

OUR SHARED VALUES

ISSUE 4

Editorial

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CONTENTS

Introduction (Mark Prater)	5
1. Our Shared Values (Jeff Purswell)	7
2. The Purpose of Our Shared Values (Mickey Connolly)	11
3. The God Who Saves: The Shared Value of Reformed Theology (Rick Gamache)	15
4. Of First Importance: The Shared Value of Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching (Jeff Purswell)	21
5. The Spirit and the Gifts: The Shared Value of Continuationist Pneumatology (Jared Mellinger)	31
6. Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: The Shared Value of Complementarian Leadership in the Home and in the Church (Josh Blount)	39
7. Faithful Shepherds: The Shared Value of Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches (C. J. Mahaney)	47
8. Evangelism and Missions: The Shared Value of Church Planting, Outreach, and Global Missions (Dave Taylor)	57
9. Partners in Christ and for His Gospel: The Shared Value of United Fellowship, Mission, and Governance (Jon Payne)	63
10. Our Seven Shared Values and the Pastor (Joel Carlson)	71
11. The Seven Shared Values in Mexico: Two Values Make all the Difference (Abelardo Muñoz)	75
12. The Seven Shared Values in Germany: How Reformed Theology Changed Everything (Christian Wegert)	81

13. The Seven Shared Values in the Philippines: Gospel-Inspired Church Planting Efforts (Jeffrey Jo)	85
14. Praying Through Our Seven Shared Values (Gary Ricucci)	89
Recommended Reading	97

INTRODUCTION

Mark Prater

Executive Director, Sovereign Grace Churches

Eight years ago, when we formed our polity, Sovereign Grace Churches identified seven key convictions that characterize our churches, define who we are for the benefit of others, and bring unity to our ministry and mission. We call these convictions our “Seven Shared Values,” to which this edition of the journal is dedicated.

It’s important to note that our Seven Shared Values vary in importance. Some represent foundational theological commitments, others differentiate us from other denominations, and others speak to how we function together as a family of churches. Collectively they express a faithful application of our biblical values, and they define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace church.

Why are these shared values important for you? Because they actually function daily in the life of your church. Mickey Connolly does a wonderful job showing us how they function in his article entitled, “The Purpose of Our Shared Values.” And in his typical winsome fashion, Jeff Purswell talks about why gospel centrality is such an important part of our culture in his article entitled, “Of First Importance.” But the gospel is also good news that must be proclaimed, which is why you must read Dave Taylor’s article, “Evangelism and Missions.”

Our shared values not only shape our churches; they shape our pastors. In his article, “Faithful Shepherds,” C. J. Mahaney skillfully shows how pastors in Sovereign Grace think about and approach pastoral ministry: as shepherds who serve the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

To live out our shared values, we need the grace of God. Therefore, I’m so grateful for the prayer that Gary Ricucci wrote, “Praying Through our Seven Shared Values.” It contains prayers for each value and declares our dependence

on God. Please join me in praying Gary's prayer so that we can be a people who apply our shared values in a manner that brings glory, honor, and praise to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Mark

OUR SHARED VALUES

Jeff Purswell

Director of Theology, Sovereign Grace Churches

Editors' note: When we formulated our revised polity in 2013, Sovereign Grace Churches identified seven key convictions that would characterize our churches, define who we are for the benefit of others, and bring unity to our life, ministry, and mission. The following description of these values comes from our website: sovereigngrace.com.

Our churches embrace the following seven convictions. We believe they are a faithful application of our biblical values and shape our local practices and ministries regardless of our context. They define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace church.

1. Reformed Theology

Scripture presents the all-glorious, triune God as the source and end of all things (Rom. 11:36), sovereignly working all things according to his will (Eph. 1:11). At the center of God's purposes in the world is the exaltation of his glory through the redemption of sinners (John 17:1–26). To this end, we believe that God sovereignly chooses men and women to be saved in order to display his immeasurable grace and glory (Eph. 1:3–6; Rom. 9:11). God's sovereign grace in salvation humbles us, fills us with gratitude, and compels us to worship him and share the message of his grace to all people.

2. Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching

We believe that the gospel—the good news of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ—is the pinnacle of his redemptive acts (Eph. 1:9–12), the center of the Bible's story (Luke 24:44–47), and the essential message for our faith, life, and witness (1 Cor. 15:3–11). We are committed to preaching the gospel, singing the gospel, praying the gospel, and building our churches upon the gospel (2 Tim. 4:2; Col. 3:16; Matt. 16:18). Our ultimate hope in all that we do is not

our plans and labors but the perfect life, substitutionary death, victorious resurrection, and glorious ascension of Jesus Christ.

3. Continuationist Pneumatology

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God's purpose to dwell among his people entered a new era (Ex. 33:14–16; Lev. 26:12; John 14:16–17; Acts 2:14–21). We believe the Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with increased power for Christian life and witness, including the giving of his supernatural gifts for the building up of the church and for various works of ministry in the world (Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:16–18; 1 Cor. 12:4–7). We are eager to pursue God's active presence in all its breadth so that Christ may be magnified in our lives, in the church, and among the nations (Ps. 105:4; 1 Cor. 14:1; Eph. 2:22).

4. Complementarian Leadership in the Home and in the Church

We believe it was God's glorious plan to create men and women in his image, giving them equal dignity and value in his sight while appointing differing and complementary roles for them within the home and the church (Gen. 1:26–28; Eph. 5:22–33; 1 Tim. 2:8–15). Because these roles give different expressions to God's image in humanity, they should be valued and pursued in joy and faith. As the redeemed community of God, the church has a unique opportunity and responsibility to celebrate this complementarity, contend for it against cultural hostility, and protect it from sinful distortions.

5. Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches

Jesus Christ reigns as head over his church, and he gives to his church elders (or pastors) to govern and lead local churches under his authority (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5). We believe that men, qualified by both character and gifting, are to serve as elders, shepherding God's people as under-shepherds of Christ (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1–7; 1 Pet. 5:1–3). A church's health is to a great degree dependent on the health of its elders, and so our aim is to strengthen the current elders in our churches while identifying and training new ones (Acts 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2).

6. Church Planting, Outreach, and Global Mission

Our gospel-centrality entails not only treasuring the gospel personally but sharing it passionately. The risen Christ commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). We believe that commission falls to us and all believers and is fulfilled primarily through church planting, whereby the gospel is proclaimed and converts are formed into communities of disciples (Acts 2:21–47; 14:23). We are eager to pursue this mission, relying fully on the Holy Spirit, to see the gospel proclaimed and churches planted throughout the world so that God may be glorified among every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev. 7:9–12).

7. United Fellowship, Mission, and Governance

We believe that the unity for which Jesus prayed among his people should find concrete expression among believers and churches. Indeed, the New Testament testifies to a vibrant interdependence among churches in the first century (John 17:20–21; Acts 16:4–5; 1 Cor. 11:16; Gal. 2:7–10).

We seek to express a similar interdependence through our common fellowship, mission, and governance. Our fellowship extends beyond mere denominational affiliation; we are committed to applying the gospel together in relationships that foster mutual encouragement, care, and a glad pursuit of Christlikeness. Our shared governance and mission protect our churches doctrinally and ethically, enabling our individual churches to do more together than we could ever do separately.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR SHARED VALUES

Mickey Connolly

Elder Emeritus, Crossway Community Church (Charlotte, NC)

I'm pretty certain it was humorist Art Buchwald who, when asked about the purpose of a club he was forming, said "To keep other people out." I thought about that when considering the purpose behind our Seven Shared Values (as well as our Statement of Faith and Book of Church Order). Some see such attempts to define a denomination as a black mark on Christianity, an attempt "to keep other people out." After all, isn't the church supposed to be just one big happy family?

Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that all born-again believers are united to Jesus and united to one another through him. But the answer is also no.

For believers hoping to partner together meaningfully on gospel mission, it is important to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). Along these lines, Richard Phillips wisely said:

Denominations allow us to have organizational unity where we have full agreement and allow us to have spiritual unity with other denominations since we are not forced to argue our way to perfect agreement but can accept our differences of opinion on secondary matters.¹

That's precisely what our Seven Shared Values do for us.

The Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith serves as the defining document for what we believe within our denomination. But on the other hand, these

1. Richard D. Phillips, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 27.

shared values capture seven convictions that define us, unite us, and keep us on course as we partner together.

Our Values Define Us for Others

Could a church that is Arminian, congregational, egalitarian, and cessationist be Christian? Yes, of course. But would that church be at home in Sovereign Grace? Decidedly not. That's okay; we wouldn't be at home with them either. Could a believer who is convinced of the wisdom of congregational church government be happy in our elder-led churches? Probably not.

Our shared values say unashamedly, "This is who we are," and allow like-minded churches and Christians to join us. Over the years, we have been blessed to have individuals and churches contact us about relating because our values attract them. Of late, this has been particularly true of global churches.

Not requiring perfect agreement in all things also frees us to partner with other gospel-centered churches in our cities and towns. It is a joy to support, encourage, serve with, and pray for our brothers and sisters who don't share all our values but do share the critical value of making disciples of Jesus and loving our neighbors in need.

Our Values Unite Us

"Being of full accord and of one mind" becomes vital for every member church and pastor of a denomination. But that doesn't mean we are clones. While there is certainly room for differences on secondary matters and practical applications, there must be unity on matters that we consider essential to our partnership. And that's exactly what our Seven Shared Values provide.

Partnership isn't simply about our values but also our mission. At a recent Sovereign Grace Pastors Conference, Jared Mellinger, drawing from Eckhard Schnabel, talked about how partnership in the gospel is centrally connected to the advance of the gospel.² Jared went on to say that such partnership

2. Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Vol. 2, Paul and the Early Church* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2004), 1460.

actually promotes and protects our gospel mission. Though we love and are committed to our seven values, we must always remember that those values aren't an end but a means to the end of our gospel mission. And our gospel mission is a means to the greatest end of all: the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in all the earth!

Our Values Keep Us on Course

In the normal hustle and bustle of local church life, it can be surprisingly easy for a stated value to slowly cease to function or at least function well. In this way, our Seven Shared Values are an invaluable evaluation tool. Pastoral teams would be wise as part of their cyclical evaluations to ask, "How are our values being expressed practically in our local church life?" They should also ask, "What can we do to shore up a particular value?" A few examples will suffice.

We value continuationist pneumatology. We believe the Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with increased power for Christian life and witness, including the giving of his supernatural gifts.³ But are we encouraging our members toward this value, especially new members who perhaps haven't had teaching or experience with continuationism?

How about church planting, outreach, and global mission? Are we informing and encouraging our churches about this part of our mission? Are we creating ways for our members to participate practically through prayer, giving, and participation in a plant or a mission team? Even if it may seem a ways off, are we strategizing and praying about how our local church may plant in the future?

Remembering One Thing

As we consider these things, let's make sure we don't miss one other thing Paul says in Philippians 2: "having the same love." Shared values don't produce denominational harmony apart from an affectionate commitment to one another and to Sovereign Grace on the whole.

3. Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, "The Empowering Ministry of the Holy Spirit."

It's no coincidence that biblical authors regularly connect theological unity with heartfelt affection. Peter puts it this way: "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (1 Pet. 3:8). In Ephesians 4:1–3, Paul finishes unpacking the glorious doctrine of God's eternal plan for his people, the church, by exhorting them to unity.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1–3)

As we practice our shared values, let's also make sure we continue to share them in that spirit of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. As we used to say and still affirm, "Sovereign Grace is a family of churches." Our Seven Shared Values combined with our affectionate commitment to one another wonderfully define and unite us as a denomination. Our unity is not one of uniformity. It is one of rich diversity gathered around shared values to the glory of God and the mutual edification of our churches.

THE GOD WHO SAVES

THE SHARED VALUE OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Rick Gamache

Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Community Church (Burnsville, MN)

*We believe that God sovereignly chooses men and women to be saved
in order to display his immeasurable grace and glory.*

The first of our Seven Shared Values is Reformed theology, which sees in Scripture God's glorious sovereignty and centrality in all things. This includes the salvation of his image-bearers, which is at the center of his purposes. This article will focus on God's sovereignty in salvation, particularly the doctrine of election.

Let's toss our anchor into Ephesians 1 so that the fluke can catch hold on verse 4. Here's what it says (beginning with verse 3):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he [God the Father] chose us in him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Eph. 4:3–4)

The string of salvation gems that Paul unpacks in this chapter are ours because God chose us. And it's the doctrine of election that's at the center of Reformed soteriology. Election is the choice of God before creation to save some people, not because of any foreseen good or merit in them, but based only on his sovereign will.

The term "election" can stir up thoughts and emotions among Christians that aren't always positive, leading to disagreement and debate. So why is it one of our main values? Why is it one of our core doctrines? Why is it alluded to in our name? I hope to provide answers and, in so doing, to help us see that not

only ought it be a core value of our denomination but also a core doctrine in our lives. It's a truth to be embraced and cherished and delighted in. Why? There are definitely many reasons, but we'll focus on four.

1. Election is the Foundation of the Gospel

The doctrine of election is the very foundation of the gospel. Let me explain. Here's what I know was true about me apart from Christ (this was true about you too, whether you were saved years ago or yesterday). I know that I was cut off from God, hostile toward him, and doing evil deeds (Col. 1:21). I was enslaved to my sin (Rom. 6:17). I was condemned as God's enemy (Rom. 5:10). I was caught in the snare of the devil (2 Tim. 2:26). I had Satan as my father (John. 8:44) and did his will (Eph. 2:2). I was dead in my sin, a son of disobedience, a child of wrath, living in the lust of my flesh (Eph. 2:1–3). My understanding was darkened, my heart was incurably sick, and I was excluded from life with God (Eph. 4:18–19). I was destined for the fiery agony of eternal hell (Mark 9:47–48) to experience conscious torment (Luke 16:24) and drink the wine of God's wrath poured full strength into the cup of his anger (Rev. 14:10). Any knowledge of God I had was only sufficient to damn me (Rom. 1:20). I was free to choose according to my sinful nature, and I freely chose to run headlong away from God to hell. I had the free will to choose hell, but no ability to choose heaven. Hell is what I deserved.

There I was, totally unable to choose God. Yet I was completely unaware. What Jesus said in John 6:44 was true of me: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws [or drags] him." It wasn't gentle wooing that I required. I needed God to drag me off the wide road of destruction, to reach down and pull me away from my suicidal fascination with sin. I needed God to haul me away from the devil and invade my soul. And, praise him, that's what he did! God broke in and raised me from my spiritual deadness, making me alive to Christ so that he appeared to me to be irresistibly beautiful. By his gift of faith, he placed me firmly and forever in Christ and put the Spirit of Christ in me.

Ephesians 1 is true of everyone who banks their hope on Jesus. We are blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing (v. 3). We are adopted as God's sons and

daughters through Jesus (v. 5). We are blessed in the Beloved (v. 6). In Christ, we have redemption and the forgiveness of our sins (v. 7). In him, God's grace is lavished on us (v. 8). God is making known to us the mystery of his will in Christ (v. 9). With Jesus, we have an inheritance (v. 11). In him, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (v. 13) so that the inheritance is guaranteed (v. 14).

For all of that, God paid a very high cost. "In him we have redemption *through his blood*, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7, emphasis mine). Jesus came to rescue us from the devastation of sin and purchase for us all these blessings and many more, but at what cost? He was despised and rejected and stricken and wounded and smitten and chastised and marred and oppressed and beaten and crushed and torn and whipped and tortured and killed for us.

An honest reading of Ephesians 1 leads us to ask questions. How is it that I'm saved? How is it that I'm in Christ? How is it that the blessings of the Father are mine? How is it that I'm God's adopted child? How is it that my sins are forgiven? How can it be that I'm an heir of God and co-heir with Jesus? How can it be that I am now indwelt and secured by the Holy Spirit? I see nothing here (or anywhere in the Bible) that gives any indication that it had anything to do with me or you. We didn't make a decision for Jesus. We didn't invite him into our hearts. We sinned and rebelled. So how is it that you and I are saved?

An equally honest reading of Ephesians 1 provides the answers. Ephesians 1:4 says he chose us "before the foundation of the world." This is the ultimate explanation for everything. The gloriously unshakeable foundation of our being in Christ is that God chose us to be in Christ. God is sovereign in the salvation of sinners. Feel the weight and wonder of that. Feel the love in that. Before the sun was formed, before any star was hung in the sky, before the earth existed, before the oceans were poured, God Almighty set his electing love on you. Ephesians 1:5: "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons." Knowing that it would cost him the excruciating death of his Son, God chose us. And Jesus, knowing the agony that awaited him, came to save us.

However weak you feel today, whatever struggle you're enduring, no matter the state of your marriage or family, whatever conflict you're facing, never

forget this: God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world. It didn't rest on whether we would accept him. He loved us and took us for himself as his treasured possession. And he will keep us forever.

Our salvation is anchored in the rock of God's sovereign choice, not in our own fickle decision. That means we are eternally safe in his omnipotent hands. Salvation does not rest in you or in me. It rests in God alone. That's a reason to delight in this core value.

2. Election Humbles Us

The doctrine of election humbles us. The truth of this doctrine is precious beyond words, but it gets personal as we think about unsaved loved ones. I have sleepless nights, pleading for God to save those close to me. Yet I know that I must let God be God. And I must let the Bible reveal to me who he is.

I cannot surrender to my philosophical assumptions just because the deeper answers to the most profound questions belong to another. Who am I to say that God cannot choose some individuals to be saved unconditionally and still have compassion for all men and desire that they are saved? It's not up to me to declare that God's absolute sovereignty in the salvation of sinners renders men guiltless for rejecting God. Those are philosophical assumptions, not biblical statements. I don't deny that God feels genuine compassion for perishing people. I don't deny that God desires all men to be saved. I don't deny that God loves the world. I don't deny that God sovereignly chooses those he saves, yet all people are responsible for responding to the gospel with faith and repentance. I believe it because the Bible teaches it, not because I completely understand it.

To cut the mysteries out of the Bible is to have a puny theology of a puny God. And God is not puny. You know who's puny? I am. You are. It takes humility to see and admit that truth even as our pride rages against it. God is infinitely wise and gloriously complex, and wonderfully complete beyond our comprehension. That's what makes him God. And if we will allow it, that's what humbles us. It's the height of arrogance to assume we have the capacity to grasp the details of God's eternal counsel. It takes a humble person to be

content with mystery. Pride demands answers to every question. But we say, “O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me” (Ps. 131:1).

God keeps secrets. Deuteronomy 29:29 says so: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God keeps secrets. Do you know why? To keep us humble. Listen to what John Calvin says on this point:

The subject of predestination, which in itself is attended by considerable difficulty, is rendered very perplexed, and hence perilous, by human curiosity, which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden paths . . . to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness.⁴

Humility accepts not knowing when God has not offered wisdom. And God promises more grace to the humble (James 4:6). That’s a reason to delight in this difficult doctrine. That’s a reason to make it a key value in our churches.

3. Election Guarantees Effective Evangelism

The doctrine of election also guarantees effective evangelism. Jesus himself says in John 10:16, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” That statement is the banner over all our evangelism. Jesus has other sheep. All over the world. There are sinners out there on whom God has set the sights of his electing love who have not yet been shot through with the gospel’s saving power. They might live next door to us. They might be at the office tomorrow morning. They might be at the next desk in class, or the barista who takes our coffee order. Jesus says that he *must* bring them and that they *will* listen to his voice.

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 404.

Where does Jesus get the authority to call people “sheep” who are not even in the fold yet? Answer: he gets the authority from the Father. In John 10:29 he says, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all.” In other words, God has chosen a people to be his sheep. They are his elect sheep whom he chose before the foundation of the world. He gives the chosen sheep to his Son, Jesus, so that they can be saved by faith in him. And because they are elect sheep given to Jesus, he must bring them into the fold. So when he calls, they will come. They are Christ’s own sheep by the choice of the Father.

Election does not undermine evangelism and mission, as some contend. On the contrary, election makes evangelism hopeful and guarantees missional success. Evangelism is God using us to call his sheep. Isn’t that remarkable? Jesus still summons his sheep through the gospel by the Spirit’s power, but he uses our mouths to deliver the message. We are his ambassadors. When we call on behalf of Jesus, the elect sheep will come. They will hear and respond. May that fill us with hope and encouragement and courage to speak words of light and life to those we encounter every single day. They just may be sheep that the Father chose in Christ before the foundation of the world.

4. Election Leads to a Deeper Experience of God-Centered Worship

Finally, the doctrine of election leads us into a deeper experience of God-centered worship. That makes sense since this doctrine, the foundation of our very salvation, humbles us before God by guaranteeing the success of our mission.

Drawing us into a deeper experience of God-centered worship is exactly what God intends for election to do. Ephesians 1 is one long outburst of worship. The first words after the greeting are: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). It goes on to repeat expressions of worship: “To the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6); “To the praise of his glory” (v. 12); “To the praise of his glory” (v. 14). Paul is lost in a deep experience of worship as he pens these words. The doctrine of election is not a call to theological debate, it’s a call to worship! The only appropriate response to the good news of election is passionate praise and wonder-filled worship. It is more than worthy of being a key value in our churches and in our lives.

OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

THE SHARED VALUE OF GOSPEL-CENTERED DOCTRINE AND PREACHING

Jeff Purswell

Director of Theology, Sovereign Grace Churches

Adults who grew up watching Sesame Street have ingrained somewhere in their brains the song “One of These Things.” This short, four-line earworm accompanied sketches where viewers would be shown a group of four items, one of which was different in some way from the other three. It was like a musical stopwatch: the goal was to identify the item that didn’t belong before the song ended. “One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn’t belong. Can you tell which thing is not like the others by the time I finish this song?”

We derive all seven of Sovereign Grace’s shared values from Scripture, but one of them stands apart in its biblical primacy; one of them “is not like the others.” As expressions of biblical teaching given for our good, we rejoice in and celebrate all of these values, but we reserve our most focused attention, our most diligent pursuit, and our greatest passion for one particular value: the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. The Imperative of Gospel-Centrality

Nowhere do we see gospel-centrality more clearly than in the ministry of the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, we read these famous words:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you. . . . For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Cor. 15:1, 3–5)

Paul sets the stage for his argument in this chapter by recalling his founding visit to this city and the founding message of this church plant. His priority then remains his priority now: the gospel. His pastoral strategy is as illuminating as it is instructive. In highlighting the gospel's primacy, Paul immediately puts the topic he's about to address—and indeed, any topic in the Christian life—in its proper context and proportion. Nothing exceeds the gospel in significance, and nothing is to distract from the gospel's prominence. Scripture reserves “of first importance” for only one message. All that God reveals to us is important and necessary (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Some things he reveals are of special importance (cf. Matt. 23:23). But there is only one thing of “first importance”: the gospel of Christ.

Gospel Clarity

Readers of the biblical Gospels, recalling the vast wealth of testimony concerning Jesus in these four books, might ask, “Aren't these the gospel?” Mark's account is particularly instructive, carrying the headline “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The four Gospel texts narrate the events of Jesus' life: his baptism, ministry, teaching, miracles, confrontations with religious leaders, and care for his disciples, as well as his betrayal and trials, his beating and scourging, his agonizing death, his astonishing resurrection, and (in Luke's case) his ascension. In other words, for the gospel writers the gospel is the story about Jesus and all he did to save us.

Paul's presentation is not at odds with Mark's, but his gaze is more focused. If Mark's gospel is wide-angle, capturing the breadth of Jesus' incarnational glory, Paul's is telephoto, zooming in on the blazing core of Jesus' saving work.

Paul spells out this core of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 with an elegant and highly structured statement. Four verbs summarize the gospel's core content, but the emphasis is clearly on the first and third verbs: Christ died and Christ was raised. “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,” and “he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” Christ's substitutionary death satisfied God's justice, absorbed his wrath, atoned for our sins, and secured our acceptance before God. His resurrection vindicated him as God's Son, the divine Messiah, and our Savior and Lord.

Gospel Objectivity

There lies on the very surface of Paul's gospel something we in our self-focused lives often miss: it is objective. The gospel is news. It is the announcement of a concrete, divinely planned, historically accomplished achievement. It is all that God did through Jesus to save his people.

This means the gospel is outside of us. It's not about what we do, what we think, or how we feel. We don't look inside ourselves to find the good news. We don't rely on our righteousness for God's acceptance. Our standing before God doesn't depend upon my emotions or my achievements. The Christian's hope for forgiveness and acceptance before God lies completely and forever in Jesus Christ, whose substitutionary death paid for our sins and whose perfect righteousness is credited to us. It is, indeed, "of first importance." No better news exists.

2. The Logic of Gospel-Centrality

The heart marveling over God's mercy in Christ needs no convincing about the gospel's priority. But in chapter 2 of this letter, Paul makes an even more sweeping claim:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

Paul moves from gospel priority to gospel pervasiveness. The gospel wasn't just first in a hierarchy of topics but it is the one topic that governed all others. Paul addresses other topics, to be sure. But for him, the gospel's truth, theological implications, and life entailments framed and shaped every issue he addressed. This is precisely what we see throughout the letter of 1 Corinthians.

"Nothing but Christ? Isn't that narrow? Won't such a gospel fixation impoverish a church, or leave a Christian unbalanced in his thinking and living?" Such questions fail to grasp the massive realities behind Paul's resolve. Far from constricting our lives and vision, the pervasiveness of the gospel liberates us to see and experience ever-expanding, Christ-magnifying glories.

The Greatest Revelation of God

Paul reaffirms his relentless Christ-centeredness to the Colossian Christians, tempted as they were to minimize their salvation and marginalize Christ. “Him we proclaim,” Paul writes, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). The “him” Paul proclaims is none other than Christ “who is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), the one who perfectly mirrors the life and nature and character of God. Paul’s language is echoed by the writer to the Hebrews: “He is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3).

The gospel is not merely a theological formulation or abstract truth. It’s the announcement of a Person—infinite in beauty, unrivaled in authority, omnipotent in power, and ever tender towards his own. Constant attention to the gospel keeps our eyes riveted on the One who most fully reveals God to us. As John Piper counsels,

If any person or any power or any wisdom or any love awakens any admiration or any amazement or any joy, let it be the greatest person and the greatest power and the greatest wisdom and the greatest love that exists—Jesus Christ.⁵

The Divine Disclosure of the Cross

Amidst the manifold glories we see in Christ, it is ironic that the most penetrating glimpse comes at the point of Jesus’s greatest humiliation. A critical turning point occurs in John’s gospel when Jesus recognized the arrival of his appointment with the cross: “The hour [the moment of his death; cf. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1] has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23). Jesus came not to suffer but to be glorified: to display visibly the divine majesty and splendor.

This display, however, was not to be one of transfiguration glory. It would appear to be almost the opposite, drawing disgusted gasps and merciless taunts.

5. John Piper, *Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 32–33.

Yet for those with eyes to see, here was divine glory: the self-giving of the Son of God to rescue undeserving sinners. Here was God's ultimate self-disclosure, a revelation of divine love and mercy that staggers the guilty heart. The cross was the perfect reconciliation of transcendent holiness, uncompromising justice, sacrificial mercy, and resolute love (Rom. 3:21–25; 5:8).

To be gospel-centered, to preach “Christ and him crucified,” is anything but narrow and restricted. It is only through that gospel that our eyes can be opened to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

The Climax of God's Redemptive Purposes

Paul's ministry also reflected a profound grasp of the fabric of God's purposes. He resolved to keep “Christ and him crucified” central because all of salvation history culminated in the cross and the empty tomb.

As Paul pondered the cosmos, he saw Christ as the head of all things and his atoning work as the hinge on which all history turned. “In him,” Paul explained to the Colossians, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19–20).

The cross was the event that inaugurated the redemption of creation from the curse of the fall. Here was the decisive moment when God acted to reclaim his image-bearers from the guilt and bondage of sin. This was the battlefield where Christ disarmed rulers and authorities, putting them to open shame (Col. 2:15). This was the key moment in God's eternal plan to sum up the entire cosmos in Christ (Eph. 1:10).

The core of the gospel—Jesus crucified and risen—towers over all reality as the crucial divine act that governs human history. To keep the gospel central, then, is simply to reflect the reality that there is nothing in creation, in history, or in our lives that is disconnected from the cross.

The Unifying Key to the Bible

All of this helps us understand, interpret, and proclaim God's rich and varied revelation to us in the Scriptures. Unlike the holy books of many other religions, the Bible is not a collection of timeless truths, or a set of theological data detached from life and history. God's revelation in Scripture is redemptive revelation. It presents, interprets, and celebrates God's saving initiatives towards his fallen creation, the bullseye of which is those who bear his image. The culmination of these saving actions, the moment to which all lead and in which all find their deepest significance, is the person and work of Jesus Christ. To understand any part of this revelation of God's saving acts, we must understand its connection to the greatest of all of God's saving acts: Jesus and his definitive work on the cross.

Following Christ's Example

It is Jesus himself who gives us this exegetical imperative. After his resurrection, in what surely was the greatest Bible study of all time, Jesus enlightens two crestfallen disciples about what has just transpired in Jerusalem. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). A short time later, Jesus gave a similar lesson to his apostles: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

In his life, death, resurrection, and reign, Jesus fulfilled all that the Old Testament recounted, foretold, patterned, and promised. And for all that follows, from the birth of the New Covenant church in Acts 2 until the consummation of all things at his return, Christ's person and saving work on the cross is the fountainhead.

Herman Bavinck exemplifies this understanding:

The doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either

prepare for it or are inferred from it. In it, as the heart of dogmatics, pulses the whole of the religious-ethical life of Christianity.⁶

This is why Sovereign Grace is committed to gospel-centered doctrine and preaching. We are not gospel-centered by happenstance or to jump on a Reformed bandwagon. We are gospel-centered because all of history is gospel-centered. Our doctrine is gospel-centered because all of God's revelation has, as its unifying core, the person and work of Christ. Our preaching is gospel-centered because the Bible is gospel-centered.

3. The Fruit of Gospel-Centrality

A steadfast resolve to keep Christ and his work central is certainly a vital safeguard against pragmatic approaches to life and ministry. A deeper look, however, shows this to be the way of authentic, joy-giving, Christ-exalting fruitfulness.

A Saving Gospel

At the beginning of his great gospel manifesto in the letter to the Romans, Paul claims, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). The gospel is more than mere information; it is a force, the very power of God unleashed in the world. It alone has the power to penetrate cold hearts, to pierce hardened consciences, and to give new life to spiritually dead sinners. Our only hope for forgiveness lies in what Christ has accomplished and in what God is pleased to do through the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:21).

A Sufficient Gospel

But the work of the gospel doesn't end at conversion. It is like a seed that takes root in the heart and continues to grow (Col. 1:5–6), shaping our thinking, feeling, and living. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes this explicit when he transitions from his rich Christological opening to the letter's body,

6. Herman Bavinck, *Sin, Salvation, and Christ*, Vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 274.

where he calls for their response: “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7). Doug Moo comments, “As they have begun, so they must continue, looking to Christ and Christ alone for all their spiritual needs.”⁷

One can hardly open to a New Testament letter without finding such sweeping connections between the gospel and every dimension of our existence. We are to “let [our] manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). At every point we are to ensure that our conduct is “in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14). We speak the truth about Christ to one another that we may “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Our very destiny as believers is “to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

Every spiritual blessing in the Christian life was purchased by Jesus on the cross and flows to believers through their union with Christ. All that we are and all that we need comes, by grace and through faith, from the all-embracing provision of God in Jesus Christ, applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Gospel-centered doctrine perceives this, gospel-centered preaching proclaims this, and gospel-centered living cherishes and pursues this in faith.

A Bountiful Gospel

To place the gospel at the center of one’s life is not simply to comply with orthodoxy; it is to get treasure. Paul marvels that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3). The bounty contained in the gospel, its provisions, and its promises are endless. It assures us of the love of God, frees us from the weight of guilt, and liberates us from the tyranny of sin. It reorients our hearts with new loves and desires, and empowers us to treasure Christ, fight sin, and love others. It comforts us in grief, sustains us in suffering, and works all things together for the glory of God and the good of those he’s made his own. It gives us a sure hope as we wait for Christ’s

7. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PN TC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 175.

return, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our Greatest Good

Indeed, the moment still awaits when we will receive the greatest gift of the gospel, dwarfing all of its manifold benefits: Christ himself. The gospel doesn't simply bestow impersonal blessings upon us; the gospel gives us God! We were separated from him in our sin, objects of his wrath, and destined for eternal judgment. But God, in his love, acted through Christ to remove those barriers, opening wide the way to *himself*. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). In his presence alone we will find "fullness of joy" and "pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). The gospel isn't a means to the goal of personal blessing. Jesus himself is the goal, the all-glorious, all-satisfying end of the gospel.

Gospel Community

Gospel-centered doctrine and preaching foster something beyond individual blessing: the privilege of sharing this gospel bounty together. The gospel alone breaks down the wall of hostility between people hopelessly divided by sin, selfishness, ethnic hatred, and class prejudice (Eph. 2:14–16). It joins together "strangers and aliens" into a family, the household of God (Eph. 2:19). It constitutes us as God's temple, the very dwelling place of God on earth where he makes his presence most fully known (1 Cor. 3:16).

We love (Rom. 13:8), we encourage (1 Thess. 5:11), we build up (1 Cor. 12:7), we forgive (Col. 3:13), we pray (James 5:16), we bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), we stir one another up to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). Such gospel fruit isn't to be contained within a church's walls. By "holding fast to the word of life," we endeavor to shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation (Phil. 2:15–16) which is desperate for the gospel, just as we once were.

When a church is planted firmly in the soil of the gospel, a culture of grace will inevitably emerge. In addition to our Seven Shared Values, we in Sovereign Grace also like to speak of Seven Shaping Virtues: humility, joy, gratitude,

encouragement, generosity, servanthood, and grace-empowered godliness. We long for our churches to breathe this heavenly air, produced not by human effort but by guarding, cherishing, and applying the gospel.

4. Our Highest Value

In 2022 Sovereign Grace Churches celebrated its 40th anniversary. Much has transpired, and many things have changed over these years. One thing has remained consistent by God's mercy: the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the lives of our members, in our churches, in our preaching and pastoring, and in our mission. Any good that has been done, and any fruit that has been borne, undoubtedly derives from this priority.

Whatever purposes God has for our future together, our fervent prayer and deep resolve is to adhere steadfastly to that matter of first and all-pervasive importance. *Nothing is more vital to the ongoing life, health, mission—indeed, the very existence of Sovereign Grace Churches—than a growing understanding, a deeper treasuring, an intentional application, and a faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

May the Lord sustain us in this conviction, to the praise of his glorious grace—which comes to us only through the gospel.

THE SPIRIT AND THE GIFTS

THE SHARED VALUE OF CONTINUATIONIST PNEUMATOLOGY

Jared Mellinger

Lead Pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church (Glen Mills, PA)

We believe the Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with increased power for Christian life and witness, including the giving of his supernatural gifts for the building up of the church and for various works of ministry in the world.

When my kids were young, they sometimes listened to an audio Bible at bedtime. The book of Acts was one of their favorites to hear. It is the story of the early church, and it is absolutely thrilling. There is massive revival, signs and wonders, earthquakes, jailbreaks, riots, miracles and healings, church members who fall dead because they lied to the Spirit, angels, enemies, heroes, murders, shipwrecks, snakebites, resurrections, and more. All of this is packed into twenty-eight chapters.

The longer I have been a Christian, the more I have fallen in love with the book of Acts. I've learned that it's more than a collection of great stories. This is where we see the fulfillment of God's promise to send his Spirit. This is where we see a New Covenant community of men and women receiving power from on high, experiencing life in the Spirit, and participating in the advance of the gospel.

Luke writes the early church's story in a way that highlights the redemptive-historical significance of the Spirit's coming. He also tells the story in a way that deliberately highlights the experiential and repeatable aspects of the work of the Spirit. The promise of the Spirit is not exhausted at Pentecost. Christ still pours out his Spirit, flooding and filling the church with his power and presence.

D. A. Carson says, “The Spirit does not simply inaugurate the new age and then disappear; rather, he characterizes the new age.”⁸ And, “The coming of the Spirit is not associated merely with the dawning of the new age but with its presence, not merely with Pentecost but with the entire period from Pentecost to the return of Jesus the Messiah.”⁹ John Murray says, “If Pentecost is not repeated, neither is it retracted. . . . This is the era of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

It is an inestimable privilege to live in the era of the Holy Spirit. We are weak in ourselves, but the Spirit of God is our strength. We are prone to weariness, but the Spirit revives us. The Lord is eager to fill his people with his Spirit, empowering us for life and witness. In Sovereign Grace Churches, we are eager to pursue God’s active presence in all its fullness. The Reformation hymn, “A Mighty Fortress” proclaims, “The Spirit and the gifts are ours,” and this blessing ought to inform our theology and our practice.

Our Continuationist Convictions

We include among the Seven Shared Values of Sovereign Grace our conviction that the Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with increased power, including giving supernatural gifts to build the church.

By including this conviction among our shared values we are not implying that cessationist churches are unhealthy. On the contrary, we thank God for the witness and example of many gospel-centered, Spirit-filled cessationist churches and have learned much from them. Theologian Max Turner has pointed out that many churches that deny the validity of tongues, prophecy, and healing are still deeply spiritual churches. And, Turner says, the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit that continuationists and cessationists share are more numerous and significant than the ones on which we disagree.¹¹

8. D.A Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 151.

9. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 155.

10. John Murray, quoted in *Reformation & Revival*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1994), 84.

11. Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 164.

This conviction is included among our shared values because we see the benefit of churches partnering together with a shared understanding and practice of pneumatology and because we believe God desires churches to benefit from the fullness of the Spirit's activity today.

Scripture does not teach that a certain category of spiritual gift is restricted to the early church. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 1:7–8 Paul thanks God that the church is “not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The gifts are ours until Christ returns. 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 teaches that the spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues will not pass away until “the perfect comes,” at the return of Christ when he comes to consummate the kingdom.

The commands of the New Testament remain for the church today: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Rom. 12:6); “Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1); “Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39); “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:19–20). Just as God desired churches in Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, and elsewhere to experience the gifts of the Spirit as an important aspect of their life together, so he desires the same for us. The goal of these gifts is not temporary, but is an enduring goal that remains until Christ returns: Spiritual gifts are given for the church's edification (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:3). So long as local churches stand in need of edification, they also stand in need of the full range of spiritual gifts.

A study of church history testifies to the continuity of spiritual gifts. From the early church fathers, on through Augustine, to the middle ages, and into the Reformation and beyond, many testify to the presence of miraculous gifts. These gifts did not die with the apostles but have continued for hundreds of years.

Spiritual gifts are to be received with thankful hearts. Our Statement of Faith celebrates the gifts of the Spirit this way:

Christ loves the church, his body, and provides for its health and growth through the Holy Spirit. In addition to giving new life, the Spirit sovereignly

bestows gifts on every believer. Spiritual gifts are those abilities and expressions of God's power given by his grace for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church. The variety of these gifts—some permanent and some occasional, some more natural and some more remarkable—reflects the diversity of the members of Christ's body and demonstrates our need for one another. The gifts are not to be exercised with apprehension, pride, or disorder, but with faith, love, and order, and always in submission to the authority of Scripture as the final revelation of God. With the exception of those among the apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation, the full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns.¹²

A Gospel-Centered Pneumatology

The gifts of the Spirit are a great blessing, but spiritual gifts are not the sum total of a biblical pneumatology. In fact, the most important aspect of our doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not the continuation of spiritual gifts but the work of the Spirit in drawing sinners to Christ and his cross.

C. J. Mahaney says,

The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Savior and to testify to the gospel. Our pneumatology must never take precedence over—and in fact, cannot be understood apart from—the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹³

It is the Spirit of God who opens our eyes to see the Savior. He convicts us of sin and cleanses us. "The Spirit transforms hearts by the miracle of regeneration and indwells all believers in abundant, new covenant measure."¹⁴

12. Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, "The Empowering Ministry of the Spirit."

13. C. J. Mahaney, "The Pastor and the Trinity," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 403.

14. Statement of Faith, "The Empowering Ministry of the Spirit."

Too often in the Christian life we think the Spirit is only at work in truly miraculous ways if specific spiritual gifts are in operation. The mistake of the church in Corinth was equating spirituality with seemingly spectacular gifts and thinking the Spirit is active most powerfully through those gifts. Paul reminds them that the Spirit leads us to Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), and the primary evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives is love (1 Cor. 13).

The Spirit works broadly in our lives, and we ought to celebrate the Spirit's work wherever it appears. "The Spirit . . . illuminates God's Word to his people, assures them of God's love, comforts them with his presence, intercedes on their behalf, and sanctifies them in conformity to the image of Christ."¹⁵ Do you see the Spirit of God at work around you in the church? Consider the elderly man who continues to grow in gratitude and joy, the single woman who shows hospitality and sacrificially serves others, the man whose prophetic gifts have ministered to dozens of people in the church and beyond, the couple that has experienced the loss of a child and clings to Christ in the midst of profound grief, the family that continues to give generously when finances are tight, the man who consistently prays for those in his small group with great faith. In all these ways and many more, the Spirit of God continues his activity today.

In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit gives courage in opposition, power in preaching, and wisdom in problem-solving. The Spirit is involved in creating fellowship, sending out church planters and missionaries, appointing leaders, breaking down ethnic and cultural barriers, convicting of sin, and spreading the gospel, all for the glory of Christ.

The Filling of the Spirit

We also observe in Acts that the most common way to describe spiritual empowering is the language of the Spirit's filling. "Full of the Spirit" accents an abiding condition, while "filled with the Spirit" points to a repeatable, experiential event. Commenting on Acts 6:3 and the selection of men who are "full of the Spirit and of wisdom," Max Turner says,

15. Statement of Faith, "The Empowering Ministry of the Spirit," emphasis added.

Luke does not believe all Christians to be “full of the Spirit”: this metaphor is used precisely to distinguish those whose lives are particularly marked by the work of the Spirit from ordinary Christians. And in Lukan terms the criterion for judging whether it is appropriate to speak of someone as “full of the Spirit” is whether the community of Christians felt the impact of the Spirit through that person’s life and saw the Spirit’s graces and gifts regularly expressed through him or her.¹⁶

We want the church to feel the impact of the Spirit through our lives. We want people to see the Spirit’s graces and gifts regularly expressed through us. God loves when his people are full of the Spirit.

What are the results of being filled with the Spirit?

The filling of the Spirit brings to God’s people a deeper knowledge of Christ, an increased desire for holiness, a stronger commitment to unity and love, a greater fruitfulness in ministry, and a deeper gratitude for our salvation.¹⁷

The Spirit filling us with power also includes the giving of gifts. Spiritual gifts are specific expressions of the grace and kindness of God that come to us through the power of the Holy Spirit and are given for the edification of the saints. We need these gifts to manifest the presence of God (1 Cor. 12:7), to remind us of our dependence upon each other (Rom. 12:3–8), and to build unity in the church (Eph. 4:12–13).

Despite certain abuses of spiritual gifts, they continue to be a valuable part of the Christian life—so much so that we are commanded to “eagerly pursue” them (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1). Prophecy, tongues, and healing are perhaps among the more neglected gifts today. Even to a church fascinated with the more “spectacular” gifts, Paul commended prophecy as a gift given by God for the edification and encouragement of the church. New Testament prophecy does not provide normative revelation, nor is it infallible, but must be tested

16. Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke–Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 169.

17. Statement of Faith, “The Empowering Ministry of the Spirit.”

by the authority of Scripture (1 Thess. 5:19–20). Scripture also assumes the continuation of the gifts of tongues, which Paul himself personally valued (1 Cor 14:18). The gift of tongues is speech directed to God in a language unknown to the speaker. Its primary use is private and is only to be used publicly if accompanied by interpretation, which is also a spiritual gift. Like prophecy, when used publicly, it is not to be utilized for self-display or in a disorderly manner, but only for the edification of others. While some gifts have been neglected, we should guard against elevating these above other gifts that appear more ordinary. As Paul stresses, each gift is from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4–7), is to be valued, and is to be used for the glory of God and the good of others. 1 Corinthians 12–14 should be carefully studied by all who desire to view and pursue spiritual gifts in a manner pleasing to God.¹⁸

God's Manifest Presence

The charismatic movement of past decades is certainly vulnerable to criticism. In light of its excesses, we intentionally prefer the language of continuationism. And yet, Sovereign Grace churches have benefitted from the charismatic movement's embrace and pursuit of the gifts. We are expectant, and we long for God to manifest his presence more fully in the church.

Here is Max Turner again:

We are ever in danger of attempting to tame and to institutionalize the Spirit. By contrast, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have correctly perceived that, by and large, the activities of the Spirit in Luke-Acts are a matter of immediate perception; the self-manifesting presence of God. Activities are characterized as of the Spirit largely when they break out beyond merely human possibilities.¹⁹

18. For a valuable continuationist treatment of 1 Corinthians 12–14, see Jeff T. Purswell's chapter in *Scripture and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Wayne Grudem*, entitled "The Spirit and the Church: Priorities from 1 Corinthians 12–14." For a book-length treatment, see D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*.

19. Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 157.

A longing for God's self-manifesting presence has been our desire throughout our history, and by God's grace it will characterize us long into the future. We believe the church today is desperate for a move of the Spirit. We want to see God act in our lives and churches in a way that breaks out beyond merely human possibilities, all to the glory of Christ, the strengthening of his church, and the progress of the gospel.

Isn't that what we see in the book of Acts? Isn't that what we see through history? And so, we pray for revival. "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence" (Isa. 64:1). We pursue God's activity and rely on his power. We continually seek to be filled with the Spirit. We long for the graces and gifts of the Spirit to abound in our lives. We remember that we live in the era of the Holy Spirit.

And so we pray, Come, Spirit of God, and fill us once more with your presence. Fill us with joy and wonder in the gospel all our days, and use us to advance the glory of Christ in all the earth.

BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

THE SHARED VALUE OF COMPLEMENTARIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE HOME AND IN THE CHURCH

Josh Blount

Associate Pastor, Living Faith Church (Franklin, WV)

We believe it was God's glorious plan to create men and women in his image, giving them equal dignity and value in his sight, while appointing differing and complementary roles for them within the home and the church.

Sovereign Grace's Seven Shared Values, as this journal makes clear, define our churches. We could ask a basic question of each value: what would change if we no longer embraced this, and where would we feel that change? In varying ways, our Sunday worship, our church planting strategy, or our understanding of the task of preaching would change with an alteration in any of the corresponding values. But the place where a change would be felt closest to home is in our belief in complementarianism—because this belief is uniquely related to the home.

Complementarianism is the biblical doctrine that nourishes and preserves healthy families and faithful local churches. Far from being a contentious matter of a few obscure texts, complementarianism is the soil from which healthy families and faithful local churches (the family of God) grow. From this soil, they impart the gift of life, and new creation life, to coming generations.

What is Complementarianism?

Stated simply, complementarianism is the belief that men and women are created equal in dignity yet different in design and role. As our Statement of Faith says, "Men and women reflect and represent God in distinct and complementary ways, and these differences are to be honored and celebrated

in all dimensions of life.”²⁰ This affirmation does two things: it protects us from wrongly magnifying the differences between men and women (self-help books notwithstanding, men and women are not from different planets) or wrongly flattening them (men and women are equal, but they are not interchangeable).

Men and women are both created in the image of God. Neither is more valuable to him. Every woman, as a woman, and every man, as a man, is a result of the wise, gracious handiwork of the Creator. To demean women or ridicule men is thus to belittle a particular work of the Lord. And yet, within that equality, men and women are not interchangeable but instead have distinct and complementary roles.

The places where these roles are most clearly seen are in earthly families (the home) and the family of God (the church). In the home, men have distinct roles as husbands and fathers, and women have distinct roles as wives and mothers. The roles might best be defined with the term “headship” and “helper.” Again quoting our Statement of Faith, “Husbands are to exercise headship sacrificially and with humility, and wives are to serve as helpers to their husbands, willingly supporting and submitting to their leadership.”²¹

In the church, God’s eschatological family, men, and women are equally valuable to our life and mission. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out regardless of gender and yet exercised in a way consistent with our gender. Elders exercise a role analogous to a father in a family, as Paul makes clear in the qualifications for eldership. By reserving the office of elder for men (1 Tim. 2:12, 3:2; Titus 1:6), the new creation maintains the pattern of God’s original created order. In addition, within the church, the created differences between all men and women are upheld and honored, whether married or single (for example, 1 Tim. 5:1–2). The order in the new creation life of the church both reflects and advances the created order established in the beginning.

20. Statement of Faith, “Man as Male and Female.”

21. Statement of Faith, “Marriage, Sexuality, and Singleness.”

Male and Female He Created Them

Next, we must ask a critical question: where do we get this belief in the complementary relationship of men and women? Is it, as some have alleged, a man-made doctrine? Is it a matter of a few obscure texts that could be interpreted differently? This question is vital, especially when there are many external reasons why this doctrine is unpopular. But rightly understood, complementarianism is not at all a matter of a few texts. It is woven into the very fabric of creation and re-creation, and thus to distort or discard it does violence to the storyline of Scripture.

Let's begin in the beginning.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26–27)

Here we see the principle of the equal worth of men and women (both are created in God's image) and their distinctness (they are created as male and female). Then Genesis 2 expands on this foundational narrative. Alone among all the created beings—birds and fish and cattle and beasts—is the lone figure of Adam. While all other living creatures are brought into existence by the spoken word of the Lord, Adam is formed uniquely by God's hand and God's animating breath.

And yet, whereas all other things are created according to their kinds, in Genesis 2 there is not yet another creature according to Adam's kind. Adam alone is alone, and this calls forth the only "not good" in all the pre-Fall world: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). And so God creates from Adam's rib a helper "fit for him" (or "corresponding to him"). When Adam awakes and sees Eve, his words are both the first human speech recorded in the Bible and the first love poetry

of the human race: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23).

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck captures the moment:

As soon as he saw her, he recognized her; his recognition was a knowledge born of love. He saw in her no alien being, but a being just like himself; she possessed the same nature that he had; she displayed the same image of God that had been bestowed upon him; and yet she was different from him, with her own sex, character, and vocation. Like a whoop of joy, like a wedding song, the words came forth from his lips!²²

This whole narrative—the aloneness of Adam, the special work of God to remedy his lack, and the unique role as corresponding helper that God creates for Eve—is the basis for the institution of marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” As Ray Ortlund writes, “This peculiar thing we call marriage [is] tenderly portrayed in its humble reality and delicate innocence against the enormous backdrop of the creation.”²³

The reason it is so fitting for a human marriage to take center stage against this enormous backdrop is not yet clear in the storyline of Scripture. Before such a further revelation can take place, however, the sin of Adam intervenes.

Ruined by Sin, Redeemed by Grace

The Fall of Adam in Genesis 3 is familiar to us. But it’s important that we not confuse the order of Scripture. By the end of Genesis 2, the good and wise hand of God has already created man and woman, equally dignified yet distinct in design. The irruption of sin into God’s world through the temptation of Satan, the deception of Eve, and the disobedience of Adam does not create distinct gender roles; instead, it corrupts them.

22. Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 4–5.

23. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 171.

As the punishments in Genesis 3:16–19 indicate, the complementary roles of husband and wife in the garden are infected with the pollution of sin in gender-specific ways. It takes only little observation or human experience to confirm the divine testimony. Apart from the grace of God in Christ, husbands do not live as loving, sacrificial heads. Protectors become abusers. Providers become neglecters. And, without the influence of the gospel, wives do not experience or receive the divinely-given role as helper as life-giving and fulfilling. Instead, it becomes a constraint, a curse. Childbirth is marked by pain (Gen. 3:16) and family life is marked by strife (Gen. 4). East of Eden (Gen. 3:24), harmony degenerates into dissonance. The home, no less than the creation itself, groans under the futility and destruction of sin.

And yet, in the mercy of God, the goodness of marriage and the created order of male and female endures the rupture of the fall—not unaffected, but also not erased. Thus God’s Word protects and celebrates marriage and gender complementarity. The Law of Israel condemns marital infidelity (Ex. 20:14) and the sexual immorality of the surrounding nations (Lev. 18). The wisdom literature delights in the blessing of marriage (Prov. 19:14; Eccles. 9:9), the gift of children (Ps. 127), the joys of sexual intimacy (Song of Songs), and the distinct vocations of men (Ps. 112) and women (Prov. 31).

Furthermore, marriages, and the roles of men and women, are woven into the storyline of Scripture. The line of the Messiah advances through the marriage of a converted Moabite woman and a godly Israelite man (Ruth 2–4). The wisdom of Abigail restrains the sinful impulses of King David (1 Sam. 25). The love of a faithful husband for an adulterous wife becomes a revelation of the heart of God for his idolatrous people (Hosea). With the fullness of time, Jesus himself honors men and women in their created distinctness. He relates to women with purity and dignity (e.g., John 4), teaching them to be his followers (Luke 10:38–42). And in keeping with the Old Testament pattern, he appoints twelve men as his disciples and the foundation of the apostolic church.

A Divine Work of Art

In this light, the specific apostolic texts that teach complementarianism are not exegetical aberrations but rather form part of a much larger pattern. They are like inspired signposts alongside a divine work of art: concise explanations that enable the viewer to see the whole scope of the masterpiece with the eyes of the Artist himself.

Husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them, showing honor to their wives and living with them in an understanding way (Col. 3:19; 1 Pet. 3:7). Wives are to submit to their husbands in the Lord (Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1). Thus the pattern of the created order is to be expressed in the posture of Christian husbands and wives toward one another.

As in the earthly family, so in the heavenly family. The apostolic writings make clear that men and women have different roles in the life of the church. Elders are to be men of character whose godliness is first displayed in caring for their own families and then exercised in parallel fashion over the family of God (1 Tim. 3:1–5; Titus 1:6–9). Yet while the office of elder (with all that that entails in relation to the church, inside and outside of Sundays) is limited to men, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not gender-specific. Men and women alike are to use their gifts to serve one another as good stewards of God’s multi-faceted grace (1 Pet. 4:9). In the gathered assembly, all participate (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26), yet the pattern of submission of wives to their husbands, and all members to the God-given elders of the church, is maintained (1 Cor. 14:34–35; Heb. 13:17).

In the family of God there is no hierarchy of worth, no inner ring, no elite few. Yet neither is there the flat, modern monotone of sameness and equality. Instead, there is God’s beautiful, complex chord of complementarity: difference by design, a heavenly harmony in which the sum is greater than its parts.

Pointing to Ultimate Reality

If you’ve made it this far, you probably don’t have to be told that what we have just surveyed is not universally accepted in modern culture or even modern Christianity. In such a world, should this doctrine be one of our shared, and

defining, values? We might decide it is a biblical doctrine, but one best left in a closet or a corner of the basement—something trusted friends and family are allowed to see, but not a flag hanging from our collective front porch!

And yet when we tamper with or mute this doctrine, we lose far more than we gain, because complementarity is not an end in itself. Marriage, and the created substructure of male and female on which marriage is built, is not ultimate reality, but it points to ultimate reality. “This mystery,” Paul writes—this mystery of husbands and wives in harmonious complementarity, this peculiar thing we call marriage set against the enormous backdrop of creation, this most basic institution of creation life, that mystery—“is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32).

The bond between Christ and his church is not a useful sermon illustration to teach about Christian marriage. Christian marriage is a divinely-ordained illustration to teach about the future destiny of all things. In Christ, the destination of the universe is a wedding feast, and the future of the people of God is to be the glorious, spotless bride of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6–8). And all who trust in Christ now will then enjoy the covenant fellowship, the unity-in-distinction, and the spiritual oneness with Christ that even the best human marriages only dimly reflect.

Contemporary discussions of gender often bring with them accusations of being on the “right” or “wrong” side of history. Sadly, the history in view is far more truncated than the majestic sweep of Scripture. At the beginning of human and creation history, there was a wedding. At the end of all things, there will be a wedding. In between, the institution of marriage, built on the foundation of the created, complementary design of men and women, endures because it is God’s institution. In it, according to God’s design, comes the gift of children—new generations of boys and girls who must be taught to become Christian men and Christian women in the family of God.

So it has been in every generation of church history, and so it shall be until the return of Christ, the King and Bridegroom of his people. Then the groaning creation will exchange its groans for shouts of joy. Then the prayers of the saints will become the praises of the great multitude, crying,

Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready! (Rev. 19:6–7)

With that vision before us, capturing our imaginations and strengthening our resolve, the church becomes a people who, looking backward, joyfully proclaim, “Male and female he created them . . . and it was very good!” And, looking forward, they happily cry, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” Amen and amen!

FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS

THE SHARED VALUE OF ELDER-GOVERNED AND ELDER-LED CHURCHES

C. J. Mahaney

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Editors' Note: This content is drawn from C. J. Mahaney's lectures and sermons on pastoral ministry. While the substance, ideas, and most of the language is drawn from him, the article was compiled and drafted by Jared Mellinger.

Tim Laniak is a Bible scholar and teacher who made several trips to the Middle East to learn about the life of shepherds. Real shepherds. One of those trips was nearly a year long, and he spent time observing and interviewing shepherds in Israel, Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. His goal was to learn more about Scripture's primary metaphor for leadership: shepherding the flock.

In his travels, Dr. Laniak learned more about "the vast variety of ills and harmful habits that befall sheep around the world."²⁴ The ills include pneumonia, cancer, hypothermia, maggots, and snake bites. They also include self-inflicted ills such as getting stuck in fences, falling down banks, eating poison, and falling into streams. Laniak says, "I am in awe that the health and well-being of hundreds of animals is often left in the hands of a single person out in the wilderness." Then he adds, "Only an attentive and knowledgeable shepherd is competent to counter every affliction."²⁵

Attentive and knowledgeable shepherds who faithfully lead the flock are not only essential in the wilderness; they are essential in the church.

24. Timothy Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2007), 65.

25. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 66.

Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches

The fifth shared value of Sovereign Grace Churches is “Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches.” We’ve explained it this way:

Jesus Christ reigns as head over his church, and he gives to his church elders (or pastors) to govern and lead local churches under his authority (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5). We believe that men, qualified by both character and gifting, are to serve as elders, shepherding God’s people as under-shepherds of Christ (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1–7; 1 Pet. 5:1–3). A church’s health is to a great degree dependent on the health of its elders, and so our aim is to strengthen the current elders in our churches while identifying and training new ones (Acts 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Christ is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. He alone reigns as head over his church. But he appoints shepherds to govern and lead churches under his authority.

In the New Testament, responsibility for governance and oversight is repeatedly placed on a plurality of elders rather than on the entire congregation. It is the overseers who guard and pay close attention to the flock (Acts 20:29). It is leaders who watch over the souls of those in the church (Heb. 13:17).

The responsibilities of the congregation are many and are crucial to the health of the church. However, the exercise of governing authority is not among them. We have tremendous respect for faithful churches that are governed by the congregation or by an extra-local leader, but we believe God calls local elders to govern and guide the flock.²⁶ As our Statement of Faith affirms,

26. Alexander Strauch says, “The authority to govern and teach the local church resides in the plurality of elders—Christ’s undershepherds, God’s household managers. . . . The New Testament does not indicate that the congregation governs itself by majority vote, and there is no evidence that God has granted every member one equal vote with every other member. Rather, the New Testament congregation is governed by its own congregational elders. The elders, according to the express instruction of the New Testament, have the authority to shepherd the congregation.”

“Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord.”²⁷

A Pastoral Crisis

This shared value is more than a polity position, although that is certainly included. The churches of Sovereign Grace are also united in our understanding of pastoral identity and responsibilities. Thomas Oden says, “The importance of the office of pastor still quietly pleads with us to think with extraordinary care about the better and worse ways in which that office might be conceived and practiced.”²⁸

Too often, pastors and churches fail to bring the necessary theological discernment and extraordinary level of care to their thinking about the pastoral office, inevitably influencing pastoral practice. This has resulted in pastoral crises. The 1900s saw a shift in how the pastoral role was understood. The focus was no longer on theological depth, ministering the word, or caring for souls but on administration, personality, practice, and methodology. Church growth had replaced faithfulness, and popular trends had replaced the truth.

We are not exempt from these dangers today, and that ought to strike fear in our hearts. This happens over time as our affections for Christ are slowly disengaged, and we come to resemble a modern CEO more than we resemble shepherds of the flock. I don’t want this to happen to me, and I don’t want this to happen to the pastors of Sovereign Grace.

In Sovereign Grace Churches, we are committed to taking seriously the study of pastoral theology and to maintaining a biblical understanding of the pastoral task. This takes a personal commitment from each pastor. The books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are unique gifts from God regarding the nature of pastoral ministry, and pastors must study them closely. Study Acts

(Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995) 219, 293).

27. Statement of Faith, “The Church of Christ.”

28. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 13.

20, 1 Peter 5, Ephesians 4, and other passages addressing leadership in the church. Study the metaphor of shepherding in the Old and New Testaments.²⁹ This metaphor is essential to understanding the biblical teaching regarding pastoral leadership in every generation and in every culture. Pastors need their sense of identity to be deeply shaped by the biblical imagery of shepherding.

Shepherd the Flock of God

In 1 Peter 5, the apostle Peter draws from the shepherding metaphor in addressing pastors.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:1–4)

Elders are those men who have been temporarily entrusted with the responsibility to shepherd the flock of God and to exercise oversight. They temporarily serve under the chief Shepherd. By identifying the church as the flock of God, Peter reminds the elders that those whom they presently serve belong to God himself. Members of the flock of God are those who are “ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Peter’s exhortation to shepherd the flock was informed by his vivid memory of his post-resurrection encounter with the risen Christ. Jesus restored Peter

29. I highly recommend Timothy Laniak’s outstanding book *Shepherds After My Own Heart*. “At a time when books on leadership are being published at a dizzying pace, one wonders if the Bible has anything to say about it. . . . One of the primary metaphors by which biblical authors conceptualized leadership is shepherding. This is quite consistent throughout the Old and New Testaments.” Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Lisle, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 21.

to public ministry and charged him three times with these words: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. So Peter now reminds these elders that those they serve don't belong to them, they belong to God.

To shepherd the flock of God is to feed, protect, and care for the flock. It is to love them, serve them, exhort them, and pursue them. This type of faithful shepherding involves exercising oversight, being attentive, discerning the needs of the flock, and acting for their good. The charge is a sacred one: we are to act on behalf of the chief Shepherd, caring for those he has ransomed by his precious blood.

God Wants Happy Pastors

As elders lead and govern, we must keep a close watch on the flock and on ourselves. There are inward pitfalls related to the pastoral task, and Peter addresses these in 1 Peter 5:2–3. Faithful pastors will exercise oversight “not under compulsion, but willingly.” This means that a pastor must labor with joy and gladness. Pastoral ministry does require certain skills, but God requires that the labor of pastoral ministry be done with gladness.

This is an essential part of every pastor's job description: God wants happy pastors because happy pastors accurately reflect the character of God. Our happiness reflects the privilege of our calling to serve those for whom Christ died.

It is also imperative that pastors shepherd the flock of God “not for shameful gain, but eagerly.” We shouldn't confine this temptation to finances. It is a warning about the temptation to use ministry as a means of personal gain in any form, whether for public recognition, developing a platform, or self-promotion.

There is only one way to serve the flock of God, regardless of position or responsibility: eagerly. This means serving with enthusiasm and energy. Whether you are a lead pastor or serve in another role, whether you are compensated full-time or serve in a bi-vocational role, whether your ministry involves public preaching or more private counseling and discipleship—fellow pastors, we are commanded by God to shepherd the flock eagerly and energetically.

Elders and Their Authority

Peter gives one more description of faithful shepherding: “Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” This is a call for pastors to not misuse their God-given authority. Pastors are delegated a genuine authority in plurality for the service of the church. They are to exercise oversight, but they must never lord it over the flock. There is a difference.

In order to avoid domineering over those in their charge, pastors and church members must understand the nature, the extent, and the purpose of the authority that has been delegated by the chief Shepherd to the elders of the church.

In his commentary on 1 Peter, Edmund Clowney writes,

The elder has authority; he is called to exercise a shepherd’s oversight. Christ, the chief Shepherd, has called him to exercise a shepherd’s care. But the undershepherd is not a stand-in for the Lord. He presents the word of the Lord, not his own decree; he enforces the revealed will of the Lord, not his own wishes. For that reason, any undermining of the authority of Scripture turns church government into spiritual tyranny. If church governors add to or subtract from the word of God, they make themselves lords over the consciences of others.³⁰

Every Christian must understand that their pastors are not stand-ins for the Lord, nor do we desire to be. And we have no intention of adding to or subtracting from Holy Scripture, which can both be temptations for pastors. Pastors must resolve to preach the whole counsel of God courageously, to never domineer over those entrusted to our care, and to lead by personal example.

Healthy Elderships and Future Pastors

Each one of the Seven Shared Values of Sovereign Grace Churches plays a valuable role in our partnership. Having elder-governed and elder-led churches

30. Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, The Bible Speaks Today (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 202.

is important because God uses pastoral leadership to shape the church of Christ and care for the flock. The health of a church is largely dependent upon the health of its elders.

What should this shared value look like in the life of a local church in Sovereign Grace?

A cross-centered ministry

Acts 20:28 commands pastors to “care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” The gospel is the central message we proclaim, profoundly shaping our view of the church and our pastoral calling.

The value of leadership

Every member plays a vital role in the life and mission of the church. At the same time, elders are uniquely called and gifted as leaders in the church and should exercise this gift with zeal (Rom. 12:8) and love. Pastoral leadership is the means God uses to feed, equip, protect, and mature the flock.

Building healthy teams

Too many pastors labor in isolation or in a context that lacks camaraderie and genuine friendship. Even where there is plurality, it requires effort to cultivate unity, love, and maturity among pastors. It is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity (Ps. 133:1), and therefore, in Sovereign Grace, we intentionally seek to strengthen elderships.

Caring for pastors

Partnership among churches provides a context for pastors to care for each other and benefit from extra-local leadership. Pastors, church planters, and missionaries will find themselves in need of care as they labor for the gospel. Caring for each other is one of the means God uses to preserve men through decades of pastoral ministry and the inevitable hardships we face.

Happy pastors

God has been exceedingly kind to give pastors the privilege and joy of shepherding their people. It is amazing that God has entrusted to us, pastors, those for whom Christ died! Hebrews 13:17 commands pastors to carry out their work with joy and not with groaning. May Sovereign Grace churches always be led by happy pastors.

Identifying and training new elders

An essential part of the pastoral task is to identify and equip faithful shepherds. Paul says to Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Our churches take seriously the call to equip future generations of pastors.

Ordinary Pastors, Extraordinary Savior

D. A. Carson wrote a biography of his father, Tom Carson, called *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor*. The book is powerful because Tom Carson wasn’t a famous man, a visionary, a gifted administrator, or a published author. He was a faithful Christian and pastor who, when he passed into glory, surely heard the voice of his Savior say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

God temporarily entrusts to ordinary pastors those for whom Christ died that we might care for them with the gospel. There are many joys in pastoral ministry, but the greatest joy and the greatest reward comes at the end: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4).

Pastors will not be evaluated by our culture’s definition of success but by their biblical job description. Faithful pastors govern and lead as God requires, serve gladly and eagerly, lead by humble example, devoting their lives faithfully to serving and sacrificing for the flock of God. Pastors like this will be personally honored on that final day by the chief Shepherd himself. Christ himself will place an unfading crown of glory on the head of each and every faithful, ordinary pastor.

How is this possible? How is it possible for an ordinary pastor—who, being a sheep himself, is quite familiar with temptation and sin and weakness and failure—to receive an unfading crown of glory from the holy and flawless chief Shepherd? It is only possible because the chief Shepherd first wore a crown of thorns as he made his way to a hill called Calvary, where his death would save sinners and sanctify and empower the service of ordinary pastors.

Christ gave his life for the flock, rose as Lord of the church, and gave shepherds to guide his people until he returns in glory. What a privilege and what grace to serve those for whom Christ died and be rewarded for it! May the Lord empower the pastors of Sovereign Grace to be faithful until he returns or calls us home. “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

THE SHARED VALUE OF CHURCH PLANTING, OUTREACH, AND GLOBAL MISSIONS

Dave Taylor

Director of Emerging Nations, Sovereign Grace Churches (Sydney, Australia)

The book of Revelation calls out in a loud voice:

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God”(Rev. 19:6–9).

One day, all of creation will explode with a mighty shout. A great multitude will call out in one immense voice, “Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns.” Finally, the redeemed will all be in one place, of one mind, and calling out with one voice before the audience of One.

After millennia, the thundering throng will emphatically rejoice that the wait is over. Man is now with God, and God is forever with man. What better way to inaugurate the new age than to have a party? Not just a party for the ages, but one that surpasses all others from any age.

The Bride is ready, and the Lamb has come, for the great drama of redemption will have come to a definitive end. The story of redemption will be complete, and the story of glorification will just be beginning. A story with no more tears, no more sadness, no more pain, but instead unbridled joy upon joy!

As John took in this scene, I can imagine that he looked at the angel at this point and shook his head as if to say, “I’m not sure how to describe this. Where do I even begin?” And so the angel speaks out, maybe even with a smile, saying, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Blessed indeed. Eternally blessed. How astoundingly true that is. What a marriage supper of the Lamb this will be!

It is incredible that the Lord has given the privilege of handing out the invitations to us, you and me.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20).

There are so many invitations still to be given out, both in our neighborhoods and in the nations. Yet, for so many of us, if we’re honest, we quickly get distracted. There are hundreds of other things that compete daily for our attention and distract us from the reality of this Great Commission. In truth, for most, if not all of us, the opportunity of giving out these invitations can itself be intimidating and daunting. Intimidating as we consider the vast world that stands before us, and daunting as we look back at ourselves in the mirror and come face to face with our own weaknesses and fears.

The work of missions, however, is God’s passion and God’s work. He has a passion to call worshippers from every tribe, language, people, and nation, and Scripture is full of that passion.

So unsurprisingly, his Word gives us everything we need for this great endeavor. In his Word, we find a wealth of principles and imperatives that give shape to our mission, as well as great confidence to our souls. Once again, we find that the Lord who calls us also lovingly provides us with everything we need.

1. The Power of the Gospel

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most powerful good news of all time: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

It can be so easy to write people off when it comes to Christianity, or at least put them in the “highly unlikely” category. The guy you play soccer with on the weekends who looks as if he might have just gotten out of jail for grievous bodily harm. The neighbors you’ve been reaching out to who look on the surface to have it all and tell you as much when you talk to them. They’re just so happy and feel complete and content, yet without Jesus. The work colleague who is a practicing homosexual and is openly pro-everything you’re not. You name it, he passionately thinks the opposite and is glad to let you know about it. Or the student you see at college wearing a full burqa, revealing only her eyes through a thin slit in her face veil. She keeps to herself throughout campus.

They all seem so unlikely to follow Jesus, but the power of the gospel means we should never write people off. The gospel is a powerful message that is for all people everywhere. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Paul knows this because his own testimony proves it.

Prior to salvation, Paul was the church’s most determined opponent. He hated Christ and his followers with a passion. So when we first encounter Paul in Acts, we see him holding people’s coats at Stephen’s martyrdom, “in hearty agreement with putting him to death” (Acts 8:1, NASB 1995). After that, he left Jerusalem, heading to Damascus, in hot pursuit of followers of “the Way,” so he could find them and hurt them and ravage them with persecution.

He was the most unlikely ever to become a Christian. Yet he was no match for the unstoppable power of God. In Acts 9, on the road to Damascus, he encountered the risen Christ and was radically converted. In a moment, he went from gospel persecutor to gospel proclaimer and gave his life to following and serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the earliest days of Sovereign Grace Churches, “keeping the main thing the main thing” has been our mantra, and together we have resolved to “know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). The centrality of the gospel is vital for all of life, including our mission. Human sin is stubborn, but the gospel contains the power to save anyone; its reach is without limits or borders. What a powerful weapon we all hold in our hands!

2. The Centrality of the Church

The gospel message is too valuable for us to be sent out into the world as lone rangers with a gospel message in our hands, the Great Commission in our hearts, and every man for himself. No, the beauty of God’s great plan is that he not only saves individuals but also brings people together. He not only justifies, he joins people together in the community of the church (Eph. 2:19–22). Together in the local church, striving side by side in the gospel, we display the manifold wisdom of God to the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10–11) and God’s glory to those around us (Matt. 5:14–16).

It is clear in the pages of Scripture that the church is the vehicle God has chosen to take the message of the gospel to every generation and people. The church community is where we learn to love God and others, where we are strengthened and transformed by the truth of the Word, and where we’re taught to pray, worship, and serve. This is where we invest our time and abilities for eternity. This is where we grow in our roles as friends, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers. As C. H. Spurgeon puts it, the church is “the dearest place on earth.” Likewise, it is also the institution that God has called and commissioned to take the gospel to the nations, both the reached and the unreached (Acts 2:14–47; 14:1–23; 18:8; 19:20).

Therefore the local church—rather than individual Christians, mission agencies, or parachurch organizations—bears primary responsibility for evangelism and missions. This in no way diminishes the important role that agencies and organizations can and do play. We are indebted to them in Sovereign Grace for the passion and expertise they bring to mission. But we must always remember the truth Andy Johnson states well:

The church was God's idea. It is his one and only organizational plan for world missions. Most of all, it is his beloved Son's beloved, blood-bought bride. Consequently, any humanly invented organizations that assist in mission must remember that they are the bridesmaids, not the bride. They are the stagehands, not the star. That position and honor has been given by Christ to his church, and only to his church.³¹

Evangelism and missions always begin in the local church and ultimately result in new local churches. It is clear in Scripture that the church is the vehicle that God has chosen to take the message of the gospel to our neighborhoods and nations. How kind of the Lord then that we get to do this together. We are far more fruitful together!

3. The Faithfulness of God

The most inspiring and faith-building provision in this great endeavor is the reality that Jesus also gives us himself. "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

What an incredible discovery this is! It's so easy to feel daunted and intimidated in our mission as we seek to be a friend of sinners and proclaim to them the glorious gospel. We can sometimes feel alone in this Great Commission.

But don't believe it for a moment. You and I are never alone. Right to the end of the age, the Spirit is always with us. More than that, Jesus, the King of the nations himself, is more than sufficient to empower and equip us for all we face. Colossians 1:15–20 reminds us just how incredible a reality this is:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is

31. Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 26.

the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:15–20)

Jesus alone is supreme in personhood, supreme in creation, supreme in the church, and supreme in salvation. How incredible it is to know that he is with us! We are never alone. The true King of the Nations is always with us. What a happy and faith-building reality that is!

Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn't

John Piper famously writes:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.³²

Missions exists because worship doesn't. Missions exists because so many people in our neighborhoods and nations have yet to receive their invitation to the incredible marriage supper of the Lamb. So many people still haven't heard.

So let's give out the invitations from Brazil to Benin, Canada to China, India to Italy, México to Malawi, South Korea to Spain, Thailand to Turkey, and the United States to the United Kingdom. The gospel is powerful, the church is central, and the Lord is faithful. Ours is the privilege to invite people to join the worship of the only One who can save even the least of these.

32. John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2010), 15.

PARTNERS IN CHRIST AND FOR HIS GOSPEL

THE SHARED VALUE OF UNITED FELLOWSHIP, MISSION, AND GOVERNANCE

Jon Payne

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We believe that the unity for which Jesus prayed among his people should find concrete expression among believers and churches. Indeed, the New Testament testifies to a vibrant interdependence among churches in the first century.

The Koinonia of the Early Church

Koinonia. Partnership. Giving and receiving. Planting and building. Sowing together and harvesting together. Co-laborers in Christ. Fellow workers in the gospel.

The New Testament is packed with references to church partnership. Just to trace one partnership line through the New Testament, take the starting point of Philippians 1:3—a familiar and well-loved verse in Sovereign Grace.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3–5)

In thanking the Philippians for their faithful financial support of his church-planting apostolic ministry, Paul uses the rich word *koinonia*. They had committed themselves to support him as he sought to plant churches and provide for him as he labored in prison in Rome. They had determined to use their resources to help the gospel mission by supporting Paul, even sending a dear leader and friend, Epaphroditus. We might say their view of partnership

was looking forward to new areas and new church plants. They were giving themselves to build and care for other churches besides their own.

Going backward from this point in time, it is not hard to see the seeds of a heritage that had produced this *koinonia* legacy in Philippi. The church at Philippi was planted because Paul had been sent out from Antioch. Acts 13:1–3 describes the faith and sacrifice of the Antioch church in sending their treasured leaders Paul and Barnabas to the “work to which [God] had called them” (Acts 13:2). We can sympathize with the hole left behind by their departure! But Antioch had its own history of receiving prior to this moment of sending. When persecuted Christians came to Antioch and proclaimed the gospel, new converts were created, yet the fledgling group needed a seasoned leader. Jerusalem had sacrificed to send Barnabas, “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). No doubt the Jerusalem church was pained to see him go, though honored by the opportunity, given the result that “a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

The strands of *koinonia* stretch forward and backward through the early church. Local churches send and receive, sow and harvest in partnership with one another through gifted leaders called to guard the gospel and build local churches.

Beyond this Philippian strand, we can expand our study of church *koinonia* to include Paul’s hope for his visit to Rome, where he desires that they and he would be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. We can read Paul’s extensive list of personal greetings and encouragements, revealing a relational connection between churches as the gospel spreads around the Mediterranean. We can survey Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians that they would follow through on their financial commitments to help the saints in Jerusalem (this passage is legitimately applied in many sermons to local giving, but extra-local giving is its immediate focus).

We can consider Paul recruiting a young Timothy for on-the-road discipleship and then sending Timothy to check on the well-being of the Thessalonian church. We can look at Paul’s warning to the Galatian churches about legalism and note the crucial decision from the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. We

can see Paul's sacrifice in sending Onesimus, his "very heart" (Philem. 1:12), back to Philemon to ensure the reconciliation of the two men, now Christian brothers. In all of these examples, a *koinonia*, a partnership, existed, not just in the churches but also among the first century churches. It was a gospel partnership of giving and receiving. The early church leaders saw churches as having a responsibility to give to and receive from others. Those that only focused on themselves were warned or exhorted. Those that received and gave outside of themselves were commended. We must ask ourselves, what does their church *koinonia* mean for us?

Koinonia Without Apostolic Authority

First, it is crucial to note that this pattern is relevant to us even though we do not have anyone with the authority of Paul or the apostles. Their role and authority in the church were unique and unrepeatably. They were authoritative eyewitnesses to the risen Christ and commissioned by him. They were entrusted to guard and pass on the gospel tradition as foundation-laying apostles of the church. No one else, either then or now, has their normative authority in the church.

With that caveat firmly in place, much of their function in the church, and especially their role in facilitating and nurturing church-to-church partnership, can and should continue in the church today. To clarify, here are a few examples of how the function of a New Testament partnership could be perpetuated without claiming any modern-day apostolic authority.

Churches should still sacrifice to plant new churches. This function of *koinonia* doesn't require an apostle with authority. It simply requires local pastors and churches who are committed to sowing friends and leaders for the sake of the mission. Unless we are ready to say that church planting was a unique and unrepeatably calling in the first century, mature churches should still sacrifice for the support of new church plants.

Churches should prayerfully and practically look to support existing churches. Though we have no one with the authority of Paul to insist on a specific financial gift (i.e., the Jerusalem offering), surely churches can still fulfill this pattern of recognizing ways that our abundance can meet those with a current need.

Churches should partner with each other to guard the gospel and guard their witness to the gospel through biblical accountability, encouragement, and evaluation. Because we do not have the apostles or Paul, this kind of partnership for accountability should be voluntary and not presumptuous, based on doctrinal unity and agreed-upon principles and not arbitrary perspectives. Yet surely churches have not outgrown the risk of doctrinal blind spots or pastoral missteps. Surely no pastor would say his church or his pastoral team is incapable of repeating any of the New Testament errors. Humbly receiving the wisdom of trusted friends in ministry does not require an apostle with normative authority so much as an agreement between trusted pastors and churches to guard each other in gospel truth and witness.

Churches and pastors should recognize, receive, and send those leaders among them with proven wisdom, leadership, and faith. This motivates our partnership toward our church planting mission and helps guard us against doctrinal dangers along the way. God has provided some men with particular leadership, mission, and wisdom gifts to be a blessing to churches beyond their own, even though there is no modern-day Paul. The absence of normative authority residing in individuals does not mean that there is an absence of any gifts related to what might be called “apostolic function” in the church today. It is worth noting that Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, and others were a great blessing in leadership and help to multiple churches in laboring together in the gospel. Yet they did not possess Pauline authority. Throughout church history, God has raised up men who motivated and served the broader church in mission through a unique blend of doctrinal vigilance and missional passion. May the Lord continue to raise up such men among us.

Churches should cultivate affection, gratefulness, and encouragement for other churches and missional leaders in ways that fulfill our broader unity in Christ. Paul’s affection for the churches, their affection for him, and their unity with each other were not dependent on his authority, but on the affectionate unity we are all meant to have in Christ. Though we all long for the day when every true Christian will experience our full unity in Christ (John 17), we should certainly seek to enjoy the firstfruits of that loving unity in partnership right now.

In Sovereign Grace, we joyfully agree that church *koinonia* is God's good purpose for the church in every generation, provided in the New Testament as a pattern to be fulfilled from one church to another until the Lord returns. We do not believe that this pattern is restricted merely to the age of the apostles. We do believe that these patterns are not just optional ideas for the church that is looking for something to do with extra resources but rather an essential part of church maturity. Let me say that again: church *koinonia*-partnership with other churches in ways patterned after the New Testament is an essential part of church maturity. In light of this calling, let us consider how we fulfill this partnership in Sovereign Grace, looking again to Philippians 1:3–8.

Church Partnership in Sovereign Grace

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:3–8)

Paul's greeting to the Philippian church forms a helpful summary of the New Testament calling to church partnership. It also serves as an important outline for applying church partnership in Sovereign Grace Churches.

Gratefulness, Joy, and Affection

Clearly, Paul does not relate to the Philippians with a "just business" perspective. He is filled with gratefulness for their labors for the gospel, joy over the effect the gospel has had in their lives and mission, and affection for them as his dear brothers and sisters in Christ. This is why we seek to create contexts where pastors and members can know, serve, and encourage each other. To put it bluntly, we do not want only a business association but a loving relationship. We want not only a formal structure but an affectionate family of churches.

This is why our Pastors Conferences and our Regional Assemblies of Elders regularly include time for informal relationship building and formal equipping and planning. This is why our pastoral prayers seek to highlight specific church plants and missional initiatives in a demeanor of grateful prayer and joy. This is why Sovereign Grace regions plan events where church members can come to know each other, can share each other's burdens, and can build together with other Sovereign Grace churches in a kind of "family reunion" expectation. We do this not merely because it's more fun to partner within a relational atmosphere (though it is!) but because we want to fulfill the pattern of relational, affectionate, grateful, joyful partnership modeled by Paul and the mature New Testament churches.

Unity in Gospel Doctrine

The partnership of Paul with the Philippians was full of gratefulness, affection, and joy precisely because it was based in the gospel. Paul knew the Philippians (and they knew him) to be in Christ through the confession of the true gospel and gospel-centered doctrine. This same gospel unity is part of Paul's greeting to the Romans (though he did not plant their church!), and it forms a primary reason for his rebuke of the Galatians. The doctrine of Christ is and will be the cornerstone of our partnership in Sovereign Grace. Practically, guarding this doctrine is the reason we created and steward our Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith. Guarding this doctrine is the passion behind our Pastors College, the goal of our ordination standards, and the motive for our adjudication and discipline processes for any pastors or churches who stray. Apart from unity in Christ and the doctrines that flow from the gospel, there can be no authentic or enduring unity. Yet, in Christ, there can be abundant joy and relationship among this global family of churches even as we enjoy distinctions in culture and tertiary doctrines. We are partnered, now and into the future, in Christ.

Sharing the Burden of Gospel Mission with Faith

Paul had a partnership with the Philippians, not merely a mutual appreciation. This partnership, this *koinonia*, consists of sharing together the burden of mission. It is investing oneself into the calling that the gospel places on the shoulders of every Christian, church, and pastor, allowing the momentum

of the gospel to lead us to self-sacrifice for the cause of Christ. In Sovereign Grace, we embrace this call by giving financially to our common mission of planting and building healthy churches. We support the cost of caring for pastors through regional leaders, training pastors at the Pastors College, and providing extra-local leadership for pastors and churches through a Sovereign Grace leadership team. We also embrace this call by sending pastors to support regional functions such as ordination, church planting, and adjudication. We joyfully promote church plants in our own churches, knowing that some of our own dear members may be sown for the harvest. We faithfully send delegates to our Council of Elders, stewarding our Book of Church Order and our Statement of Faith through grateful, earnest participation in the formal structures of Sovereign Grace. We share the responsibility not only to give but also to receive in this gospel mission, rejecting independence and self-sufficiency and welcoming loving encouragement and even exhortation from our fellow churches and pastors as a normal part of gospel guardianship.

We are determined that the gospel mission of Sovereign Grace should be sealed with our own labors of love. We are not content unless our own church may share the honor of the gospel mission in our Sovereign Grace family. And we do this with faith, knowing that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus because of his grace and for his glory.

It is important to note that we also gladly celebrate other gospel churches around the world who are seeking these same goals among other church denominations and affiliations. May all those who preach the name of Christ in faithful gospel *koinonia* be blessed by the Lord! For our part, we are humbled and honored that God has placed us here, in this family of churches, to practice New Testament *koinonia* for the sake of his mission with these dear churches and these dear saints.

Our Partnership Prayer

Our prayer is that this value of church partnership will flourish with greater zeal and affection as Sovereign Grace churches are planted and adopted worldwide. We pray we will be faithful to the biblical pattern laid down for us. We pray that we will be stronger in Christ together. We pray we will show

the love of Christ toward one another. And we pray that Sovereign Grace churches, now and in the future, will be known for our *koinonia*—our gospel partnership—for generations to come.

OUR SHARED VALUES AND THE PASTOR

Joel Carlson

Senior Pastor, Emmaus Road Church (Bozeman, MT)

With a transcript of average high school grades and with no hope of a scholarship (and frankly, with nothing else to do), I flew out of Butte, Montana, in the summer of 2006 with Recruit Training Command. Great Lakes, Illinois, was my destination. I was joining the United States Navy.

Most young men and women, myself included, join the military with very individualistic goals in mind. The purpose might be to gain life experience, see the world, earn an education, or serve their country in time of need. Many of these young people are shocked when they arrive at their training command and quickly realize that the Department of Defense does not prioritize aiding them in expressing their individualism. The Navy's purpose was to purge any individualism out of young men like me.

By joining the armed forces, I was signing up to become a representative of something larger than myself. This is why service manuals, codes of conduct, and adherence to the rules given to me by my superiors mattered tremendously. Everywhere I went, and in everything I said, I represented an organization, and I was obligated to represent it well.

Four years after exiting the Navy, I led a church plant in the city of Bozeman in my home state of Montana. Not long after planting, we discussed joining Sovereign Grace Churches, and that conversation eventuated in formal adoption in July 2018. I am still thrilled to say that we love this family of churches. There is no place we would rather be.

While joining Sovereign Grace Churches is not quite like joining the Navy, there is one striking similarity: an awareness of representation. I learned

quickly upon adoption that so much of what I appreciated about Sovereign Grace was captured in our Seven Shared Values. It quickly became clear that it took effort and intentionality to implement and maintain them. I had admired what Sovereign Grace Churches stood for from a distance, but now that I was leading a Sovereign Grace church, I felt the burden to cultivate these biblical values on a daily basis.

Pastors, you know the challenge I am describing. Our church bodies do not come to us neatly packaged, filled with only joyful and understanding saints who agree with our doctrine and practice without exception. It just does not work that way. We have people in our churches who join the body with various stories as their backdrop. How am I going to promote continuationism to those raised to believe the gifts of the Spirit are antithetical to Scriptural authority? How might I teach biblical complementarianism to a young lady raised without a father? Or, largely applicable to my context, how do I show people that it is good to belong to a union of churches when all they have known is staunch independence?

I am still trying to find answers to these questions, and I know I have a long way to go. I have been grateful to my fellow pastors who have guided me along the way in my efforts to build the Sovereign Grace culture into my local church. I am humbled to offer these four suggestions that I have gleaned from my brief time in pastoral ministry. I hope they serve you as you seek to build a healthy, biblical culture in your church.

1. Share the Load

The Seven Shared Values will be tough to implement if you are the only one trying to uphold them. Pastor, you need others to share that load. Who can help? As an eldership, work to identify people in the church who are already leaning toward the values. Let them know how grateful you are for their dedication to represent our values well, and make sure you give them avenues to continue practicing and modeling the values for the church body. Rallying more people to shoulder this load is a good first step in creating a healthy culture around our values.

Practical Suggestion: Go through your roster and consider who is already promoting these values in their words and lives. Move toward those people and equip them to keep going!

2. Don't Fear the Classroom

Consider taking the Seven Shared Values into the classroom. Might it serve people in your church to sit down outside of the Sunday gathering and learn about the biblical and historical warrant for our Shared Values? “You mean, just like in a school setting?” Yes, like a school setting: pencils and all! You may be surprised by how helpful it is to engage your people in this way. Texts can be considered. Questions can be answered. Church members can hear from their elders and hear from each other in a fresh setting. We want our members to embrace these values, not as arbitrary marks of our choosing but as realities rooted in Scripture and given for our good.

Practical Suggestion: Consider planning a seven-week course to teach your church about our Seven Shared Values separate from Sunday services.

3. Find Simple Avenues for Expression

There is no need to overthink when and how these Seven Shared Values can be expressed regularly. And remember that each value might find expression in different ways. For example, living out our value of Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches can start simply by creating space for all your elders to have a visible role in the Sunday gathering. On the other hand, our commitment to Outreach, Global Missions, and Church Planting may come through making people aware of faraway church plants or praying corporately in response to the latest news from Emerging Nations. Our Continuationist Pneumatology should not be restricted to approaching a microphone during musical worship on Sunday. How about encouraging our people to pray and pursue the Spirit's gifts throughout the week and in their various small groups? At Emmaus Road Church, for example, we often have more expressions of speech gifts during the week than at our Sunday gathering. What a change it makes when our pastors and members seek out simple and consistent avenues to live out our values!

Practical Suggestion: Develop a plan with your leaders. Itemize the different ways each of our Seven Shared Values can find expression in your church body, both on Sunday and during the week.

4. Enjoy the Journey

I am aware of the temptation to discouragement, especially when I am not detecting the momentum I desire for my church body. I tend to think of Emmaus Road Church in terms of where I believe the church should be, often at the expense of seeing the tremendous fruit in the church *right now*. This frustration can undoubtedly pertain to my desire to see the Seven Shared Values embraced and lived out in our church. I need the constant reminder that God is often pleased to work gradually. The Messiah did not come immediately after the Fall but came after centuries of anticipation (Gal. 4:4). The Kingdom of Heaven did not arrive in its total and finished form but is being built by God over time (Matt. 13:31–32). Even our sanctification is a lifelong trek, marked by our dependence upon God for growth in holiness (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Why would we expect anything different within the churches? I want to find joy in the journey of leading and serving in the church, not constant despair and anxiety. I want to celebrate every small expression of our values instead of longing for only the “big ones.” I want to walk alongside members eagerly as we grow together in our understanding of how God would have us live and serve as part of Sovereign Grace Churches.

Practical Suggestion: Take time regularly to consider and thank God for how he is already working out the Seven Shared Values in your church body.

THE SEVEN SHARED VALUES IN MÉXICO

TWO VALUES MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Abelardo Muñoz

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The Seven Shared Values that define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace church are extremely important in the country of México. They function as a compass that guides us and enables us to stay on the right track while marching on in a spiritual landscape where most basic biblical values are either ignored or neglected. If we did not have the Seven Shared Values, it is most likely that our church, along with the rest of the churches in our region, would have strayed, in one way or another, from the straight path of faithfulness to biblical principles.

The evangelical horizon of our nation contains a mix of ministry values and practices completely foreign and even opposite to those established in Scripture. This makes it almost impossible for any local church to carry out its ministry without being influenced by teachings and practices contrary to most of our Seven Shared Values.

In this article, I will attempt to explain the perspective and the practice of the majority of local evangelical churches both in Ciudad Juárez and in the rest of México, as it pertains to two of our Seven Shared Values: Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching and Complementarian Leadership in the Home and the Church.

I will focus on these two values because they are perhaps the most absent and, therefore, the ones we need to promote more intentionally in order to help churches throughout México embrace them as fundamental convictions. Then I will speak briefly of the main ways our church and our region seek

to teach and model these values to other pastors from our community and from all over México.

Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching

Perhaps the most prominent and harmful characteristic of today's evangelicalism in México is the sad reality that the doctrine being taught and the sermons being preached are not gospel-centered. Instead, what is normally taught and preached is a false or distorted gospel, centered on the needs and welfare of man more than in the glory of God and the exaltation of Christ. In other words, what is proclaimed the most in México and Latin America are diverse versions of the prosperity gospel.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that even those churches that have not succumbed to the enticements of the prosperity gospel generally do not teach doctrine nor preach sermons centered on the gospel. Instead, what is typically taught and preached in those churches is a brand of Christianity in which our approval by God depends on our performance or level of obedience to the commands of Scripture. What is preached are different kinds of moralism and/or legalism, which differ only in form but not in substance.

Here are just some of the factors that contribute to this spiritual tragedy:

- The great majority of lead pastors in our city and nation have not received any kind of formal theological training, nor have they been taught the importance of giving the person and work of Jesus Christ preeminence in all teaching and preaching.
- A high percentage of those who currently serve as pastors in México were self-appointed as senior pastors or were installed in their roles only because they are children or close relatives of the former senior pastor. The critical task of biblically ascertaining a genuine call of God upon a man's life is never carried out. As a result, most pastors assume their roles without being evaluated or confirmed on the basis of whether they meet the character and doctrinal requirements spelled out in Scripture. All of this leads to the sad conclusion that a significant percentage of leaders

who currently serve as pastors in México were never called nor gifted by God to serve in that capacity.

- This unfortunate pastoral/ministerial picture is made even worse by the fact that almost all pastors in México carry out their ministries alone and isolated. It is very unusual for a pastor to have a mentor or a fellow elder to whom he can go when facing affliction or adversity, or simply to have fellowship or ask for counsel or advice, and much less to practice accountability or to have someone speak into his life. In México, the practice of accountability is totally foreign.

Sadly, all of the above is the rule and not the exception, not only for pastors of independent churches but also for pastors whose churches are affiliated even with the largest denominations of our nation. This is because most denominations do not assign a high priority to the relational aspect of ministry. As a result, they do not provide their elders with the care and encouragement every pastor needs.

Complementarian Leadership in the Home and the Church

In our country, the outlook regarding complementarianism is just as bleak as in the case of gospel-centered preaching and teaching. This is especially true when it comes to male leadership in the church.

In flagrant indifference and negligence towards the requirements established in God's Word for those who aspire to the office of elder or bishop (1 Tim. 3:2), a rather high and growing percentage of local churches are led by women who hold the title and position of senior pastor. An even higher percentage of local churches are led by a man who functions as the senior pastor and by his wife, who is also formally appointed as co-pastor, with authority to teach and preach to both men and women. A sad outcome is that in many of these churches, the wife-pastor has an equal or even greater influence than her husband.

In some cases, this practice is the result of faulty hermeneutics, which leads to the erroneous idea that since husband and wife are "one flesh" before God

(Gen. 2:24), that confers upon wives the same rights and the same ministerial authority their husbands possess. Another purely pragmatic argument for a pastor's wife preaching to the entire congregation is the fact that she might have a remarkable speaking gift and is often mightily used by God to bless and edify the church. This disregards the fact that God never based these roles on gifting but on his Word.

Ways in Which We Promote Our Shared Values

One of the main ways in which we seek to promote the Seven Shared Values is by inviting as many pastors in México as possible to attend a Pastors Conference. It is hosted each year in our church, Iglesia Gracia Soberana de Ciudad Juárez and is called “Fieles a Su Llamado” (“Faithful to His Calling”). By the grace of God, we had about 350 pastors and leaders with their wives attend. (It is worth mentioning that those pastors and leaders came from seventeen of the thirty-two states that comprise the Republic of México.)

We thank God for the great blessing this conference is for all those who attend. While attending the conference, the pastors and leaders are exposed in every plenary session and in every breakout session not only to excellent gospel-centered preaching and teaching but also to the Seven Shared Values of our dear family of churches. We hope and pray that this will result in more and more churches embracing little by little each one of our shared biblical convictions.

Another very effective tool we've been using to promote gospel-centered preaching is the expository preaching workshops that take place once a year in Juárez (since 2014) and in our Sovereign Grace church of Guadalajara (since 2017). In 2014, our church began a formal partnership with the Charles Simeon Trust in order to promote expository preaching among the pastors of our nation and the rest of Latin America. By God's grace, that initiative has produced amazing results. From the small beginning of just one workshop in all of Latin America in 2014 (the first one we had here in our Juárez church), there are now five workshops held each year in different Mexican cities (including the ones in Juárez and Guadalajara). In total, there are twenty-two workshops per year in different nations around Latin America! And

the number of workshops keeps growing year after year. We need to pray for God to raise more qualified instructors because more than twenty requests for a workshop are turned down each year in our continent due to the lack of qualified instructors.

Conclusion

We'll never stop thanking God for the tremendous impact and importance our Seven Shared Values have had on our church for decades. They are having the same positive influence on all the churches of the region God is allowing us to develop. Our deepest longing and constant petition before our Lord Jesus Christ is that he will grant us the grace and resources to plant, adopt, and relate to the greatest number of churches possible. We pray that all of them may be impacted and edified as a result of embracing our biblical convictions, the Seven Shared Values that define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace Church. And may all this happen to the praise of the glory of his grace.

THE SEVEN SHARED VALUES IN GERMANY

HOW REFORMED THEOLOGY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING

Christian Wegert

Senior Pastor, Arche Church (Hamburg, Germany)

After fifteen years, we at Arche Church in Germany are still filled with gratitude to be associated with Sovereign Grace Churches and to share the seven values. In fact, the first shared value, Reformed Theology, has great significance for us.

Our Way to Sovereign Grace

When parts of the Pentecostal movement in Germany took on more extreme aspects of the charismatic movement, we were looking desperately for sound biblical teaching. One day we invited the Baptist pastor Ted Tripp to our church as guest speaker. When he heard about our conversion to the Reformed faith, he asked us whether we as former pentecostals still believe in the active presence of the Holy Spirit. After hearing the answer “We do,” he spontaneously exclaimed: “I know which church movement you would fit into.” And right away the name “Sovereign Grace” was mentioned. We had never heard of Sovereign Grace before. Ted told us about the characteristics of this family of churches, how they are Reformed at heart, yet at the same time believe in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. That was precisely what we had been looking for.

This led us to attend the Sovereign Grace Pastors Conference as guests in 2006 and 2007. Revived and reaffirmed in the teaching of the sovereign grace of God, we returned to Germany, each time highly motivated to proclaim this glorious message not only in Hamburg, but—with the help of our television ministry—also in all of the German-speaking parts of Europe.

From the Pastors College Back to Hamburg

However, participating in conferences wasn't the only thing. Sovereign Grace opened the doors for me to study at the Pastors College. My family and I look back on that time with much gratefulness. At the Pastors College I was able to gain insight into the breadth and depth of Reformed Theology. I had the privilege of seeing the effect of the healthy and transforming power of gospel-centered doctrines in the lives of individuals, families, and even churches. Returning home with these treasures, I desired to spread the gospel of grace in Germany.

My father, Wolfgang Wegert, who was the senior pastor at that time, welcomed that wholeheartedly. He was the one who had started the reformation in our church. Together with the elders, he appointed me as his successor, which was confirmed by the church. I will not forget the help of Sovereign Grace pastors who supported this generational change by giving biblical counsel and helpful practical advice. The assistance of Sovereign Grace in this process had much impact in spreading Reformed Theology in Germany.

German Pastors College

Jeff Purswell played an active role in founding the Hamburg Pastors College according to the example of the Sovereign Grace Pastors College. The purpose of the college is to equip young men for pastoral ministry and to strengthen pastors in their existing ministry. The Bible-based lecture units take place on a number of weekends every year and were conducted by Jeff Purswell during the first few years. God used his excellent teaching gift and his love for Germany to get the college on the right track. Today, the teaching is done by Arche pastors, as well as other guest teachers. Markus Kniesel leads our Pastors College, having also studied at the Sovereign Grace Pastors College. So Sovereign Grace has had a blessed impact not only on our church, but also on our whole nation.

Church-Planting Activities in Germany

We were very excited by the vision to plant new churches in addition to caring for the local church in Hamburg and being involved in its nationwide

television ministry. With God's help we started and planted a reformed church in a town called Stade, about 60 kilometers away from Hamburg, and another church in the city of Hanover, about 150 kilometers away. These churches are pastored by graduates of our Pastors College and, God willing, others will follow. A network has been established of partner churches and associated churches. One of the churches is in the town of Gorlitz near the border to Poland—a church made up of Polish and German members. Resulting from our missions ministry in Ukraine, a number of Arche churches came into existence there. They all embrace the glorious gospel of free grace and they continue to preach it in their oppressed country. One way we build and establish this network is our annual conference called “Ecksteinkonferenz” where we have invited brothers from Sovereign Grace, such as C. J. Mahaney, Jeff Purswell, Bob Kauflin, and Rick Gamache, to speak.

From Arminian Law to Reformed Freedom

On the basis of knowing Reformed Theology, our preaching and teaching ministry also changed. In former times man and his activity were at the center of our preaching. Without knowing it, we preached justification by works in disguise. Now the living God who initiates everything is at the center, and we declare that from beginning to end salvation comes from him alone. That turned the hearts of many of our listeners upside down and they told us: “All these years we thought we had true faith; now we know the true gospel.” Others even said: “We thought we were Christians, but now we have been born again.” And still others testified to how this message of grace set them free from their own struggles and that they have now received rest, assurance, and true joy of salvation.

Only a few days ago someone wrote:

Having dropped out of prosperity by shutdown of my company, unemployment, and marriage problems, I sat in my mobile home meditating on my life so far. Then I took your book *Foundations of Faith*³³ which I had ordered from you and started to read until I came across the statement:

33. A booklet that we distributed through our television program and in which we explain the basics of the gospel.

“I am justified by Jesus Christ.” For the very first time I understood what God in Christ had really done for me. This little word “justified” struck me and changed my life forever!

How Reformed Theology Created Unity

The people in our church say it is remarkable how much all of our seven pastors agree. While we were part of the pentecostal movement, there were many contradictory doctrines. One pastor preached on one Sunday and another pastor preached the exact opposite the next Sunday. That led to confusion and strife. “But today,” many say, “it doesn’t matter who stands in the pulpit. You all preach the same thing. There is not even room between you for a single piece of paper!” Voices such as these convinced us that our church’s reformation brought about a precious unity because reformed pastors have learned that there is only one gospel, not two, three, or even more. And if all of us preach the one, sound, healthy gospel of the Scripture, we proclaim it each one in his own way, yet with one voice. A pastor once said: “Whoever has embraced the gospel of the free grace will cling to it for the rest of his life.” Thanks be to God, due to the loving care of Sovereign Grace, we too were able to embrace it. And we too will cling to it for the rest of our lives.

THE SEVEN SHARED VALUES IN THE PHILIPPINES

GOSPEL-INSPIRED CHURCH PLANTING EFFORTS

Jeffrey Jo

Senior Pastor, Cross of Christ Salvation Gospel Ministries (Imus, Philippines)

Editor's Note: Jeff Jo's story captures the heart of our desire for Sovereign Grace Churches to reach the lost through church planting. By doing so, churches like Jeff's are not only winning the lost but growing them into disciples of Jesus Christ.

I still remember in the early years when God birthed in our hearts the desire to pray and do missions in the third poorest province in our country. In spite of our limited financial resources at that time, we believed that the Holy Spirit was leading us to plant churches in that region, which was 1,300 kilometers away from us.

This led us to cry out to God, “Lord, we are just a small church, but you created in us a big heart for missions. May we be passionate to proclaim your gospel and plant churches so that your name may be known among the people and tribes in that region.” So for the past fifteen years we have been planting churches in the southern part of Surigao, Mindanao, Philippines.

Since then, in God's providence, eleven churches have been planted, reaching the Manobo tribes. God willing, three more will be added in 2022. Year after year, as our fellow elders and pastors congregate, we ask ourselves, “Why do we do missions?” Let's face it, sometimes we do ministry activities without asking why we do what we do. I believe it's possible to plant churches with a wrong intention or, worse, with a wrong foundation. This happens when our efforts in church planting are focused on the wrong things.

Church growth. We do not do missions so that we can brag to other churches about how fast our denomination is growing. Both church planting and church growth is God's work. We should be reminded of Psalm 127:1, which says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

Church fame. When we are after the church's fame rather than the glory of God, we are not just diverting from the biblical intention of church planting, we are competing with the glory that is due to his name alone. Charles Spurgeon once penned, "The moment we glorify ourselves, since there is room for one glory only in the universe, we set ourselves up as rivals to the Most High."³⁴

Church buildings. No matter how important the church building is, it does not ensure that biblical church planting has been done. Nowadays, there are church buildings that are filled with religious yet unconverted people, going through religious motions but with no biblical conviction or devotion at all.

Church planting aims for the worship of his glorious name. Both in the lives of an individual person and a congregation, the gospel of Christ is cherished. It is the very foundation in the heart of every genuine disciple of Christ, whose joy is to be in the fellowship of the community of the saints as they grow together "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). At the same time, we expect to see real gospel conversions exercised in marriage, family, and community. How do we do this?

Once a month, we gather as elders with our wives to bond and check on how we are living out the gospel of Christ inside our families. We encourage the same kind of fellowship in our sister churches south of Mindanao. We desire to see churches where families have high esteem for the gospel of Christ.

Secondly, we raised up a church-planting team who have been instructed in and inspired by the gospel of Christ. This secures their hearts as they do missions and disciple others, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20).

34. C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Chester, UK: Discovery House, 2016), August 16 Morning.

Lastly, in his providence, we prioritize gospel clarity both in the preaching of his Word and in congregational singing, celebrating the beauty of the cross of Christ and the power of his resurrection. In the light of these gospel-inspired gatherings and church planting endeavors, every pride melts in the hearts of those whom he elected for salvation.

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

PRAYING THROUGH OUR SEVEN SHARED VALUES

Gary Ricucci

Elder, Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville (Louisville, KY)

Our Values as a Whole

Our gracious God and Father, our glorious Lord and Savior, our indwelling Helper and Counselor, we come to you with hearts of reverence, worship, gratitude, and awe. Lord God, that we come to you at all is the fruit of your sovereign goodness, mercy, and grace alone, lavished upon us in the substitutionary sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ, who bore your wrath and was raised for our justification. Thank you that by your grace we know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent, and are thereby saved to eternal life.

Father, thank you for being self-revealing—desiring that we know you, believe in you, obey you, and display your glory as you make us more like your Son. You have taught us that passion and pursuit of your glory is the purpose for which we were created and is thereby our greatest good. We ask that you grant us fervent faithfulness and abundant fruitfulness that brings you glory.

Lord God, we treasure your sovereign and effectual call, the gospel which saves us through your Son, and your Spirit who fills us. We find in that treasure the precious gift of a new family of brothers and sisters you've joined together as loyal partners and co-laborers and as a priceless means of grace to one another in our glorious mission.

You have instilled within us, as a family of Sovereign Grace Churches, specific biblical values and convictions. By your grace, we resolve to have these values shape our lives, our homes, our relationships, our practices, our churches, our partnership, and our gospel mission together. Such resolution is futile apart

from your enabling and empowering grace. So we now draw near to you, call upon you, and trust you to answer our prayers in a way that furthers our fruitfulness and brings great glory to your name.

1. Reformed Theology

Lord God, we bow our knees before you, creator of heaven and earth, enthroned in the heavens and ruling over all. In your omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, we believe that you work all things—all things—after the counsel of your will, including the choosing, calling and saving of sinful man. Father, we confess that our finite minds cannot fully grasp the infinite mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. However, because your Word proclaims both, we trust you will faithfully save those whom you have called as we faithfully proclaim the gospel.

Help us, as a family of churches, to declare the living God with grace and confidence. You have the final word in all things. Keep us from passive resignation and stir us with faith-filled proclamation to the exaltation of your name.

2. Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching

Father, we pray our every desire and every endeavor will be informed by the gospel, which is of first importance. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation, may all we say and do and may all we preach and teach be infused with what Christ has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish through his substitutionary death and his resurrection. Remind us to embrace thankfully and to declare faithfully that only the gospel brings reconciliation between God and man. Only the gospel provides any hope of peace on earth. The Holy Spirit empowers the lives, the relationships, and the churches of Sovereign Grace to display as central the wondrous transforming grace of the gospel.

3. Continuationist Pneumatology

Lord Jesus, in your ascension to heaven, you blessed us with another Helper to be with us and within us—the Holy Spirit. We thank you for his guidance into

truth, conviction of sin, empowerment of us as ambassadors, and revelation of your glory. We also praise you for the manifestation of your Spirit at work in the gifts you've given to each member of your church for the common good. We ask that your Spirit would stir us to steward his presence and power with godliness, evangelism, and the exercise of the gifts he's given us to serve others. Lord, fill us with the Spirit, keep us ever dependent upon him in humility, and create faith-filled anticipation of his presence and power, so we increasingly bring glory to Christ and blessing to and through Sovereign Grace Churches.

4. Complementary Leadership in the Home and the Church

Heavenly Father, we stand in awe of the majesty and beauty of your creation. You've crafted humanity to reflect your glory as we bear your image in our maleness and femaleness. Holy Spirit, draw us again and again to God's Word to behold your perfect design, your perfect plan, and your perfect purpose for each man and woman to display your glory uniquely on the earth. We ask you to sustain our convictions, declaration, and application of our identities and roles by the clear teaching of Scripture forever. Protect us as Sovereign Grace Churches from the influence of cultural acceptance, identity distortions, or misapplication of roles—whether in the home, the community, or the church. Guard us from that age-old question of the deceiver: "Did God actually say . . . ?" May joy, honor, respect, and abounding fruitfulness in our homes, our families, and our churches be the result of embracing our roles and privileges as man and woman created in your image.

5. Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches

Lord Jesus, we once again thank you that when you ascended on high, you gave gifts to men to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Throughout your Word and throughout redemptive history, you display your care for your people by authorizing specific roles assumed by specific men to guide, instruct, direct, and lead your people.

We are grateful for those you have placed among us to shepherd our souls and for the biblical standards you hold for those so delegated to represent you as under-shepherds among your flock. Please grant our leaders discernment to recognize those you have called, so that they might sufficiently equip, train,

affirm, and deploy them for the expansion of the gospel and the care of your church. May our leaders walk in fear of the Lord and so receive your promised wisdom. May they walk in humility and so abound with your grace. And may they wisely and courageously shepherd your flock with integrity of heart.

6. Church Planting, Outreach, and Global Missions

Father, amid the names by which we are joyfully called—your children, disciples, a holy nation, and heirs—we also want to steward the name given as representatives of our Lord and Savior and King: the name of “ambassadors.” Having received the priceless treasure of the gospel, may your love compel us to share that gift with every tongue, tribe, and nation. Please raise up among Sovereign Grace Churches pastors, teachers, evangelists, and church planters, both here and abroad. Empower us by your Spirit to be a means of filling the earth with your glory as we proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches to be light in a darkened world. May we all embrace the privilege and mission of the gospel, from our own communities to the ends of the earth.

7. United Fellowship, Mission, and Governance

Lord, we thank you for the blessings you grant us as we, by your mercy and grace, dwell together in unity. You have blessed us with unity and harmony in our doctrine and theology, in our values and distinctives, and in our ecclesiology and missiology. And Lord, may we always be humble as we recognize, trust in, and follow those specifically gifted and called to lead and govern. Thank you for a governing and unifying order that not only protects but also multiplies our ministry and fruitfulness. We pray that an ever-deepening commitment to you, to our mission, and to one another would provide a powerful display of the righteousness, peace, and joy that is your kingdom. And may our love and loyalty to our leaders and to one another also display that we are indeed your disciples.

Closing Prayer

Father, we offer these prayers that we might increasingly walk in a manner worthy of your calling, that we might be increasingly unified and fruitful in our gospel ministry, that we might steward the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and that we might bring glory and honor and praise to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we gratefully pray.

Amen.

RECOMMENDED READING

The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains, proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying.

CHARLES SPURGEON

Sermon, "Paul—His Cloak and His Books"

RESOURCES ON OUR SEVEN SHARED VALUES

Jeff Purswell

Director of Theology, Sovereign Grace Churches (Louisville, KY)

As we hope this issue of the Sovereign Grace Journal makes clear, our Seven Shared Values are more than just “denominational distinctives.” They capture biblical realities we pray will shape our entire family of churches. Each value opens up wide vistas of biblical truth and theological reflection that can nurture our souls and transform our lives. This issue would not be complete without pointing to resources that explain, celebrate, and help us apply the truth that informs these values.

We’ve included here a range of books, some aimed at popular audiences and some more technical. No doubt we’ll omit a book you love and have benefited from! But we hope this list will bring helpful titles to your attention and encourage you to explore the richness captured in our Seven Shared Values.

1. Reformed Theology

What is Reformed Theology?, by R. C. Sproul. A readable, God-exalting overview of Reformed theology by one who taught millions these glorious truths.

Chosen for Life, by Sam Storms. For a treatment of the doctrine of election that is thorough yet clear, persuasive yet courteous, deeply theological yet wisely pastoral, this book is hard to beat.

Redemption Accomplished and Applied, by John Murray. A classic treatment of the nature of Christ’s saving work and how it is applied to our lives.

Especially for pastors: *Providence*, by John Piper. Working your way through Piper’s majestic tour of God’s “purposeful sovereignty” will refresh your soul and deepen your grasp of the worldview that is Reformed theology.

2. Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching

The Cross of Christ, by John R. W. Stott. This classic book has stood the test of time in exploring the glories, dimensions, and implications of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

The Cross and Christian Ministry, by D. A. Carson. This book has long been essential reading, especially for pastors, in grasping the foundational role of the gospel for life and ministry.

Living the Cross-Centered Life, by C. J. Mahaney. A succinct, pastoral, and practical guide to living in light of the cross by one of the most gospel-centered pastors we know.

Especially for pastors: *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, by J. I. Packer and Mark Dever. There are riches on every page of this collection that celebrates the glory of the atonement, but pastors especially should not miss Packer's "What Did the Cross Achieve?" and his introduction to Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.

3. Continuationist Pneumatology

Showing the Spirit, by D. A. Carson. A masterful and clearly written exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14 that provides clarity and much wisdom on the Holy Spirit and the gifts he gives to the church.

God's Empowering Presence, by Gordon Fee. Building on an 800-page examination of every Pauline text that mentions the Spirit, Fee then summarizes in 100 pages a Pauline pneumatology that reveals the centrality of the Spirit for the life of God's people. One can find a much more concise treatment of this material in Fee's *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*.

Systematic Theology, 2nd ed., by Wayne Grudem. This book has done much to shape our family of churches over the years, but chapters 39, 52, and 53 are particularly clear and cogent treatments of continuationist convictions.

Especially for pastors: *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, by Max Turner. With depth and exegetical precision, Turner explores the New Testament's teaching on both the gift of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, as well as their use in the church today.

4. Complementary Leadership in the Home and in the Church

Men and Women in the Church, by Kevin DeYoung. If we had to recommend one book that summarizes biblical teaching on this topic with faithfulness, clarity, and accessibility, this would be it.

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem. This landmark book, published in 1991, remains the gold standard for comprehensively articulating the complementary worldview. Given the vast cultural changes over the past thirty years, the revised version is invaluable for a rising generation of pastors and church members.

God's Design for Man and Woman, by Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger. This book takes a biblical-theological approach in tracing Scripture's teaching on manhood and womanhood from beginning to end, along with some very helpful concluding applications.

Especially for pastors: *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed., eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner. This thoroughly updated collection of essays on 1 Timothy 2:9–15 presents a decisive case for a complementary reading of this pivotal text.

5. Elder-Governed and Elder-Led Churches

How Jesus Runs the Church, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Although differing at points with Sovereign Grace polity, Waters provides a clear, biblical treatment of how Christ's authority is mediated to his church through its leaders (he also argues for extra-local polity among churches).

The Shepherd Leader, by Timothy Z. Witmer. In a very readable fashion, Witmer explores both the biblical foundations and the vital roles of Christian leadership.

Biblical Eldership, by Alexander Strauch. This book not only describes the multi-faceted role of the elder but makes a compelling apologetic for the role of elders in the leadership of the church.

Especially for pastors: *Preaching and Preachers*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Although not a book on ecclesiology per se, this classic text will reinvigorate a pastor's vision for the priority and promise of what is most central to his ministry in the church.

6. Church Planting, Outreach, and Global Mission

Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien. By tracing the theme of mission throughout Scripture, this book inspires us in our mission by revealing that it is, in fact, God's own mission, central to salvation-history and part of God's eternal purposes.

What is the Mission of the Church?, by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert. This important book brings much needed clarity and discernment to the many claims made about what the church is called to do.

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, by J. I. Packer. A must-read book that informs and inspires all dimensions of our evangelism and outreach.

Especially for pastors: *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul*, by P. T. O'Brien. Drawing from Paul's life and ministry, this book clarifies the gospel's power and priority in mission and the church's role in its advance.

7. United Fellowship, Mission, and Governance

Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 4, by Herman Bavinck. Tucked deep in this magisterial work, Bavinck's chapter on "The Church's Spiritual Power" (chapter 7) traces the church's ecclesiology throughout its history and persuasively asserts both the integrity of local churches and the necessity and wisdom of connectionalism among churches (Bavinck's arguments were influential in the formulation of Sovereign Grace's own polity).

Churches Partnering Together, by Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks. Although one may not agree with every pastoral decision described in this book, the authors make a compelling case for the biblical priority of partnership, not simply among Christians but especially among churches.

Collected Writings of John Murray Vol. 1, by John Murray. Two chapters in this collection—"The Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Union" (chapter 36) and "Corporate Responsibility" (chapter 37)—make a biblical case for cooperation among churches.

Especially for pastors: *The Church of Christ*, by James Bannerman. This classic 19th century treatment of ecclesiology leaves few stones unturned, but Part IV ("Parties In Whom the Right to Exercise Church Power Is Vested") is particularly relevant to Sovereign Grace polity in its evaluation of independency and congregationalism.

The Sovereign Grace Journal

1. Christ Our Treasure
2. A Christ-Centered People
3. Our Statement of Faith
4. Our Shared Values
5. Our Shaping Virtues
6. A Passion for the Church
7. Churches in Partnership
8. The Books that Shaped Us
9. Evangelism
10. Church Planting



We plant and strengthen
CHURCHES
for the glory of God.

Sovereign Grace Churches is a confessional community of congregations, united in theology, fellowship, and mission. We treasure the sovereign grace of God in Christ, and we are committed to gospel-centered doctrine, preaching, and living.

Our fellowship extends beyond mere denominational affiliation, to relationships that foster mutual encouragement, care, and a glad pursuit of Christlikeness.

We are continuationist in our pursuit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts, complementarian in convictions on gender, and elder-governed in our polity, with some carefully delineated areas of shared governance. Our passion is to see churches planted and nurtured throughout the world.

To learn more about our churches, including our *Statement of Faith* and how to join us, visit sovereigngrace.com.

