



Church Membership
Covenant & Resources
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Free Grace Church Membership Covenant

Introduction

“...Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” –(Romans 12: 1-2)

As Christians, we are members of God’s household (Eph. 2:19) called to function, participate, and minister in a particular place within the body of Christ. A healthy body requires that each member do its part well. A healthy church requires the same: members who are sacrificially committed and well-equipped to do the works of service that God has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10; 4:12). Free Grace Church holds its members in high regard; we expect them to be committed to the glory of God, the gospel, and the Great Commission. God, in His sovereignty, placed us in this community, among these people, in this century, for a reason (Acts 17:26-27).

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” - Romans 12: 3-8

Being a member of Free Grace Church is really about being part of a family. All members are disciples of Jesus, unified by their identity in Christ. This unity is expressed in the way they collaborate in loving God, loving fellow Christians, and loving

non-Christians. Members who enter into a covenant with their local church are agreeing to a Biblical degree of responsibility and service. At the same time, the elders and deacons are covenanted to assist members first and foremost, to love and lead, provide counsel and aid, and pray for, teach, and guide them.

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace...” -1 Peter 4: 8-10

What is a covenant?

This covenant is a promise by which we obligate ourselves to God and one another (Ezek. 20:44; 36:22; Ps. 76:11; Hos. 2:19-20; 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:13). The Free Grace Church covenant includes a statement of faith, a statement of biblical doctrine, the obligations of Free Grace Church to its members, and the obligations of members to Free Grace Church. Though the covenant does define the relationship between members and the church, it is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to his glory and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:25).

Statement of faith

- I am a Christian saved from the eternal wrath of God by faith in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, through his death and resurrection, by which I am assured of eternal life (John 3:16-18; Rom. 3:23-26).
- I believe Jesus Christ is exactly who he claimed to be: the divine Son of God. (Isa. 53:6; Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:70; John 4:25-26; 6:29; 8:58; 11:25-27; 14:6-7; 15:5).
- I have repented of my sins and have been made a new creation in Christ (1 John 1:9; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- In obedience to Scripture, I have been baptized to personally identify with the death, burial, and resurrection

of Jesus, and to publicly demonstrate my commitment as a disciple of Jesus (Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21).

Statement of Biblical doctrine

- I agree with the “Statement of Beliefs” of Free Grace Church, which are founded upon historic creeds (e.g. Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed) and expressed in our Statement of Beliefs.
- I understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace; I will adhere to Free Grace Church’s position on primary theological issues, and I will not be divisive over secondary issues (Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:7, 17).
- I agree that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the ultimate doctrinal authority on all matters (Is. 55:11; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:15-16; Heb. 4:12).

Obligation of Free Grace Church to its members

- We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- We covenant to seek God’s will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- We covenant to care for you and seek your growth as a disciple of Christ, in part by equipping you for service (Eph. 4:11-13) and praying for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
- We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
- We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
- We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1).

- We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12).

My obligation to Free Grace Church as a member

- I have read and understood the Free Grace Church statement of beliefs and will not be divisive to its teaching. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:7, 17).
- I covenant to submit to the authority of Scripture as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- I will maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines. My relationship will be evident through my participation in weekly worship services, participation in a discipleship group, communion service, and a life that glorifies Jesus (Ps. 105:1-2; Ps. 119:97; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25; 2 Peter 1:3).
- I will steward the resources God has given me, including my time, talents, and treasure for the glory of God, the good of others, and the advance of the kingdom (Prov. 3:9-10; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 5:22-26; Eph. 4:1-16; 5:15-18). This includes regular financial giving, service, and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (Rom. 12:1-8; 2 Cor. 8-9; 12:7-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- I covenant to submit to discipline by God through his Holy Spirit, to follow biblical procedures for church discipline in my relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, to submit to righteous discipline when approached biblically by brothers and sisters in Christ, and to submit to discipline by church leadership if the need should ever arise (Ps. 141:5; Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; Gal. 6:1-5 8; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 1:9; 3:10-11; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:5-7, 14-25).
- I agree, by God's grace, to walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who has saved me from my sin

that I could live a new life (2 Cor. 5:17); I will practice complete chastity before marriage and complete fidelity in heterosexual marriage by abstaining from practices such as cohabitation, pornography, and fornication (Job 31:1; Prov. 5; Rom. 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-7:16; Heb. 13:4); I will refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness, and other sinful behavior as defined by the Bible, and my conscience dictate (1 Cor. 8:7; Gal. 5:19-21). Should I sin in such a manner, I agree to confess my sins to Christian brothers or sisters and seek help to put my sin to death (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5; 1 John 1:6-10).

- I understand that this commitment is voluntary. If I need to leave Free Grace Church, I commit to honor Christ and the peace of this church by leaving in an orderly way free of gossip or slander. I commit to try to work through disagreements among my brothers and sisters in order to maintain unity and fellowship. I also agree to write a letter to the elders if I decide to leave, communicating my intentions.

My Commitment to the Mission of Free Grace Church

The Free Grace Church exists to glorify God by the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the Fresno area.

I have read the mission statement of Free Grace Church and commit to live out this mission as a diligent, faithful disciple of Jesus, that my identity would be in him, my worship would be for him, my fellowship would be through him, and my interaction with the culture would be for his glory.

I understand that this covenant obligates me to the members of Free Grace Church and is an acknowledgement of my submission to the elders of the church. I accept the responsibility to notify Free Grace Church leadership if at any time I can no longer commit to this covenant, or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding Free Grace Church.

Members will sign and date a copy of the covenant and submit to the elders.

Statement of Beliefs

This is a summary of our core beliefs found in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. We are in substantial agreement to this historic statement of faith, which is similar to the Westminster Confession.

- All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible and inerrant Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the sufficient, supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.
- We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross as sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of God the Father, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
- The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
- Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is completely dependent upon the

work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit, repent of their sins, and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

- The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord. Jesus Himself builds His church, and has sent the church to serve him through faithful worship, acts of love and service, and fulfilling the Great Commission.
- Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)
- The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven
and earth,
And in Jesus Chris, his only Son, Our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
Born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell,
the third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father
Almighty,

From thence He shall come to judge the living and the
dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic [*meaning
worldwide*] Church,
the communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting

Amen

Why Formal Membership in a Church?

*Excerpt from the Introduction to Redeemer Seminar Handbook
(adapted from Spiritual Disciplines in the Church, by Donald Whitney, 1996)*

Many benefits of a vital congregation are available to anyone who becomes involved, members or not. But there is a rationale for formal membership:

Church in the NT usually meant a specific local church like that at Ephesus or Corinth. Did people actually join local churches formally, or was it an informal association?

Five indications:

1. The Biblical metaphors used to describe local churches: Flock, temple, body, and household are used specifically of local churches (Acts 20, Eph. 2, 1Cor 12, 1Tim 3). Each of these metaphors has a clear distinction of who is part of the church, and who isn't.
2. The meaning of "the whole church" In 1Cor 14:23, Paul says "if the whole church comes together in one place..." How would the leaders know if the "whole church" was there if no formal relationship was established?
3. The instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership Pastors/overseers/ shepherds were to care for "all the flock" (Acts 20:28. cf. 1Tim 3, Acts 20, Phil 1:1, Titus 1). Leaders of the citywide churches must have had some listing of believers. Since leaders were accountable for the souls of the flock under their care (Heb 13:17), they must have had some commitment for care.
4. The meaning of the word "join" After the fiery end of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:13, no non-Christians

“dared join them [the church], but the people esteemed them highly.” The Greek word for *join* has strong connotations of commitment. The same word is used to speak of sexual relationships (1Cor 6:16) and joining to the Lord (1Cor 6:17).

5. The instructions for church discipline Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5 talk about putting a person out of the church (*remove* NASB, *expe!* NIV) and treating him like an unbeliever. Since unbelievers were welcome at worship, removal must have indicated a distinct formal association. “In the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member. Conversion was described as ‘the Lord adding to the church’ (Acts 2:47). There was no spiritual drifting.” (Douglas Millar).

Biblical Reasons for Joining a Church

1. You have the benefit of receiving the care of, and being accountable to, spiritual leaders. Every believer must “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls” (Hebrews 13:17). This command assumes that you have a covenant with certain spiritual leaders. They are responsible for you and you to them. Some people may say, “I am accountable only to God.” Ultimately, only God has authority over you. But the doctrine of sin should sober us about making ourselves the sole judges over our own hearts, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Hebrews 3:13 says we need others to exhort us “daily” lest we become hardened by sin.
2. You have the benefits of church power to shape the ministry of the congregation. Members choose officers and guide the direction of the congregation. Officers are elected (Acts 6:1-6), by “the people.” Formal

membership entitles you to voting rights within the government of our church. While congregational meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, only members may pass resolutions, vote for changes to the by-laws or nominate and elect the officers. Members officially call the pastors to the work of the church and recommend the annual budget to the Elders.

3. You are not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people (Mark 8:38).
4. You stop being an independent Christian (Matt 18:15-17, Hebrews 13:17).
5. You participate in a stronger, more unified effort of God's people.
6. You have greater opportunities to use spiritual gifts (1Cor 12, Eph. 4).
7. You openly demonstrate the reality of the Body of Christ (1Cor 12:27).
8. You encourage new believers to a commitment to the local body (Heb. 10:24f).