

THE CONSTITUTION OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA

PREAMBLE

Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, called certain of His servants to unite under the name of First Regular Baptist Church of Wheeling on May 12, 1833. The purpose of this union was to worship God and to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. To this purpose, He has steadfastly prospered this work to this very day.

The members of the First Baptist Church of Wheeling, West Virginia, having studied the Holy Scriptures with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognize the need to reconstitute the Church in order to grow closer to His will for the Church in the era in which we live to prepare ourselves for a greater effort in His name. Being fully persuaded from Holy Scripture that the Word of God is the final authority for all faith and practice and the ultimate constitution for His church, we the members of First Baptist Church joyfully pursue the exultation of Christ in the life of the church through the constitution set forth in these pages. In doing so we humbly submit to Him who is the only head of His body. (Eph 1:22-23) Furthermore, we humbly submit that He is the only lawgiver (Jas 4:12) for His Church that in all things Christ would have first place and final say. (Col 1:18)

We seek to govern ourselves by the By-laws, which are inspired and guided by principles set forth in the New Testament. The policies, procedures and guidelines in the By-laws are the best understanding of the sincere members who prepared it. These By-laws are neither sacred nor infallible. They are subject to change by the Church in accordance with the processes described therein. The Church has the freedom, with guidance from the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, to establish and maintain policies and procedures that will permit orderly process and governance in all Church activities. (1 Cor. 14:40) We recognize that it is our responsibility to conduct ourselves in a manner that is truthful and honest before all men. (Rom. 12:17) We also recognize and surrender all that is properly due to civil authorities which God has provided for our good. (Rom 13:1-7)

Therefore, we the members of the First Baptist Church of Wheeling, West Virginia, hereby reconstitute ourselves and adopt this Constitution to at all times reflect the character of and bring glory to Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Bible.

Therefore, likewise we hereby adopt the By-laws as our articles of governance, so that we might reflect the character of and bring glory to Jesus Christ in all we do.

Article 1 – Name

First Baptist Church of Wheeling, West Virginia.

Article 2 – Purpose

This Church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which will be the ultimate purpose of all of its activities. This Church glorifies God by loving Him and obeying His commands through:

- Worshipping Him
- Equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study
- Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and personal evangelism, and any other means consistent with the teachings of Holy Scripture
- Encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work, local, state, domestic, and international
- Administering the ordinances of baptism and communion
- Encouraging Biblical fellowship among believers
- Serving other individuals, families, and Churches by providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ
- Encourage fellow Churches to Biblical faithfulness and purity through instruction about the nature of the local Church.

Article 3 – Doctrinal Statement

Scriptures: We believe that the Bible, in its entirety, is the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in its original manuscript. The Bible was written by human authors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are God's complete and final revelation of His will and that it has absolute authority in all matters of faith and conduct for the Christian life. We believe that although there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. This interpretation is to be found as one applies a literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpreting under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Trinity: We believe that there is but one true and living God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are one God, each having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and each are to be honored and worshipped as God.

God The Father: We believe that God the Father is the eternal, infinite, sovereign ruler of the universe. We believe that He is perfect, infallible in all things. He reigns with providential care over all His Creation. All things are ordered and occur according to His purposes and plan.

Jesus Christ: We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. He is the promised Messiah, miraculously conceived in the flesh by the Holy Spirit, and was born of a virgin. He lived a sinless life and freely offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people. The shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross completely satisfied the righteous wrath of God against sin, and provided redemption and forgiveness for all who believe. Three days after His death, Jesus Christ arose bodily demonstrating His victory over death and sin. He ascended to Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and is now our Advocate and High Priest and perpetually intercedes for His people. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, will return to Earth to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Holy Spirit: We believe that the Holy Spirit is divine and is coequal with the Father and the Son and is that Person of the Trinity who convicts men of sin, exalts Christ, causes spiritual birth, indwells, seals, comforts, sanctifies, guides, equips, teaches, and fills the believer, enabling him to walk in obedience to God and His Word. We believe that the Holy Spirit began working in our age at the day of Pentecost when He was sent forth by God the Father and as promised by Christ to His disciples to initiate and build Christ's body, His Church. We believe that the Holy Spirit bestows a spiritual gift or gifts upon all believers. These gifts are given for the perfecting of the saints. We also believe that speaking in tongues and the sign miracles were used by the apostles in the early Church for their authentication as teachers and revealers of

divine truth. These latter gifts were never intended to be characteristic in the lives of believers. (1 Cor 13:8, Acts 2:1-13.)

Creation And Fall Of Man: We believe that God created the universe and everything in it out of nothing by the power of His spoken Word. Before God created the universe nothing except God existed. God created the universe in six literal twenty-four hour days (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:18). Man was created by God in His own image and is not the product of evolution. All people are descendants of Adam and Eve, whom God created personally and individually at the beginning (Matthew 19:4). Adam fell into sin through personal disobedience to the revealed will of God; and as a result, all mankind is infected with sin and death, and faces eternal separation from God.

Salvation: We believe that eternal salvation is God's free gift by His grace. Salvation is a free gift but must be received (John 1:12) by man through his personal faith and belief in Jesus Christ. Only by belief and trusting in Jesus Christ can man be saved from the penalty of sin, which is physical and spiritual death. Christ's shed blood and death on the cross, and bodily resurrection was a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, thus guaranteeing our own resurrection and eternal life. We believe that salvation begins the moment the believer receives Christ as his personal Savior by faith. Salvation is not received by, nor based on, any work or merit performed by the believer, but solely on God's free gift through His grace. Hence, salvation is not earned, but is given and is eternally secure.

The Church: We believe that all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ are united by the power of the Holy Spirit in one spiritual body, the Church, of which Christ is its Head, its one supreme authority. The Biblically designated leaders within the Church body serving under Christ and over the assembly of believers are Elders (also called pastors, bishops, and pastor-teachers), and Deacons. Both Elders and Deacons are men who meet specific Biblical qualifications as outlined in scripture. We believe the Scriptures command believers to:

- Support their local Church willingly, cheerfully, abundantly, and regularly through tithes and offerings
- Gather in order to devote themselves to worship, prayer, teaching of the Word, and fellowship
- Serve the body of Christ through the development and use of talents and spiritual gifts
- To reach out to the world and disciple believers in fulfillment of the commands of Christ
- Observe the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Ordinances: We believe two ordinances have been committed to the local Church body: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christian baptism by immersion is the outward testimony of a believer's inward faith in the crucified, buried, and resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ. Baptism is a symbol of our own death, burial, and resurrection to newness of life that happens when we become new creations in Christ. Although baptism is not required for salvation, it is commanded of all believers.

We believe the Lord's Supper (communion) is the commemoration of Christ's death by believers. This ordinance was commanded by our Lord to be observed until His return. The Lord's Supper is to be a time of solemn confession of our sin and should be preceded by careful self-examination. We believe the elements of communion, the bread and the juice, are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ. Nevertheless, the Lord's Supper is indeed communion with our Lord, since He indwells all believers and is present in the fellowship of believers.

Human Sexuality, Marriage, And The Role Of Men And Women: We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in, outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, and pornography are sinful perversion of God's gift of sex. We believe that the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman.

We believe that men and women are spiritually equal in position before God, but that God has ordained distinct and separate spiritual roles for men and women in the home and in Church. We affirm the significant role women should play in establishing and leading the local Church. Every leadership opportunity is open to women except those that are excluded by Scripture. The Scriptures clearly state that men are to serve in the offices of Elder and Deacon, and that women are not to serve in Church positions in which they exercise authority over men or in which they teach doctrine to men. (1 Timothy 2:12)

Death, Heaven, Hell, And The Return Of Christ: We believe that when physical death occurs, the soul of the believer passes immediately into the presence of Christ and there remains in joyful fellowship until its bodily resurrection unto life. The soul of the unsaved descends immediately into Hades and is confined to misery and punishment in Hades until its bodily resurrection when it is judged to conscious separation from God and eternal torment and misery in Hell (Lake of Fire).

We believe that, according to the Scriptures, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the air to receive to Himself into heaven, both His own who are alive and remain until His coming, and also all who have died in Christ. This event (the Rapture of the Church) is the blessed hope set before us in the Scriptures, and for this we should be constantly looking, since it could occur at any moment.

We believe that immediately following the Rapture of the Church, the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon the unbelieving world during a seven year period of Tribulation. At the end of this seven year period, the Tribulation will culminate in the glorious Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to Earth to assume His authority as King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ will establish His thousand year Millennial Kingdom in which the saved will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the Earth. At the end of the Millennial Kingdom the unsaved souls will be raised, and along with Satan, will be committed to eternal damnation in Hell. The saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God forever.

Article 4 – Covenant Of Membership

Having been led as we believe by the Spirit of God to repent and to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and to give up ourselves to Him and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, and relying on God's gracious aid most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We covenant;

That we will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:3)

That we will exercise a Christian care and watchfulness over each other, and faithfully warn, exhort, and admonish each other as occasion may require. (Col. 1:28)

That we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others. (Heb. 10:25)

That we will strive to bring our children and any under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends. (Eph. 6:4)

That we will rejoice at each other's happiness and with tenderness and sympathy bear each other's burdens and sorrows. (Rom. 12:15, Gal. 6:2)

That, as we are the light of the world, and salt of the Earth, we will seek divine aid to enable us to deny ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to walk circumspectly in the world, that we may win the souls of men. (Titus 2:12)

That we will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine. (Heb. 10:23-25)

That we will contribute cheerfully and regularly to support the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations according to the blessings God has bestowed upon us. (1 Cor. 16:2; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

That we will appreciate those who diligently labor among us and have charge over us in the Lord and give us instruction, and esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

That we will humbly obey our leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over our souls as those who will give an account, so that they may do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for us. (Hebrews 13:17)

That we will in all conditions, even till death, strive to live to the glory of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

That we will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other Church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all (2 Corinthians 13:14). Amen.

Article 5 – Church Membership

Section 1 – The Duties And Privileges Of Church Membership

In accordance with the duties enumerated in the Holy Bible, each member will be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the Church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only members will be entitled to serve in leadership positions.

Under Christ, this congregation is governed by its members. Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend members' meetings and vote on the election of officers, decisions regarding membership status, and on other such matters that may be submitted to a vote.

Section 2 – Reception Into Membership

It is the desire of First Baptist Church to extend its fellowship to those who are in agreement and sympathy with the doctrine, Church covenant, and structure of this fellowship, and who feel led by God to be a part of this fellowship. Therefore, we desire to uphold the principles of commitment to Christ and to the body that the Holy Bible teaches and that must accompany true membership in the body of Christ.

To qualify for membership in this Church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized in obedience to Christ, following his regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Bible. Each member will submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith and will keep the Church covenant. The Elders will be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. In making this determination they may rely on the following:

- A. By public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior, followed by baptism by immersion.
- B. By letter of transfer from another Baptist Church, provided the believer has been baptized by immersion after profession of faith.
- C. By statement of prior conversion experience and baptism by immersion after profession of faith in a Church of like faith and order.
- D. By restoration, upon a vote of the Church, after evidence of Godly repentance.

Any person may be received into Church membership upon acceptance by vote of the members at any members' meeting who:

- A. Has informed the Elders of their desire for membership.
- B. Meets the requirements set forth in this article.
- C. Has been instructed in matters set forth in the constitution and by-laws, and has completed a membership class.
- D. Is recommended to the Church by the Elders for admission into membership.

Section 3 – Termination Of Membership

- A. By letter of transfer to another Baptist Church or Church of like faith and order.
- B. By confirmed membership in another Church, denomination, or faith.
- C. By receipt of a written request of said member.
- D. By a member bringing reproach upon the Church and its reputation because of immoral or un-Christ-like conduct or by persistently breaking the covenant with the Church, fellowship will be withdrawn from the member and membership will cease, but not until every possible effort has been

made, in keeping with the Scriptures (Matthew 18:15-17), to restore the member to a faithful Christian life.

E. By breaking the covenant with the Church through lack of participation in worship services, ministries, or financial support within a twelve month period upon recommendation by the Elders.

F. By death.

Section 4 – Church Discipline

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the Church, will be subject to the admonition of the Elders and the discipline of the Church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and the example of scripture. Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

Church discipline can include admonition by the Elders or congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period, removal from office, and excommunication. (See Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15) (1 Timothy 5:19-20; 1 Cor. 5:4-5)

The purpose of such discipline should be for:

A. The repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined. (See Proverbs 15:5; Hebrews 12:5-11; Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 17:10; 25:12; 27:5; Ecclesiastes 7:5; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 1:13-14)

B. For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them. (See Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 15:33; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Hebrews 10:24-25)

C. For the purity of the Church as a whole. (See 1 Corinthians 5:6-7; Ephesians 5:27; Jude 24)

D. For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians. (See Matthew 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:11; 1 Timothy 3:7)

E. Supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character. (See Deuteronomy 5:11; Matthew 5:16; John 15:8; Romans 15:5-6; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; 1 Peter 2:12)

The obligation of members to walk together in harmony and holiness both in doctrine and deportment is specifically expressed in the Covenant of Membership and freely entered into as a condition of membership.

1. The immediate purpose of all Church discipline is to restore a negligent member to his covenant obligations (Gal. 6:1) Its ultimate purpose is to guard the integrity of the gospel and the Church's witness in the community (Eph 4:1-3; Col 4:5-6) while ministering grace and truth to the member under discipline. (1 Cor.13; Gal 5:14-15; 6:1-2; Eph 4:25, 29-32; Phil 2:1-8; 1 Jn. 4:7-12)
2. The Church will consistently and without partiality apply these Biblical standards in disciplining those whose conduct is unbecoming to saints (Eph 5:3); such as, unresolved personal conflicts between

members (Matt 18:15-22), immorality (1 Cor.5:1-2), public scandal (1 Cor. 6:1-10), persistence in doctrinal error (Rom 16:17), disorderly conduct (2 Thess. 3:14-15), and divisiveness. (Titus 3:10-11)

A member who has been placed under discipline by the Elders is no longer classified as “a member in good standing.”

3. Those who continue in unrepentant sin may be referred to the Church by the Elders for dismissal from membership, and exclusion from the services and fellowship of the Church. (1 Cor. 5:2, 11-13; Titus 3:10-11)
4. Anyone under the discipline of the Church may be restored to fellowship after giving evidence of genuine repentance and being recommended by the Elders for restoration. (1 Cor. 2:5-11)
5. All Elders and Deacons, as well as Staff (consistent with the current employees manual) and appointees, are subject to the same Church discipline as other members. Those who are unrepentant may be removed from office and or membership in the Church.
6. The procedure for discipline of Elders is specific (1 Tim 5:19-20); the Church may not receive an accusation of misconduct against an Elder except on the confirmation of two witnesses to the alleged offense. Those Elders who are guilty of sin and continue in it will be publicly rebuked (1 Tim 5:20) and may be removed from office.

Article 6 – Amendments To The Constitution

- A. This constitution may be amended at a special members' meeting of the Church called for that purpose.
- B. Notice of the meeting and the written wording of said amendment must be presented to the congregation both verbally and through the mail at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
- C. The amendment will be adopted by affirmation of two-thirds of the members present.
- D. At least thirty-five percent (35%) of the total membership of the Church eligible to vote must be present at the meeting to constitute a quorum.

Article 7 – Adoption of the Constitution

- A. Adoption of the constitution, dated August 9, 2009, will occur at a members' meeting called for that purpose.

B. The congregation will be given an opportunity to review the proposed constitution at least thirty (30) days before the special members' meeting.

C. Notice of the meeting regarding the proposed constitution must be presented to the congregation both verbally and through the mail at least two weeks before the meeting.

D. The adoption of the constitution must be affirmed by at least two-thirds of the members present who are eligible to vote.

E. At least thirty-percent (30%) of the total membership eligible to vote must be present at the meeting to constitute a quorum.

Article 8 – Dissolution

If in the providence of God it becomes necessary for the First Baptist Church of Wheeling, West Virginia to be dissolved, the dissolution will be governed by the following:

1. The Church may be dissolved at a special members' meeting of the Church called for that purpose.
2. Notice of the meeting and written wording of said dissolution must be presented to the congregation both verbally and through the mail at least two weeks before the meeting.
3. The dissolution must be affirmed by at least two-thirds of members present who are eligible to vote.
4. At least thirty-five percent (35%) of the total membership of the Church eligible to vote must be present at the meeting to constitute a quorum.
5. If affirmed, the Elders will cause all assets of the Church to be liquidated.
6. The proceeds of the liquidation will be gifted proportionally to mission organizations per the percentage they were being given at the time of the dissolution.

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Last revision dated 7-8-2009

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