

## **Doctrinal Distinctives**

These Doctrinal Distinctives state the doctrinal position, and thereby determine the practice, of Grace Church in respect of certain issues. It is recognised that true evangelical Christian believers may, in conscience, take a different personal view in respect of these matters. Persons may be welcomed into membership of Grace Church who hold a different view on these matters, provided that they are prepared to respect the beliefs and practices of the church and that they will not seek to undermine them. A person may only become an Elder of Grace Church if he wholeheartedly subscribes to these beliefs and is willing to uphold them.

## **The Sufficiency of the Scriptures**

Grace Church believes that God speaks to men and women today through the Scriptures. When the Scriptures are read or explained, whether publicly or privately, God speaks by his Spirit. The Scriptures contain everything which it is necessary for God to say, whether explicitly or through deduction by good and necessary consequence, to enable men and women to come to salvation through Christ, and to grow to maturity in Christ such that they might know how to live to please him. Since the Scriptures are entirely sufficient in this regard, no additional word or revelation from God is required to enable a person to know God, or to know his will. Where anyone claims that God is speaking a word by any means other than through the Scriptures, such word shall not be accepted unless it is first rigorously tested to determine whether it is consistent with the Scriptures. In accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, the Elders of the church are the persons within the congregation who bear the responsibility for assessing whether any such word is genuinely from God.

## **Baptism**

Grace Church believes that Baptism into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is an outward sign which marks a person's regeneration and baptism by the Holy Spirit into membership of the Church of Jesus Christ. As such it should only properly be administered to a person who publicly professes faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism should, wherever possible and practicable, be administered by immersion in water, symbolising that the person baptised has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and is the possessor of the benefits thereof.

## **The Lord's Supper**

Grace Church believes that the Lord's Supper is a remembrance meal at which Christian believers share bread and wine together to remind themselves of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of the new covenant of salvation which he inaugurated, and to proclaim that he will return. Jesus Christ is no more present at a celebration of the Lord's Supper than at any other gathering of the members of a local church. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated on a regular basis by the members of the church, ideally in the context of a fellowship meal demonstrating their unity in the body of Christ.

## **Election and Evangelism**

Grace Church believes that God is sovereign in the salvation of men and women. Those persons who exercise genuine repentance and true faith in Jesus Christ do so because they have been chosen by God. Knowledge of this truth promotes amongst believers absolute humility and assurance of salvation. However it does not follow from the truth of election that believers need not participate in mission and evangelism. The Church is commanded by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to all men everywhere, and the proclamation of the gospel is the means by which the elect are brought to salvation.

## **Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Grace Church believes that every genuine believer was baptised by the Holy Spirit at the moment at which they were regenerated and brought to true faith in Jesus Christ. The experiences of the disciples at Pentecost and of the Samaritan believers in Acts Chapter 8 were unique and unrepeatable moments of salvation history, and they do not provide a pattern for present day spiritual experience. Whilst every genuine believer is therefore always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it does not follow that every believer is necessarily filled with the Spirit at all times. All believers are urged by Scripture to ensure that they are increasingly yielded to the power, influence and control of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

## **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

Grace Church believes that all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament may be bestowed upon believers today as God himself directs in his sovereignty. The gifts of the Spirit did not cease to be available to the church with the passing of the apostolic age, and they will only pass away when Jesus Christ returns to establish his kingdom.

## **The Gift of Tongues**

Grace Church believes that although the gift of tongues may be given to believers today, it is not a gift which is given to every believer, nor is it a sign of receipt of the Holy Spirit. Tongues are given not as a means by which God may speak to his church, but are a gift whereby members of the church are enabled to praise God in languages other than their own. The gift of tongues should be used publicly to offer praise to God at a meeting of a local church only where an interpreter is present who will be able to translate the praise offered so that it can be understood and affirmed by all members of the congregation.

## **Salvation By Christ Alone**

Grace Church believes that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and that he provides the sole means by which men and women may come to salvation. The Christian faith is the only true religion, and adherence to any other belief cannot lead to salvation. Believers in Jesus Christ are required to display tolerance in their attitude towards those of other faiths, but also to seek to bring them to a true saving knowledge of Him by prayer and evangelism.

## **Leadership of the Local Church**

Grace Church believes that, in accordance with the pattern established in Scripture, a local church congregation should be led by a plurality of suitably gifted Elders. Whilst God created men and women in absolute equality, he also ordained that leadership in the family, within the context of marriage, and in the church, should be the functional responsibility of men. For this reason, in obedience to the Word of God, the Elders of Grace Church are required to be male. The duly appointed Elders of the church are the under-shepherds of Christ, and they must exercise their leadership of the local church in accordance with the character of Christ's own leadership of the Universal Church. They are to love the members of the church and to give themselves in their service, working to present them to Christ as holy and blameless. In turn the members of the church are required to submit themselves to the leadership of the Elders, in so far as such leadership is exercised in accordance with the Scriptures. Also in accordance with the pattern of Scriptures, male and female members of the church with appropriate gifts may be set apart as Deacons to serve particular needs arising in the life of the church.

## **Every Member Ministry**

Grace Church believes that each and every member of the church is called by God to utilise his or her gifts, whatever they may be, by ministering to other members of the church. The provision of teaching and pastoral care within the life of the church is not the sole responsibility of the Elders and Deacons. The church does not believe that there is any scriptural justification for a distinction amongst believers between clergy and laity, but affirms that every believer is a priest who enjoys direct access to God and is able to minister to others. The Elders and Deacons of the church are not qualitatively distinguishable from other members of the church, but are believers who have been appointed by the members of the church to provide pastoral leadership of the congregation, in recognition that they are suitable in character and gifts to undertake such responsibilities.

## **Sex and Sexuality**

Grace Church believes that God created men and women as sexual creatures. As such it is entirely right and pleasing to God that they should enjoy the pleasure of sexual intimacy. However, God has ordained that the only proper relationship within which such sexual intimacy may be enjoyed is marriage. Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman who are unmarried, or between persons of the same gender, is sinful and displeasing to God. Those who engage in sexual intimacy outside of the context of a marriage relationship, and who do not repent of their sin, face the certain prospect of judgement. However, God longs that all persons who have fallen short of his standards of sexual behaviour should come to repentance and faith so that they might receive complete forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and that they might resist temptation and live in a manner which is pleasing to him.