

What Does Grace Fellowship Believe?

Senior Pastor Jim Leggett's notes on church beliefs from Joining Step.

Distinguishing Between Three Levels of Belief

1. **CONVICTIONS: Core beliefs of the Christian faith that I would die for and break fellowship over.**
 - Example: Deity of Christ – Belief that Jesus Christ is 100% God and yet 100% Man, born of a virgin birth.
2. **PERSUASIONS: Beliefs that I am persuaded about and would argue for; however, I would not die for these issues or break fellowship over them.**
 - Example: Different end times views. If we are in agreement that Jesus Christ is coming back, it is ok for us to disagree on the exact details of the end times scenario: pre-tribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, post-tribulation rapture, post toasties, etc. I will make a strong case (“argue”) for my view, but I will not die for my view or break fellowship over it.
3. **OPINIONS: Issues that I have an opinion on but would not even argue.**
 - Example: Joseph died when Jesus was a teenager.

What Does Grace Fellowship UMC Believe?

- 1) **CONVICTIONS: Core beliefs of the Christian faith that I would die for and break fellowship over.**
 - **Authority of Scripture** – The Bible is the Word of God, fully true, and is our authority for all that we believe and do (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18).
 - **God** – There is one true God who exists eternally in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19; John 14:9; Acts 5:4,9; 2 Corinthians 13:14).
 - **Deity of Christ** – Jesus Christ is 100% God and yet 100% human, born of a virgin birth (John 1:1,14; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-38).
 - **Substitutionary Atonement** – Jesus Christ died on the cross as our substitute – taking upon Himself the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 3:18; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - **Resurrection of Christ** – Jesus rose from the dead in a bodily resurrection defeating sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:3-6; Romans 6:4-9).
 - **Second Coming** – Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 24-25; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19-21).
 - **Salvation by Grace through Faith** – A person is saved from eternal separation from God as a free gift when that person places their faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Revelation 21:27).

A Historic Summary of Core Conviction Beliefs: The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; on the third day, He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

2) PERSUASIONS: Beliefs that I am persuaded about and would argue for; however, I would not die for these issues or break fellowship over them.

- **End Times View** – Jesus will rapture His church (believers) before the tribulation period described in Revelation 6-19 (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 3:10). Jesus will return in a glorious appearing to set up a 1000-year Kingdom before throwing Satan into the lake of fire and ushering in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 19-22).
- **Predestination** – All have sinned and cannot save themselves (Romans 3:11-12; 5:12). Jesus died for all (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1). God is wooing all people to Himself (Matthew 23:37; John 1:9; 12:32; 16:8; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 3:20). Before the foundation of the world, God knew ahead of time who would place their faith in His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 4:4-5; 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2). God has predetermined that the Church will be saved (corporate election; all election passages use plural pronoun; Ephesians 1:4-5,11; Colossians 3:12). One becomes a part of the Church by placing their faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Romans 10:9).
- **Eternal Security** – God empowers a believer to believe to the end of his or her life (John 10:27-29; Romans 8:28-39; Philipians 1:6; Jude 24).
- **Supernatural Spiritual Gifts** – Supernatural spiritual gifts still exist today. Speaking in tongues is a valid gift for the church today (1 Corinthians 14:39) and should operate under the boundaries of 1 Corinthians 14. One such boundary: Speaking in tongues tends to confuse unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:23) and therefore should be expressed in believers' settings such as prayer groups and personal prayer. Speaking in tongues may accompany being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6) but is not THE sign that a person has been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31; 8:17; 9:17-18; Ephesians 5:18).
- **Baptism** – Grace Fellowship UMC offers to those who have placed their faith in Christ any of the 3 modes of water baptism that have been practiced in church history: immersion (Romans 6:3-4), pouring (Acts 2:17-18), and sprinkling (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Grace Fellowship offers either infant dedication (1 Samuel 1:24-28) or infant baptism (Acts 16:15,33; 1 Corinthians 1:16; Luke 18:15-17; Genesis 17:10-14) to parents. We believe that water baptism does not save anyone but rather is an act of obedience (Luke 3:13-17; Acts 2:38-39; Luke 23:39-43). Faith in Jesus Christ is what saves a person (Ephesians 2:8-9).

- **Communion** – Communion is an outward sign or symbol of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). We believe that God is active in the Communion ritual imparting His grace to us. To participate in Communion is more than just a picture—it is to actually participate (commune) with Christ (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). We do not believe that the bread and juice turn literally into the actual flesh and blood of Christ.
- **Spiritual Warfare** – Satan and demons exist. They were defeated through the cross but will not be thrown into the lake of fire until the Second Coming (Revelation 20:10). Believers have authority in Jesus' name over demonic powers. Believers may be oppressed by demons but not possessed (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:15). Prayer is an essential weapon for the church in this on-going battle (Mark 11:17; Acts 12:5, 12).
- **Women in Ministry** – God has established authority in the home based on gender (Ephesians 5:22-33) but has established authority in the church based on office. God does call and equip women for pastoral ministry offices. (Judges 4:4-9; 1 Samuel 25; 2 Kings 22:14; Esther 4:16; Micah 6:4; Luke 13:13; 24:10; John 4:28-30; Acts 18:18,26; 21:9; Romans 16:1,3,7; 1 Corinthians 1:11; 11:5; Hebrews 11:2,11,13,23, 31,35; 2 John 1).
- **Church Government** – Several different church government configurations can fulfill the Bible's description of church government. Grace Fellowship has chosen to adopt the Methodist configuration involving the Senior Pastor as presiding elder and a bishop as the overseer of that elder. The Leadership Team consists of all the small group leaders and has delegated month-to-month leadership to the Church Council of Grace Fellowship.

3) OPINIONS: Issues I have an opinion on but would not even argue.

- Joseph died when Jesus was a teenager
- The ESV translations is best for preaching. The NLT is best for devotional reading.

Where Grace Fellowship Stands on Some Controversial Issues

1. **Homosexuality** – God loves homosexuals (John 3:16) and we welcome and want homosexuals to attend Grace Fellowship (Mark 2:17). At the same time, we believe the practice of homosexuality is a sin (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Genesis 19; Jude 7; Romans 1:26-32; 1 Timothy 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). After repenting of sin and turning to Christ, any person (including a homosexual) is encouraged to join Grace Fellowship and become a member. Any former homosexual considering leadership at Grace Fellowship UMC is welcomed and encouraged to do so. In keeping with 1 Timothy 3, we would ask such a person to wait for a period of time in order to demonstrate a track record of freedom over their former life of sin. We would ask this of any new believer. We do not believe in the ordaining of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals. We do not believe in ceremonies that celebrate same-sex unions.
2. **Abortion** – We believe that the life inside a mother's womb is a real human being (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:4-5) and, therefore, that abortion is murder and is wrong/sin (Exodus 20:13). We believe that God offers full forgiveness to an abortive mother/father who have turned to Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:13-15; Ephesians 1:7).
3. **Money** – We believe that everything belongs to God (Job 41:11; Haggai 2:8; Psalm 50:10). We believe that all that we have has been given to us by God and that we are merely

stewards entrusted with His resources (Matthew 25:14-30). Therefore, we believe that how we use our money (both individually and as a church) matters. As a sign of surrender and worship, we believe that God calls believers to give the first portion of their income back to God (Proverbs 3:9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Although it is not required for our salvation, we believe giving a tithe (10%) of our income to Christ's church is the starting place for believers (Malachi 3:10; Leviticus 27:30; Matthew 23:23). We believe that the Bible discourages debt and holds up the goal of being debt-free (Proverbs 25:28; Ecclesiastes 6:9; Proverbs 6:1-5; Psalm 37:21; Romans 13:8).

The following are 7 reasons why our senior pastor and his wife have practiced tithing for their entire married life:

- 1) Because we see tithing in the Bible.
- 2) Because it acknowledges God's ownership of all that we have.
- 3) Because it is a tangible way of trusting God with our life by trusting Him with our finances.
- 4) Because it is a tangible way of placing Christ as Lord over our finances.
- 5) Because it causes money to lose its grip on us.
- 6) Because we wildly believe in the investment we are making into the Kingdom of God by giving to His church.
- 7) Because all of the years that we have been tithing God has blessed us beyond what we could ever have imagined.

What Questions Does This Bring Up For You? We dedicate a large chunk of time to do Q&A with Pastor Jim at the Starting Steps session called Joining Step. Please bring your questions to the class, and let's dialogue. To get more information or to sign up for Joining Step go to <http://www.whatisgrace.org/startingsteps>

Biblical Examples of The 3 Levels of Belief (at the top of this document)

1. Circumcision
 - A group of Christians were trying to make circumcision a conviction level issue and the Jerusalem Council clearly ruled in Acts 15 that circumcision is a persuasion level issue.
 - Paul argues adamantly against circumcision throughout his letter to the Galatians and yet he has Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3. Thus, circumcision was clearly not a conviction level issue for Paul.
2. The Jerusalem Council's list in Acts 15
 - Although the Jerusalem Council clearly defines circumcision as a persuasion level issue, they do issue a list of conviction level "must do" or "must do not" in Acts 15:28-29
3. Meat sacrificed to idols
 - Romans 14 says that it is OK for some Christians to eat meat while it is a sin for others (based on that person's belief about this issue). Same with observing special days of the week.
 - Same thoughts in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:14-11:1
4. Some of Paul's exhortations
 - Paul distinguishes between his persuasions on issues of whether to marry and the Lord's clear commands on these issues in 1 Corinthians 7 (see especially vv. 8, 10, 12, 25, 40).