

## **STATEMENT ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT FROM THE AFFILIATED PASTORS OF GREATER GRACE WORLD OUTREACH**

The following statement regarding church government was approved by the assembled body of nearly 200 ordained pastors, associate pastors and licensed preachers affiliated with Greater Grace World Outreach of Baltimore, Maryland, during their annual pastors conference in June, 2006.

### **Purpose of Church Government**

The purpose of church government is to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God the Father. *"For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. ...Let all things be done decently and in order."* (1 Cor. 14:33, 40)

Church government is for the benefit of every believer in the body of Christ, *"which [authority] the Lord gave for building you up, and not for casting you down."* (2 Cor. 10:8) *"He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Eph. 4:11-13)

Pastors and elders must lead as servants, not as lords. *"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, not for dishonest gain, but willingly; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock."* (1 Pet. 5:2-3) *"Jesus summoned them, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bondservant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' "*

### **Three Principles of Church Government**

We believe in three primary principles in regards to church government. They are: 1) the autonomy of the local church; 2) the accountability of every church leader to other spiritual leaders; and 3) the voluntary nature of a local church's affiliation. These principles have been defined in the GGWO Affiliation Handbook. GGWO does not dictate the form of government that an affiliated church establishes, or the provisions of a local church's constitution. However, it is expected that every pastor and preacher (ordained or licensed by GGWO) will be held accountable to other leaders and to the GGWO Ordination Board. (For details, please consult the GGWO Affiliation Handbook and Ordination Handbook.)

### **Three Values to Be Upheld**

In addition to these three principles, we hereby state three essential values that we believe are important to uphold and protect in any church government. They are: 1) freedom, 2) fairness, and 3) openness.

## **1. Freedom**

### **Freedom of Thought and Convictions**

The members of a local church are free to think for themselves. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to do so. The pastor should not force his convictions on the people in his congregation. Instead, he should help them form their own convictions before God. Much thinking is required for a person to truly have his own convictions. Thus the pastor should gently guide the believers to discover God's mind by helping them understand Biblical doctrines, values, and principles and their application in life, while always respecting each one's freedom of thought. Ultimately, people will give an account to God for their convictions, not to their pastor. *"The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but be gentle towards all, able to teach, patient, in gentleness correcting those who oppose him: perhaps God may give them repentance leading to a full knowledge of the truth."* (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

### **Freedom to Test the Pastor's Message**

It is the freedom of the believer that gives him the right, and even the obligation, to test everything that the pastor preaches, testing the message by the Word of God, and holding onto that which is good. *"Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good."* (1 Thes. 5:21) *"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."* (Acts 17:11) The Holy Spirit's anointing on the pastor does not make his message inerrant. Though he may be filled with the Spirit, he is still an imperfect vessel. Each believer should develop his spiritual discernment to receive the good and, if need be, to "spit out the bones."

### **Freedom concerning Minor Doctrines**

A pastor who is affiliated with GGWO should agree with the major doctrines taught in GGWO. (Please see the GGWO Statement of Faith in the Affiliation Handbook.) However, there is freedom to disagree on minor doctrines. No one ministry, and no one person, can claim to know all truth. Original thinking is helpful as each believer expresses his portion to edify the Body of Christ. There are times when a respectful disagreement actually works to promote unity. For that to happen, it is important to honor one another, to have an attitude of respect, and to value unity. Disagreements about minor points should not be used to sow discord.

In cases where there are major disagreements, it is sometimes better for the parties to agree to go in different directions.

### **Freedom to Leave a Church**

The believer has the freedom to leave a local church. He should not be maligned for his personal decision to leave. His decision, and his right to make such a decision, should be respected. Each believer has the Holy Spirit and it has to be recognized that the Holy Spirit may lead some people to leave.

## **The Limitations of Delegated Authority**

All genuine authority is ultimately from God. Everyone will give an account to God concerning his actions with respect to God's authority. In some things God has delegated a measure of authority to men. He expects all people to obey that authority. However, it is important to realize that there are limits to a person's obedience to those to whom authority has been delegated.

For example, it is never right to go against the Lord in order to obey one in authority. *"They called them, and charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves, for we can't help telling the things which we saw and heard.'" (Acts. 4:18-20)* *"But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" (Acts 5:29)*

Secondly, delegation of authority has its limits. One cannot delegate more authority than he himself has. Nor is there ever a requirement for obedience in areas where authority has not been delegated. For example, the boss at work does not have the authority to dictate what I eat for breakfast at home. If a pastor attempts to exercise authority beyond the areas truly delegated to him by God, it is a usurpation of authority. Usurped authority is not delegated authority. The pastor has a measure of delegated authority within church governance, but that does not give him authority in the private lives of church members.

## **A Pastor's Authority as a Preacher**

The pastor also has authority as a preacher/teacher of God's Word. The authority of the Word is not in the individual, but in the message – to the degree that it is an accurate reflection of God's truth. What is outside an accurate representation of God's truth does not have the authority of God's Word. Though the pastor has been delegated with authority to preach, what he preaches is not binding if it is not Biblical.

## **Freedom of the Believer in Decision-making**

The pastor does not have delegated authority in the private lives of church members. However, a church member may choose, because of personal trust, to give his pastor a measure of authority in areas of his life. This is not the same as delegated authority. The pastor cannot demand this kind of authority, nor should he manipulate the believer to gain this kind of authority. The church member has the right to give it or withhold it, and that decision is between him and God. The pastor has the right to advise people, to challenge people to grow, and even to lovingly confront them. But the church member always has the right to disagree. He will stand or fall before God for his own decisions. (Romans 14:4)

## **Freedom in Financial Giving**

Church members are free to decide whether to support their church financially, and how much to do so. It is not right for church leaders to control an individual's giving. The individual believer may freely choose to

incur a debt upon himself through a voluntary pledge, but that is a personal decision between him and God. GGWO leaders must not demand that any church member give tithes. Rather, they must allow people to be free to give to God as they choose. *"Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart; not grudgingly, or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Cor. 9:7)

### **Freedom of Local Churches**

GGWO churches are completely autonomous, unless they have themselves decided to limit their autonomy. GGWO does not demand that any church do so. A voluntary limiting of autonomy might be the case especially for a new church being planted. Perhaps that church will initially lack mature leaders to completely govern itself.

### **Freedom in Affiliation**

Affiliation with GGWO is a voluntary relationship of mutual trust. GGWO encourages and respects the autonomy of the local church. Each church is free to remove itself from affiliation with GGWO. Disaffiliation does not necessarily mean loss of blessings or rewards. This is up to the Lord to determine. *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes."* (1 Cor. 4:5)

If a local church considers itself affiliated with GGWO, there must be some accountability to GGWO to ensure that people's trust is not violated. This accountability directly involves those men ordained and licensed by GGWO. This accountability is carried out through the GGWO Affiliation Council and Ordination Board. These two GGWO boards have no authority over other individuals in the affiliated congregations. (Please consult the GGWO Affiliation Handbook and Ordination Handbook.)

### **Freedom in Godly Relationships**

A pastor who plants and develops a church, and then leaves to minister in another area, will probably continue to hold a special place in the hearts of people in that congregation. He should honor the new pastor's position and the autonomy of the local church and, at the same time, be free to continue to minister to those in whom he has invested spiritually.

## **2. Fairness**

### **Showing Impartiality in Church Governance**

*"I charge you in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the chosen angels, that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality."* (1 Tim. 5:21) *"My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. ...If you fulfill the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors."* (James 2:1, 8-9) Church government should be executed in a way that shows respect toward all church members. While close relationships between members of a local church are the will of God, manifesting the love of God,

those relationships should never degenerate into showing partiality. People in the church, should be able to trust that problems are dealt with fairly and impartially.

### **Dealing with Problems in Church Leadership**

Fairness means that problems are dealt with, not ignored. While there is abundant grace and forgiveness, certain issues should not be allowed to continue without a resolution. Church members should be able to trust their leaders. This means that any serious problem in the life of a leader (such as, abuses of authority, ongoing sins) must be dealt with. A church sends out mixed signals if it endorses a leader whose very life contradicts the church's message.

### **Fairness toward the Accused**

Also fairness must be practiced in the way that problems are dealt with. Paul's strong exhortation (in 1 Timothy 5:21) instructs us to deal impartially with people who are in sin. There should be provisions in the church bylaws to deal with any worker, including the head pastor, if he is in sin.

Fairness extends also to the one being accused. Accusations should be specific enough that their truthfulness can be assessed. Vague, unverifiable accusations should not be received. Jesus said, *"If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."* (Matt. 18:15-16) These verses teach that there must be due process. There must be evidence based upon impartial investigation. Both sides in a conflict should be heard.

### **Dealing Fairly with Complaints**

Congregation members should know how to handle complaints they have with those in leadership. The member has the right to go first to the leader or leaders involved. If he is not satisfied, he can go to the senior pastor. If he is still not satisfied, he has the right to take the matter to the elders of his church. Even if his complaint is not considered valid, the church member should be able to trust that his complaint is handled with respect.

### **Fairness in Restoration**

There should also be fairness and impartiality exercised in the restoration of a church member or church leader who has fallen into sin. Restoration of a leader into an office should be based upon trust. Therefore, that restoration is not automatic upon repentance. Restoration into fellowship should be based on forgiveness, once the issues have been dealt with. The guilty one should know what the expectations are for him to be received into full fellowship, if that fellowship has been broken.

## **Biblical Foundation for Avoiding an Individual**

There are cases when avoiding a particular individual is Biblical. *"Drive out the mocker, and strife will go out. Yes, quarrels and insults will stop."* (Prov. 22:10) *"Now I beg you, brothers, look out for those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them."* (Rom. 16:17) *"But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Don't even eat with such a person."* (1 Cor. 5:11) *"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks in rebellion, and not after the tradition which they received from us."* (2 Thes. 3:6) *"If any man doesn't obey our word in this letter, note that man, that you have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed."* (2 Thes. 3:14) *"Avoid a factious man after a first and second warning."* (Titus 3:10)

## **Rules of Fairness in Avoiding a Believer**

However, church leadership must be very careful to be fair and loving toward the offender if they choose to encourage people to follow this practice in a specific case. There must be evidence that the person is guilty of that of which he is accused. The accusation must be grave enough to warrant this treatment. Avoiding a particular individual should not be based on an overreaction or personal dislikes. The accused should be able to know what is expected of him in order to be restored to fellowship. And the leadership should be available to hear the individual.

In the last analysis, relationships are a matter of private determination before God.

## **Public Warnings**

There are cases when church leadership has the right to publicly give a warning about a person, a movement, a teaching, or false accusations. Fairness must be applied. There must be evidence that what is told is true.

## **3. Openness**

### **Openness toward Other Believers and Churches**

*"But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God."* (John 3:21)

Church government should manifest an openness of spirit toward Christians in other churches – an availability to receive and appreciate their portions. This is illustrated by Jesus' rebuke of John's sectarian attitude in Luke 9:49-50. John said, *"Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he doesn't follow with us."* Jesus answered, *"Don't forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us."* Openness includes a willingness to co-labor in prayer and evangelism with other believers, and to speak well of the work of God throughout His church on the earth.

## **Openness to Criticism**

Church government should be open to listen to the criticisms of Christians, both within the assembly and outside the assembly – an availability to appreciate the good in what is said and to implement improvements. It is an evidence of wisdom to listen to the reproof of others and receive whatever is true in it. *"Reprove a wise man, and he will love you."* (Prov. 9:8b)

## **Openness in Finances and Decision-making**

Church government should be open in regards to financial management and important decisions that affect the congregation. Church leaders should make financial information available. They should provide congregation members the opportunity to voice their opinions and be heard. Church members have a legitimate vested interest in the way that the church is being governed and in how the church uses its funds. They may be interested in knowing which people are in positions of responsibility, what their responsibilities are, and what their rationale is in important decisions. Though at times there may be legitimate reasons for withholding some of this information, church leaders should strive to be transparent and open.

## **Openness – A Form of Voluntary Accountability**

Openness helps people trust the leadership of the church. Openness helps church members to observe if their leaders are functioning as they should. Openness can be a public testimony that the value of fairness is upheld. Transparency in leadership is a form of voluntary accountability.

## **Wrong Uses of Secrecy and Openness**

If there is sin involved in the leadership, secrecy must not be used as a way to avoid accountability.

However, openness should be properly balanced with confidentiality, privacy and security. Openness should not be used as a pretext for breaking a confidence, humiliating a person, or gossiping about someone's private life. *"One who brings gossip betrays a confidence, but one who is of a trustworthy spirit is one who keeps a secret."* (Prov. 11:13)

In some countries the church must operate as an underground work. For security reasons, a church in such a place may decide not to be open about some aspects of its operations, or even about its existence.