

THE CORE VALUES OF GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES

(And of The Rock Church)

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a written description of the commonly held core values and practices embraced by the individuals and churches in the Great Commission Churches (GCC). Great Commission Churches is a U.S. based association of churches that is part of the larger Great Commission church movement worldwide. This movement began in 1970 and is today an international fellowship of church movements and ministries, in North America, Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

I. THE GRACE OF GOD

1. God's grace through Jesus Christ is our bedrock and power supply for our salvation, our life in Christ and our ministry, both individually and as churches (2 Corinthians 9:8).
2. Grace will lead to works, and result in fruit in people's lives (Ephesians 2:8- 10).
3. Those who have been born again by the Spirit are eternally secure and will not lose their salvation. (1 Peter 1:3-5).
4. We believe in a balance between God's grace and man's responsibility. We believe the Bible teaches both the sovereign grace of God and the solemn responsibility of man to trust, obey and serve God. (Philippians 2:12-13).

II. COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

1. Our supreme desire is to glorify God. Our love for God and devotion to Him must be our deepest passion and greatest motivation—more than possessions, human relationships, and personal accomplishments, including ministry accomplishments (Matthew 22:37; Philippians 3:7-8).
1. 5. The Bible is our final authority for doctrine and practice and our instruction manual for life. It is God's revealed communication for matters of our faith, for our personal lives, for raising our families, for our behavior in the workplace, and for all ministry (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
2. 8. Obedience to God's Word is crucial to an accurate understanding of the Bible. Without such an attitude of humility, His Word becomes mere knowledge which eventually leads to pride and possibly deception (James 1:22).

III. ALL NATIONS REACHED WITH THE GOSPEL

1. Out of our love for God and people (The Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37-40), our mission as individuals and as churches is to fulfill the Great Commission—making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:18-20.)
2. God's desire is that every individual in the church personally embrace the Great Commission—that, in one sense, we are all "missionaries" wherever we are located. All believers are to be "on mission," to do their part in reaching their city, nation, and the world for Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9).
3. While personally embracing this mission, God's will is that every individual work together with others as a team, serving within his giftedness and unique role as part of that team in fulfilling the Great Commission (Ephesians 4:11-16).

IV. THE CHURCH

1. God has commissioned and established the local church as His primary means of fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission—loving God and others by winning people to Christ, building them to maturity, raising up leaders, and sending teams to start new churches (1 Timothy 3:15).
2. As patterned in the New Testament, we believe that God sends teams of mature leaders to other cities, regions, and cultures to preach the gospel, gather converts into new churches, establish them in correct doctrine and life practice, and appoint leaders for the new churches. These missionary teams are to be sent out and supported by their local churches. (Acts 13:1-3; 14:21- 28)
3. We value cooperation between Great Commission churches in a geographical region for mutual edification, accountability, and mission endeavors. To facilitate this, our churches partner with "church

ministry teams" which coordinate regional mission efforts, encourage pastors, provide accountability, and assist in leadership training (2 Corinthians 8).

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of each local church and that each local church, once it has been established and elders appointed, has final human authority over its affairs under Christ. (Ephesians 1:22-23).
5. We believe that the church should function as a family, as a body, and as an army. (1 Timothy 5:1-2; Romans 12:4; Ephesians 6:10-18).

V. CHURCH LEADERSHIP

1. Recognizing Christ as the Head of the church, we further recognize that He has appointed certain men of character to be spiritual elders, or pastors in the local church. These men have the final human authority in their church's affairs and decisions (Titus 1:5).
2. We believe that the terms "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" each refer to the same position (Acts 20:17, 28).
3. The New Testament model is that of a Christ-centered submissive plurality of pastors rather than a single pastor leadership structure (Acts 14:23; Phil, 1:1).
4. Elder/pastors are to be appointed based upon the character qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
5. Leadership in the church must be radically different from leadership in the world. The greatest in the church must be the servant of all. Church leaders are to be humble servants, aggressively teachable, responsive to criticism, and models of always learning, growing, and improving.
6. We believe that the character qualities and doctrinal understanding needed to become an elder/pastor/overseer are best developed within the local church. We view additional training (such as that offered by Bible schools or seminaries) not as a qualification for a pastor, but rather as a possible supplement to the equipping of a pastor within the local church (Titus 1:5).
7. We value and esteem women in the church and encourage their ministry in various roles, but in accordance with the New Testament, we reserve the office of elder/pastor/overseer for men alone (1 Timothy 3:1; 2:12).
8. A pastor/elder is to be a servant, modeling Christ-like humility, teachability and love, as well as a leader, demonstrating faith, courage and strength in managing the church (Luke 22:26; Hebrews 13:7).

VI. ONENESS (LOVE AND UNITY)

1. We strongly revere the "doctrine of love and unity" within all of Christendom. God desires unity between believers as a high priority and we strive to maintain a unity with every believer, both within and without our association (Ephesians 4:3).
2. We believe that our unity must be centered in Jesus Christ and in the truth of the gospel and of the scripture. Unity is maintained and enhanced as we believe and obey the scriptures, unite in a common vision, and follow the Lord together.
3. We value a deep "Jonathan-David" covenant love and loyalty for one another, particularly among leaders in churches, regions, nationally and internationally (1 Samuel 18:1).

VII. RAISING GODLY FAMILIES

1. We believe that strong families are foundational for the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development of each individual; for healthy relational patterns within the church; and for stability in society. Strong families produce strong churches and strong communities (Ephesians 5:22-6:4).
2. We value both the husband and the wife mutually loving and honoring one another, in following Christ's supreme example. We also promote differing but complementary roles in the family with the husband as the head of the household, loving and leading his wife, and his wife honoring, supporting, and submitting to her husband wholeheartedly (Ephesians 5:22-33).
3. We believe that human sexuality is a gift and is to be celebrated and practiced exclusively within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. Therefore, in accordance with the Bible, we consider homosexuality, adultery and fornication to be sin (1 Corinthians 6:9).
4. We believe that life is a gift from God that begins at conception and should be valued and protected at all stages of development and ability (Psalms 139:13-16).
5. We aspire to provide compassionate ministry to those who are divorced while at the same time teaching that God hates divorce and wants couples to stay married. Churches in our association (with some

exceptions) generally teach that God permits remarriage after divorce in two instances—marital infidelity or if an unbeliever leaves a believing spouse. (Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:15).

6. Parents are responsible for their child's upbringing in matters of spiritual, academic, and personal training. The means each parent uses to fulfill this responsibility will vary—and includes the parent choosing other people or institutions in that training, such as local churches, home school resources, public schools, and Christian school (Ephesians 6:4).

VIII. EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

1. Rather than a clergy-laity system, we affirm the "priesthood of all believers." All Christians are "priests," according to 1 Peter 2:5-9, empowered through the Holy Spirit to worship God and be workers in the church and the world.
2. The elders have the responsibility to train and equip the members in ministry, but not to actually perform all of the ministry of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).
3. God desires each member to utilize his or her unique spiritual gifts in ministry (1 Peter 4:10-11).
4. All ministry is in vain without the help of, and our reliance upon, the Holy Spirit. He is our source of power in the church and in the believer. He is our Helper in all matters of faith, service, and direction (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

COMMON PRACTICES

1. Churches in our association seek to equip members with certain basic spiritual disciplines such as daily devotional times, serving in the church, sharing the Word with believers, and sharing the gospel with unbelievers.
2. From the example of the Jerusalem church in Acts 8:1-4, the practice of many church members has been to voluntarily and spontaneously spread the gospel to new areas and new people groups, without relying upon pastors or paid staff. 12
3. While encouraging the use of spiritual gifts, most churches in our association have understood some of the gifts to be "sign" gifts, whose purpose is to authenticate the message to unbelievers. For example, most would understand the gift of tongues to be the super-natural ability to speak a known language as a sign to unbelievers (Acts 2), rather than a "private prayer language," as taught by many charismatic churches.
4. Our practice has been to allow both pastors and non-pastors to baptize a new believer and to administer the breaking of bread (communion).
5. Our historical practice is for our church's ministry to be both centralized (in a rented or church-owned building) and decentralized—ministry performed by church members in homes and in the marketplace (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20).

CONCLUSION

Great Commission Churches has aspired to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to put into action New Testament Christianity in today's world. The values and common practices detailed in this paper have given greater clarity to our understanding of what New Testament Christianity looks like today. As we have followed the Spirit's leading in putting into action these values and practices, God has provided grace, blessing and power to individuals and churches. We give God all the glory for what He has done in this movement—and, in the future, we aspire to follow Him and His word ever more closely, so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread to the ends of the earth.