not apply to them. Or take a married person who falls in love with someone who is not their spouse and then claims that the affair they engage in is not wrong because they are in love. Does this make any sense? In fact, the commandment is there to stop the very activity they are trying to normalize. This type of behavior acts to treat the command with the most clear disrespect. Homosexuals trying to make an “end run” around the command by trying to shift it to a place that does not apply to them are engaging in a clear form of denial.

The same can be said when the argument is about homosexual promiscuity and not homosexuality itself. In other words, some argue that Paul is only addressing homosexuals who are sexually promiscuous and not homosexuality itself. This is again begging the question. The Old Testament commands were clearly against homosexual acts in any form. There would have been no context in which Paul or any other Biblical author, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would have seen these acts as sanctionable, whether in a committed relationship or not. Specifically, Paul’s arguments regarding “natural” and “unnatural” due to created order and intent would precede any claim of acceptance due to monogamy (Again, refer to “Romans is not referring to actual homosexuals . . .” above).

### **Conclusion: Fellowship Church’s Stance and Practices**

It is the intention of the Elders and Leadership of Fellowship Church to be a people intent on following the commandments of God to the best of their ability and understanding. With that purpose in mind, Fellowship Church must follow the Biblical counsel and call homosexuality sinful.

Homosexuality will be treated no differently than any other sin when it comes to church membership and being in good standing of that membership. Any person who struggles with homosexual feelings but comes confessing it as sin and trying to live a life of repentance will be welcomed into fellowship and church membership as would any other repentant and confessing sinner. Any church member who struggles with homosexuality will be treated with love and compassion as would any other church member struggling with any other sin. Praise the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father who forgives all our sins!

However, continuing in obedience to the commands He has given us, any church member who engaged in homosexual behavior and would not, after intervention and multiple attempts toward restoration, repent of those actions would then be removed from fellowship and membership as would any other unrepentant sinning member. Anyone unrepentantly practicing homosexual activities will not be admitted in membership to Fellowship Church, as any other unrepentant sinner would be denied membership as well. Any person who disagrees with this

statement is always welcome to attend our worship services as long as they are not divisive and are respectful of our beliefs. Furthermore, we ask any current member of Fellowship Church who disagrees with these conclusions to approach leadership in order to make sure that true disagreement exists. After much discussion and prayer, if true disagreement indeed does exist, we would ask that member to withdraw their membership.

We want to acknowledge that there are people within our congregation who struggle with homosexuality. We desire for you to know that we want to stand with you. The grace and power of the Lord has been unleashed in your favor and we want to see the Lord work in you and in us as we all face our sins and come face to face with the love and forgiveness of God. We want to be a resource to you in your stand and a help in times of tempting and failing.

We also want to acknowledge that some who read this will be people who do not know the Gospel of our Lord and His offer of grace and forgiveness. The Bible teaches us that humanity is fallen and broken. Christ's mission was to start the process of God's restoration of humanity. This offer is made by grace, or freely. All who sin and are trapped in sin are offered the freedom that comes in Christ. We desire for you to know that if you want the forgiveness of God for sins, any and all sins, He has offered it in Christ. The Christian life is one of constant renewal and purification. It is not easy. But we testify and confess that God is faithful. He has been for us and He can be for you. To Him be the Glory.

We pray that the glory and grace of God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit would temper all our actions and decisions. We seek only to honor the Lord and the ways He would have His people live. We ask the Spirit to come and intercede for us, not only that we would know how to lovingly and compassionately deal with those who are struggling with any sin but also that sin within ourselves would be exposed and scrubbed away.

Praise the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Fellowship Church  
8000 Middlebrook Pike  
Knoxville, TN 37909