

Church Constitution

for

The Church in []

I. Purpose

- a. The purpose of the church is to glorify the Triune God by doing everything a church can and should do according to what God says in His Word. That involves many things, such as publicly reading the Scriptures,¹ preaching,² teaching,³ admonishing,⁴ encouraging,⁵ confessing sin,⁶ singing,⁷ administering baptism⁸ and the Lord's Supper,⁹ etc.

II. Beliefs

- a. Members and deacons are required to agree¹⁰ to the *Gospel Coalition Confession of Faith*.¹¹
- b. Elders (pastors) of the church are required to agree to the *Gospel Coalition Founding Documents*, as well as (1) *Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), (2) *The Cambridge Declaration* (1996), and (3) *the Confessional Statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition*.

IV. Structure

- a. Christ alone is the head of the church and has all authority over it; all Christians submit finally and ultimately to Christ.¹² Indeed, the church is the *Body of Christ*, which means the character, health, and functionality of the church is determined by the variety, proper use, and expression of the congregation's spiritual gifts.¹³ Although there are church "officers" – members with specific Scriptural responsibilities – they are not the focus of the church or any church service, and they do not have absolute control over the church. There are no categories of "producers" and "consumers" in the Body of Christ, nor should that mentality (or similar) be adopted by any Christian. Everyone contributes, everyone benefits, and everyone is directly accountable to God for their beliefs and behavior.¹⁴ Any structure, program, or attitude that hinders this reality and undermines the well-being of the church is not of God.
- b. Nevertheless, God's perfect and sufficient Word¹⁵ provides a general structure for how the Body is to be governed: through the two primary offices¹⁶ of "elders and deacons."¹⁷ Generally speaking, elders are men that rule and shepherd the church, while deacons are men and women¹⁸ who help and assist in the church.¹⁹ Elders are required to have the ability to teach, while deacons are not required to have teaching abilities (though they may certainly teach if the circumstances require²⁰). Thus, the authority of elders is not the same authority of deacons,²¹ and deacons, like all members, generally defer to the elders.²²
- c. Both elders and deacons are required to have been a member of the church for at least 6 months and enter their office by a minimum of a 2/3 vote by all of the existing church elders as well as 2/3 vote by at least 2/3 the existing church members.²³ A deacon shall be dismissed from office by either (a) volunteer resignation or (b) at least a 2/3 vote of the membership in favor of dismissal. An elder shall be dismissed from his office just the same, only giving priority to the instructions in I Timothy 5:19-21. Finally, no person

under any circumstance should assume any office (deacon/elder) if the person is not fully qualified according to the requirements below.

- i. Elders are qualified men who oversee and shepherd the church. There must be no less than two elders, and no less than one elder for every twelve member-households.²⁴ When elders are needed due to church growth, the existing elders are to call on an available member and train him for at least one year according to the confessional standards of elders before he assumes eldership – if the elders have not already provided adequate training. If there are none available, the church waits patiently on the Lord and regularly prays to bring leaders. If the church has two elders and loses one, the remaining elder is free to keep exercising his gifts but is no longer an elder (in the office with authority over the church), until another comes to restore the proper balance of leadership.
 1. The qualifications for an elder are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.²⁵ Unless a man meets *all* of these qualifications, he shall not be an elder.
 2. All elders are equal in power and authority. All elders are “pastors” since (a) they all have the ability to teach, and (b) Scripture commands “elders” to “shepherd.”²⁶ Nevertheless, there are distinctions within elders due to their spiritual gifts and demonstrated productivity.²⁷ For that reason, the first and most eligible elder to be financially compensated by the church is the elder(s) who specifically labors at preaching and teaching.
 3. In addition to shepherding, training, and ensuring the proper use of spiritual gifts, elders are responsible for upholding, protecting, and following the contents of the church constitution. If it can be demonstrated by any member during an assembly of the congregation that an elder has violated the constitution intentionally and/or without repentance, or shown that an elder consistently fails to embody all of the required qualifications for the office, he will be dismissed from office if a 2/3 vote is met by either the elders or 2/3 the membership.
- ii. Deacons²⁸ and deaconesses are servants of the church (e.g. “deacon of offering,” “deaconess of library,” “deacon of finances,” “deaconess of website,” “deacon of childcare,” “deacon of music,” etc.).²⁹ Deacons’ qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13, and deaconess’s qualifications are listed in 3:11.³⁰ The diaconate primarily meets the material needs of the church, though they are not so limited and may help with spiritual matters if there is a special need (e.g., visitations with the sick and dying, counseling, curriculum preparation, teaching, leading prayer meetings, etc.).

V. Gatherings

- a. The “church” is the Assembly of God’s people. Regular gatherings shall occur twice a week: Home Gatherings and Lord’s Day Gatherings.
- b. Home Gatherings
 - i. Remaining consistent with a biblical ecclesiology is Home Gatherings.³¹ Just as Scripture assumes a plurality of elders over a singular congregation, so Scripture

assumes a proper context where members can grow in intimacy, encourage one another, admonish one another, “being knit together in love”³² and can “confess our sins to one another.”³³ These gatherings build the personal relationships and accountability that allows (and, indeed, encourages) such activities to take place.

- ii. 3-12 member households are to attend a member’s home for the same purposes as the Lord’s Day Gatherings (see below), though with a stronger emphasis on discipleship than more formal preaching and larger corporate worship. It thus involves such things as prayer, confession of sin, conversation over food and Communion, fellowship and training in spiritual matters, etc. Prayer can take place with mixed groups of men and women³⁴ or in groups of men and women. An elder attends each Home Gathering each week, not to teach or control activities, but mainly to ensure that the church can build each other up without being hindered by any major disturbances. These weekly gatherings can occur at any time (except during the Lord’s Day Gathering) and at any member’s home.
- c. Lord’s Day Gatherings
 - i. If the church grows large enough to gather at a larger building/location, the church shall meet for more formal corporate worship gatherings on Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection, according to the pattern of the early church.³⁵
 - ii. The Lord’s Day Gatherings shall consist of three core sessions lasting 30-60 minutes and any additional sessions. Core sessions are the main gatherings and shall not be substituted by any other sessions:
 1. “*Worship*”: This portion of the Sunday assembly is moderated by at least one elder. It consists of (1) the public reading of Scripture (primarily the Psalms and Proverbs) and quiet meditation. (2) prayer, both in general by the worship leader (a church officer), and also by members in multiple small groups of 3-7 persons. (3) the administering of the church ordinances when necessary (Lord’s Supper and Baptism).
 2. “*Teaching*”: This session(s) is designed for orderly teaching of Scripture, theology, etc. Teaching involves a more classroom type setting and participants are encouraged to ask questions and interact with each other and the teacher, though always in a respectful manner.³⁶ Below are the three core courses (not in any particular order):
 - a. *Hermeneutics*. Every year an elder shall teach the church how to interpret the Bible. The primary texts the teacher shall use are Fee and Stuart’s *How to Read the Bible For All It’s Worth* and Patterson and Kostenberger’s *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*.
 - b. *Exegetical and Biblical Theology*. Every odd year (e.g., 2017, 2019) an elder shall teach a year’s worth of exegetical theology. The purpose of exegetical theology is to dig deeper into the line-by-line, book by book study of Scripture. The primary text that the teacher (elder) shall use is the *ESV Study Bible*. All other materials (e.g., theological books) are secondary in usage and importance for the class. The teacher shall teach at a pace

consistent with content and genre of the text, and a teacher shall not teach on the same texts or biblical book without having first gone through all of Scripture. Every even year (e.g., 2018, 2020), an elder shall teach a year's worth of biblical theology. The purpose of biblical theology is to look at a particular theme/motifs or group of themes/motifs in all of Scripture. So while exegetical theology is more zoomed-in and detailed, biblical theology is more zoomed-out and focused on redemptive history. The primary text the teacher shall use is the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and any select title from the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series (IVP).

- c. *Systematic Theology*. If there is sufficient leadership and interest in the church, an additional class of systematic theology is to be offered either at the same time on Sunday (resulting in three simultaneous classes) or different time on Sunday than the previous courses (Hermeneutics and Exegetical/Biblical Theology). On odd years (e.g., 2017, 2019, etc.), an elder shall go through Grudem's *Systematic Theology* or Bavinck's *Our Reasonable Faith*, or a similar work approved by the elders. The teacher shall not take more than one year to teach through the systematic theology. On even years (e.g. 2014, 2016, etc.) the elder shall teach through any /all of the confessional standards for eldership. When finished with the two-year cycle, the class shall start over and repeat.
 - d. If the church grows larger to have enough all three of these core courses (either occurring simultaneously or at different times), additional classes on various topics (e.g. historical theology, apologetic theology, counseling, marriage and family, world religions, philosophical theology, etc.) may take place with prior consent of the elders. These additional classes must be taught by a member with the gift of teaching.
 - e. All members, including children of all ages (if well behaved), are encouraged to attend any and all of the available courses.
3. "*Preaching*": This session consists of a 30-60 minute sermon delivered by an elder on a text of Scripture or a topic addressed in Scripture, preceded and followed by the congregational singing of a hymn.
 - a. If the sermon is expository,³⁷ the text (and its full context, e.g., chapter) is to be read out loud by a church member in the public assembly immediately before the sermon in the translation used by the preacher.
 - b. The number of topical sermons shall not exceed the number of expository sermons for any given year.

- c. All sermons are to be recorded and made available for public download on the church website or other appropriate internet location.
- iii. If the church grows larger to have enough all three of these core sessions (either occurring simultaneously or at different times), additional sessions for various purposes (certain discussions, missions planning, playing and listening to music, etc.) are encouraged to take place with prior consent of the elders.
- iv. During any gathering of the church, members may read from the Bible translation of their choice. However, when a conflict or question arises about a particular translation, the five translations (literal: NRSV, ESV, NASB; dynamic: NET, NIV, idiomatic: NLT) are to be used and consulted for the serious study of the Scriptures. All other alternative renderings of texts (e.g. that of RSV, KJV, CEV, Message, etc.) are given no authority unless a member can demonstrate in the presence of the elders through scholarly research in the original languages, textual criticism, and the rules of exegesis, that his/her translation is superior to the renderings contained in the above five English versions.

VI. Membership

a. Qualifications

- i. It is the elders' responsibility for determining a person's qualification for membership. To qualify for membership, the candidate must be a baptized Christian, show clear signs of regeneration, and show an acute interest in the church by:
 - 1. Participating in three meetings with at least two church elders (if there are two) to get to know each other. One meeting will occur in a "neutral" setting (e.g. coffee shop), another at the candidate's home, and the other at an elder's home.
 - 2. Reading the *Gospel Coalition Confession of Faith*, then discussing any concerns or issues with two or more elders.
 - 3. Faithfully attending (6) Home Gatherings and (6) Lord's Day Gatherings within any 2 month period. If special circumstances (e.g. job, missions, etc.) make this unfeasible, an alternative period of candidacy attendance will be organized by the elders.
- ii. Admission is granted whenever the elders agree that the above requirements have been satisfied. Members are also encouraged to specifically meet with the deacons after obtaining membership if that would help get everyone to know each other (this especially applies to a larger church).
- iii. Duties, Rights, and Church Discipline
 - 1. Regular attendance of the gatherings is recommended. If a member is expecting to be absent (and unavailable for contact) for longer than three weeks, the member must notify the elders beforehand or they will be contacted. If any member has not attended any gatherings for three months without notifying any elder, the member loses membership status.

2. Members in good standing in the church may voluntarily choose to terminate/transfer their membership (e.g. due to change of location, personal interests, church, etc.) by the submission of a letter to the elders requesting membership termination or transfer and their following approval.
3. To keep each other accountable, “church discipline” will take place when appropriate. It can include admonition by the elders or by the congregation, or involve suspension from communion for a definite period, or deposition from office.³⁸ Members may also lose their membership by excommunication, which is the termination of membership in combination with discouraged attendance. If the member demonstrates (a) the consistent unrepentance of ungodly behavior or sin, or (b) demonstrates the consistent unrepentance of teaching false teaching, the one(s) who are informed of this matter are to follow the procedure in Matthew 18:15-18. If this does not lead to a restored fellowship, the elders are free to terminate membership.

VII. Ordinances

- a. The Lord Jesus has instituted two ordinances for the church: the Lord’s Supper and the Baptism of Disciples.³⁹ Both ordinances have no saving merit, but take place after one is saved.
- b. The Lord’s Supper is a serious,⁴⁰ and yet celebratory meal of God’s covenantal faithfulness to His people and a commemoration of the broken Body and shed Blood of Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Immersive baptism, likewise, is a sign of identification with Christ, both in death and resurrection, and a testimony to newness of life. Thus, Baptism is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, and the Table with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God’s pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.⁴²
- c. Any person professing repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and whose life makes that profession credible, desiring to be baptized and become a member of the church, shall make application to the elders, who will then follow through with the process of membership admission outlined in this constitution.
- d. The Lord’s Supper regularly occurs during a Home Gathering every other week and during morning worship at Lord’s Day Gathering every month. Following Scripture’s example, it takes place over a full meal, using wine and bread offered to the members in the form of a loaf so that members may break bread for their portion.⁴³ During the Home Gatherings, 3-12 member households shall provide food for the meal, while the elder shall provide the bread and wine.
- e. The wine and bread is to be distributed by a church officer. Communion is available to anyone professing faith in Christ. Elders may withhold the elements from any person who they believe are not Christians, while deacons may not withhold the elements from anyone unless specifically instructed by the elders to do so.

VIII. Meetings and Elections

- a. Members shall meet at least three times per year at some time apart from the assemblies agreed upon by the membership. An elder designated by the elders shall preside as a moderator at all members' meetings. Minutes shall be recorded by a deacon and archived on the church computer/network.
- b. The elders shall meet at least twice a month to discuss the status and progress of the church.
- c. A budget shall be approved by the membership at a members' meeting not more than three months after the start of the fiscal year. Prior to this approval and subject to the elders' discretion, expenditures may continue at the prior year's level.
- d. At any regular or special members' meeting, officers may be elected and positions filled as needed, so long as all relevant constitutional requirements have been met.
- e. Special members' meetings may be called as required by the elders, or at the written request, submitted to the elders, of ten percent of the voting membership. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church within one week preceding the meeting. In the event of a written request from the members, the elders shall call a special meeting to be held within one month of their receipt of the request.

IX. Amendments

- a. This constitution may be amended by a 2/3 vote of the members present and voting at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote. The revised version of this constitution shall be made available to all church members through the church website.

¹ 1 Tim 4:13.

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¹⁰ By “generally” we mean “essentially” (e.g., basic, central beliefs) and by “strictly” we mean “exhaustively and absolutely” (e.g., every jot and tittle). Elders must be notified if members have a disagreement with the Confessional standards for membership, and the other elders must be notified if an elder has disagreement with confessional standards for eldership.

¹¹ See <http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/confessional/>

¹² Eph. 5:23.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 14-20, Ephesians 4:15-16.

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¹⁵ Ps. 12:6, II Tim 3:16, etc.

¹⁶ By “offices” we simply mean a church-recognized position (which has certain responsibilities) whose qualifications are listed in Scripture (e.g., 1 Timothy 3).

¹⁷ See Php. 1:1, 1 Tim 3, Tit 1:6-9, Rom 16:1-2, etc.

¹⁸ E.g. Rom 16:1. See Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* 16:1; *Institutes*, IV. XIII. 19; Thomas R. Schreiner. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 787; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 944; Douglas Moo, *New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 914.

¹⁹ See, for example, Acts 14:21-23; 20:17, 27-30, Titus 1:5-9, Matt. 18:15-20, Eph. 4:11-13, I Tim. 3:1-7, II Tim. 2:2, James 5:14, etc. See also, James White, “Sufficient as Established” in *Five Views of Church Polity*.

²⁰ See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915-20; Schreiner, *RBMW*, 220.

²¹ “This office of deacons is an office of service, which gives not any authority or power in the rule of the church; but being an office, it gives authority with respect unto the special work.” John Owen. *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 20 (London: R. Baynes, 1826), 524.

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²³ The purpose of a vote from the elders is to ensure that none of the leaders of the church have a serious problem with the officer, and the purpose of a majority vote from most of the congregation is to ensure that the officers are known and supported by the members of the church (e.g., to prevent elders from electing officers and bringing them into the church that are totally unknown to the congregation). For examples of the whole congregation of the church appointing people for tasks/positions, see Acts 6:3, 1:23, 15:22-25, 2 Cor. 8:19.

²⁴ For example, a family of 10 living under one roof and a single man living by himself would constitute two “member-households.”

A plurality of elders is inarguably the biblical form of church government (see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 47; White, “Sufficient as Established,” etc.), and the New Testament assumes that elders know their congregation (this can’t happen when the ratio of pastors to members is, for example, 3:300).

²⁵

1 Timothy		Titus	
3:2	above reproach	1:6, 7	above reproach
3:2	husband of one wife	1:6	husband of one wife
3:2	sober-minded	1:8	disciplined
3:2	self-controlled	1:8	self-controlled
3:2	respectable	—	—
3:2	hospitable	1:8	hospitable
3:2	able to teach	1:9	able to give instruction

—	1:9	able to refute those who contradict
3:3 not a drunkard	1:7	not ... a drunkard
3:3 not violent but gentle	1:7	not ... violent
3:3 not quarrelsome	1:7	not be arrogant or quick-tempered
3:3 not a lover of money	1:7	not ... greedy for gain
3:4–5 manage his own household well, care for God's church	1:7	God's steward
3:4 keeping his children submissive	1:6	children are believers (or "faithful"), not insubordinate
3:6 not a recent convert	—	—
3:7 well thought of by outsiders	—	—
—	1:8	a lover of good; upright, holy

“**Above reproach**” – does not need to be reproached.

“**Husband of one wife**” – the elder must not be a polygamist or unfaithful to his wife (if married).

“**Sober-minded**” and “**disciplined**” – able to pay attention and gets things done.

“**Self-controlled**” – demonstrates wisdom by restraining words and actions, especially under emotional and difficult circumstances.

“**Respectable**” – worthy of respect and high esteem.

“**Hospitable**” – open and welcoming.

“**Able to teach**” and “**give instruction in sound doctrine**” – demonstrates a working knowledge of Christian theology and the ability to communicate it effectively to others.

“**Able to refute those who contradict**” – demonstrates knowledge and ability to do Christian apologetics.

“**Not a drunkard**” – does not abuse alcohol or other intoxicants (e.g. narcotics, etc.).

“**Not violent**” “**but gentle**” – does not seek to intentionally harm someone, moreover, behaves gently and tactfully.

“**Not quarrelsome,**” “**arrogant, or quick tempered**” – refuses to engage in petty arguments, refuses to be condescending to others, and does not react rashly.

“**Not a lover of money**” or “**greedy for gain**” – is not preoccupied with thinking about money.

“**Manage his own household well, care for God's church**” and be “**God's steward**” – maintains a functional and orderly household and demonstrates financial discipline.

“**Keeping children submissive**” who are “**not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination**” – refuses to allow the rebellion of any children in his household (if he has children).

“**Not a recent convert**” – must be a Christian for at least a year, and a member of the church for at least an additional year.

“**Well thought of by outsiders**” – is not notorious; has good public record.

“**A lover of good, upright, and holy**” – demonstrates godliness, that the Spirit is working in his life, and seeks the best interests of the church.

²⁶ I Peter 5:1-4, Eph. 4:11-13.

²⁷ I Tim. 5:17, I Peter 5:1-4.

²⁸ I Tim. 3:8, Phil. 1:1.

²⁹ “it is likely that deacons were charged with visitation of the sick, poor relief, and perhaps financial oversight” Douglas Moo. *New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 914.

While elders have gifts as those who “speak” (e.g. teaching), deacons and deaconesses are (usually) especially gifted as those who “serve” (e.g. administration, serving, encouraging, etc.)

³⁰ I Timothy 3:8-14 contains the minimum qualifications for deacons:

3:8 dignified

3:8 not double-tongued

3:8 not addicted to much wine

3:8 not greedy for dishonest gain

3:9 clear conscience

3:10 tested

3:10 blameless

3:12 husband of one wife

3:12 managing children and household well

“**Dignified**” – does not need to be reproached.
“**Not double-tongued**” – is not known to say one thing and do another.
“**Not addicted to much wine**” – does not abuse alcohol or other intoxicants (e.g. narcotics, etc.).
“**Not greedy for dishonest gain**” – is not preoccupied with thinking about money.
“**Clear conscience**” – follows conscience in questionable situations.
“**Tested**” – demonstrates consistent behavior through time.
“**Blameless**” – lives in a way that simply cannot be faulted.
“**Husband of one wife**” – if married, the deacon must not be a polygamist or unfaithful to his spouse.
“**Managing children and household well**” – maintains a functional and orderly household.

A deaconess must have the following qualifications:

3:11 dignified
3:11 not slanderers
3:11 sober-minded
3:11 faithful in all things

³¹ See Payne and Marshall’s *Trellis and the Vine* (Matthias Media, 2009).

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³³ James 5:16

³⁴ See I Cor. 11:5, Acts 1:12-14.

³⁵ Rev 1:10.

³⁶ See 1 Tim 2:12, 1 Cor 14:34.

³⁷ Generally speaking, an expository sermon consists of walking through the text of Scripture, thought by thought, line by line in an effort to understand the original meaning of the text to the original hearers (entering into the world of the text through exegesis), addressing any biblical-theological issues (how the meaning of the text relates to the overarching themes in all of Scripture, and other places where the same idea or assertion is found) and coming out into the world of Christians living today (application, our response to the text and God’s speaking in it). An expository sermon is not (a) merely an exhaustion of cross references, (b) simply explaining concepts from various words in a text, ignoring the train of thought of the original author, nor (c) topical preaching in disguise, where ideas in the given text is simply a license to deliver a topical sermon on those ideas.

³⁸ See Matthew 18: 15–17; 2 Thessalonians 3: 14–15; 1 Timothy 5: 19–20 20; 1 Corinthians 5: 4–5.

³⁹ See Thomas Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

⁴⁰ See I Corinthians 11:20-34.

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