

Constitution of the Church known as Coweta Particular Baptist Church

Newnan, Georgia, USA

Article 1: Of the Church

This Church is a congregation of historic Baptists holding and maintaining those doctrines set forth in the Church Statement of Faith, which is the *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* [with permitted reservations*], maintaining that the moral law of God ought ever to be the rule of a believer's thought and conduct, and that the Holy Scriptures are the infallible, sole and binding authority in all aspects of doctrine and practice.

The Church is and shall remain an independent congregation, holding that the Lord Jesus Christ is the exclusive Head and authority over individual congregations.

The Church exists for the worship of Almighty God through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, the expounding of God's Word, the nurture of believers in the faith, the defense of the faith, the ministry of discipline in the congregation, the promoting among the congregation works of witness and service, the proclamation of the Gospel of grace to all people, and the support of church planting and other missionary endeavours.

Article 2: Of the Membership

The Church shall be composed of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ; have since been baptized by total immersion in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; give evidence of a renewed life; and hold that the revelatory miracle signs ceased with the apostles; disavow all sympathy with Roman Catholicism, the ecumenical movement, theological liberalism, worldly Christianity, charismatic distinctives, and New Age or other mystical views; are not members of any other church; and, after an examination of the following documents with the elders, assent to the Church Statement of Faith [with permitted reservations above], pledge themselves to the Family Covenant of the Church, and acknowledge that the conduct of the Church must accord with its Constitution, doing so both to the elders and to the Church.

Above said examination will be of a proposed member by the elders and shall begin at the earliest possible time following a person's request for membership. It will continue for not less than one month and not more than three months from the date of a person's request for membership. In the event of only one elder, the elder and at least one male member will examine the proposed member prior to presenting them at a Church Meeting (Article 6) for review and acceptance by the Church. Said presentation by the elders at a Church Meeting shall not bind the Church to receive the individual into membership.

In addition to being, having, and holding the above mentioned particulars, prospective members shall personally present a testimony of salvation to the Church at any regular Church meeting; and be approved by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote at a Church Meeting. Those approved shall be formally received into

* See: *Permitted Reservations to the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* herein.

membership, with all its privileges and disciplines, by the right hand of fellowship at the Lord's Table.

(Revised 5/2015) Members shall be removed from the roll of the church upon their decease or upon their removal at a distance which makes attendance upon the services of the church impractical, after having been orderly dismissed to the membership of a church of like faith and practice in that place. Such dismissal may be approved and delivered in writing by the church only if the member is not then under the censure of the church (see Article 7). (It should be noted that members removing and failing to seek membership in a church of like faith and practice, may be subject to the censure of this church for forsaking the assembling of themselves together as commanded by the Scriptures.)

Further, members shall be removed from the church roll upon their renunciation of or stated opposition to the Confession of Faith, Church Constitution, and/or Family Covenant, or renunciation of their public profession of faith, that is, a declaring themselves to be really unconverted and therefore ineligible for membership in the church. In addition, members who refuse to participate in any disciplinary enquiry into sinful conduct on their part or who are actually found guilty and unrepentant of any of those sins which warrant excommunication (see Article 7), after the orderly proceeding of the church in its responsibility to discipline such, having excommunicated them, their name shall be stricken from the church roll. (No removal or renunciation by a member shall terminate any proceeding of church discipline previously initiated by the church.)

Members of the church should fully understand the solemn engagements to which they bind themselves in being admitted to this body. As they have been, according to their profession, united to Christ by covenant, so also, in uniting with this church, are they joined by covenant to the local expression of Christ's body, and thereby assume the most weighty obligations of mutual care and watchfulness. These covenant obligations are more particularly set forth in the Family Covenant and Profession of Membership that form a part of this Church Constitution. No one ought take upon himself such engagements without a due consideration of their significance and extent. The covenant-keeping Jehovah repeatedly denounces the most severe judgments upon those who "break covenant," and thus the church, Christ's body, is duty-bound to fulfill its covenant responsibilities to one another. Yet, while they are most solemn obligations, they are also most joyful ones, because they are a means, under God's blessing, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," (Eph 4:12-13). (Rev. 5/15)

Special Note Concerning Particular Individuals: We assert the local church, rightly constructed, to be a constitutional body, distinct from the home in origination and administration, yet comprised of families each ordered by their several heads (Titus 1, Eph.5, I Pet. 3). Further, we assert that, while the church and home bear many resemblances in purpose and practice, never ought one to have lordship over the other to the detriment either of the authority unique to the home or the authority uniquely exercised in the church. In keeping with these things, principles of family headship and the associated spiritual oversight in the homes will be honoured in all Church matters as the will of the body, formally expressed, will be honored in all member homes.

Thus, in the case of individuals seeking membership while still under the headship of a parent, the following things are declared to be the guides for determining such cases: First, the person under consideration must have a credible profession of

faith. The determination of a credible profession of faith, warranting believer's baptism, will fall first to the ruling parent. Upon such a determination, the person may be submitted to a review of the elders and the Church body in application for membership as in any ordinary case. Secondly, the prospective member must be baptized in accordance with Article 9. These two things being present, no one may be denied application to unite with a local assembly but rather ought to seek such. The Church, as an autonomous body, may then vote freely to accept or deny membership as in any ordinary case.

Thirdly, the Church ought to consider that receiving such a person into membership is to accept them into participation with the body under the oversight of the ruling parent. Therefore, the ruling parent of such a person ought also to be considered when judging such a case; for, if the ruling parent deems it fit that any Church practice, be it outreach or ordinance or any other practice, ought to be abstained from or participated in by such a person, the Church will defer to that governance so long as such a practice does not introduce error or schism or impurity.

Fourthly, the ruling parent must understand that they are at all times under the most sober responsibility to ensure the fullest possible and most wise participation by such a subordinate in the affairs of the Church, preventing as needed for the health of the Church, and admitting as appropriate for the good also thereof. In the event of misconduct by a member under the charge of their home, the parent may be first and finally subject to censure, as well as the offending party. But, in a case where a member subject to a ruling parent is in rebellion in any way warranting Church censure and the ruling parent has exercised every godly means to correct the rebellion, but to no avail, the subordinate person may be left to the censure of the Church and the mercy of God as in any ordinary case. (See Article 7)

(Added 8/2014) Let it be further understood that, where the father is present, we do not see the headship of said parent as being limited by the age or circumstances of the child, with one exception, namely, the entering of that child into their own biblical marriage covenant. Upon that event, a child is to be considered as standing out from under the direct headship of their father, whether a son as now the head (under Christ) of a family, or a daughter as now under the headship of her husband. In a case where an unmarried child, of any age, is without a father, their mother is understood to be their ruling parent. Further, where a single person in the church has no parents living, we understand the officers of the church are to function as heads in providing spiritual oversight and protection to such a person.

Article 3: Of Elders and Deacons

The Church shall elect Elders from among the male members of the Church to oversee the spiritual care of the fellowship.

This Church holds that a plurality of elders, each elder having an equal share in the responsibility of spiritual oversight, is the most biblically consistent model for a New Testament church. It is Christ's ordinary way to set apart one, particularly, among such elders to the office of teaching by means of gifts and graces imparted to him. Such a one is commonly distinguished as the Pastor, or teaching elder (Article 4). While the Pastor may be generally deferred to as the teaching elder or may preside in keeping with the terms of Article 4 herein, the authority exercised by the elders on behalf of the congregation remains equally dispersed among all the elders so that no elder or the Pastor has or may exercise authority over another elder.

Such elders shall meet from time to time as the spiritual care or any other affairs of the Church necessitate. Together with deacons, they shall determine the business to be put before a Church Meeting. Such elders shall serve for as long as the Church deems appropriate.

The elders thus elected “are to attend to their work with all possible engagedness, as it becomes those who have the charge of souls. They must give themselves up to study, prayer, and meditation, *1 Tim. 4:14-16*, that they may be workmen who need not be ashamed, *2 Tim. 2:15*. They must be instant in season and out of season, preaching the pure doctrines of the gospel, *2 Tim. 1:13; 4:2*. They are to feed the Lord’s flock with spiritual bread, *Acts 20:28*, to preach with the view of bringing souls to Christ, and not for the sake of honor or *filthy lucre*. They are not to lord it over God’s heritage, but to be patient and tenderhearted, *1 Peter 5:3; 2 Tim. 2:24, 25*. They are to watch over the flock, *to comfort the feebleminded, 1 Thess. 5:14*; to sound the alarm to the wicked and obstinate, *Ezek. 3:17, 18*; and to set their faces like flints against profaneness and every vice. They should often visit the flock committed to their charge, to know the state of their souls, that they may speak a word in season to them, catechize the youth, instruct the ignorant, and pray with and for them. They are especially to visit the sick and those who are otherwise afflicted, *Ezek. 34:4*. They are to administer the ordinances of the gospel in a strict conformity to the Word of God, *Heb. 8:5* ... In a word, they are to be examples to the flock, *in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity, 1 Tim. 4:12.*” [Some Southern Documents, pg.181] Furthermore, they are to be faithful heads of their homes, in keeping with the requirements of *1 Tim. 3:4-5*, not submitting to the leadership of the wife in the spiritual care of the church and having their children in order, as befits godliness (*Titus 1:6*).

The Church shall also elect from among the male members Deacons who shall meet under the chairmanship of the pastor, or an elder or deacon deputed by him, to supervise the organization, management and care of the properties, fabric and facilities of the Church, the compassionate and benevolent work, the practical arrangements of meetings, classes, meals, and other gatherings arranged, and the employment of non-pastoral staff. In addition to these more secular concerns, they are to be busy serving tables – both the table of the Lord’s Supper and table of the pastor by ensuring his care and support, as well as the tables of those who meet the qualifications of widows indeed (*1 Tim. 5:16*) and those among the body who are identified by the Church as right recipients of temporal support (*Heb. 13:16*). Qualifications for the office of deacon are expressly set out in *Acts 6:3* and *1 Tim. 3:8-13*.

Deaconesses may be elected from among the members, as well, in the event the body recognizes a need among the female members for which they may be of good service. While some are adverse to this practice, we find in Phebe (*Romans 16:1*) an example of female "ministers" or servants in the apostolic church. Further, we find manifold testimonies among the early church of such a practice (Clemens of Alexandria, Pliny, Jerome, etc.). We concur with Dr. Gill when he says that "something of this kind [deaconesses] seems not at all unnecessary, but of service and usefulness; as to attend at the baptism of women, and to visit the sisters of the church, when sick, and to assist them" (*Body of Divinity, Bk.2, Chp.5*).

The qualifications for Deaconesses we find to be identical with those of a godly widow (*1 Tim.5:9-10*), as befits a lady in such a position and as demonstrated in the life of Phebe and other such "ministers" of record in the early church and in keeping with the requirements upon Deacons in *1 Tim. 3:8-13*. Further, Deaconesses shall be subject to all those duties and oversights above described for Deacons. Only, let Deaconesses be ever

mindful of the purposes of their office and guard against exercising spiritual instruction of the men of the Church. We do not see the office of Deaconess to supplant in any way the principles of submission and silence expressed in 1 Tim. 2:11-12.

The deacons may nominate a Treasurer from among the male members, not necessarily from among their number, to be elected in a Church Meeting. They will ensure the careful spending of stewarded and other funds, and, with the Treasurer, draw up a proposed yearly budget for approval by a Church Meeting. Such deacons, as well as the Treasurer, shall serve for as long as the Church deems appropriate.

Likewise, the deacons will be responsible to keep written records, or minutes, of any regular or special Church meeting (Article 6). They may appoint a clerk for such purpose from among the male members, not necessarily from among their number, to serve as long as the deacons deem appropriate.

An elder or deacon may resign from office at any time or be removed by the Church, per Article 6 herein. The Church shall be responsible to maintain those who have the spiritual oversight of them and shall do so in whatsoever way the Church deems appropriate. (See item #8 of the Family Covenant)

Article 4: Of the Teaching Elder

The Pastor, as an elder, shall have all of the qualifications of an elder as set out in Article 3 herein. The Pastor will normally preside at meetings of elders, deacons, or members and over all departments of ministry in the Church. He may be dismissed by the Church in a Church Meeting, per the terms of Article 6 herein, if it can be shown that he no longer practices or preaches the doctrines of or complies with the Constitution of the Church.

Recognizing that others may also be gifted to teach, the Church may call and approve such persons to assist the Pastor in the office of teaching. [*Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, Chapter 26:11*]

Article 5: Of Special Concerns Regarding Church Officers

Each epoch in the history of Christ's Church is associated with particular, concentrated assaults on the people of God and the truth of the Word. The constituting body of this Church recognizes that two of the premier battles of this day are the battles for the minds and hearts of men, women, and children in the spheres of education and counselling, so-called.

The unbeliever in this land has concentrated his efforts on undermining the parent's responsibility to educate their children in a godly manner on the foundation of the truths of the Scriptures, contending that the State may or should educate the child and that without Christ and His wisdom (Psalm 1, Proverbs 1:7-9, 2:1-7, Ephesians 4:11-16, Romans 12:1-2, etc.). Furthermore, to provide instruction and comfort for the adversities of the human experience, the unbeliever demands the replacement of Christ and the wisdom of the God with the wisdom of the world. Its counselling is calculated godlessness (2 Corinthians 10:5, 1 Corinthians 1:20, etc.). Such vile endeavours are to be spurned as overtly antichristian (2 John 7).

In keeping with the Scriptures herein given, this Church asserts that parents are responsible, above all others, to educate their children in an explicitly Christian manner. Furthermore, counsel for the heart and mind in the trials and concerns of this life is not

to be sought in the wisdom of the world but in the Word of God and among a multitude of the godly.

Further, recognizing that among those comprising any wayward people, there are those who may be called common laborers and those who are leaders and soldiers in the opposition, and understanding that God recognizes this difference (Numbers 13, 16, etc.), it is the position of this Church that no man may be elected to the office of elder or deacon herein who occupies a teaching or administrative position in any state school or who is a practicing psychiatrist or psychologist or secular counsellor, so-called.

Article 6: Of the Church Meeting

From time to time a meeting of members, called the Church Meeting, shall be convened by and under the chairmanship of the pastor or, in his absence, another elder or deacon for such things as: the approving of applications for membership; the dismissal of members other than those who are excluded by death, non-attendance, resignation or forfeiture of membership; matters of church discipline; the nomination or election or dismissal of elders (including the pastor) or deacons; the approval of annual statements of account and of an annual budget; the approval of unusually substantial expenses not of a routine character; the approval of all innovations in the ministry of the Church; the hearing of reports or exhortation as deemed fitting by the elders or deacons; and the proposed dissolution of the Church. Notice of a Church Meeting and the matters to be addressed therein shall be given by announcement at the morning worship service on the Lord's Day preceding the meeting.

A meeting convened to consider the nomination or election or dismissal of a pastor or any other officers, or to consider the annual accounts statement or budget shall be known as a Special Church Meeting and shall be announced on two consecutive preceding Lord's Days.

Proposals to elect officers must be considered in two consecutive Special Church Meetings, a vote by paper ballot being taken in the second of these. Charges of ill repute against nominated men shall be mentioned by any members at the first meeting for consideration by the members and officers between the two meetings. Such things shall be done decently and in order with all respect and sobriety due any assessment of sin or accusation thereof in Christ's Church.

Only those matters introduced by the pastor and officers and thus emanating from the chair may be considered at a Church Meeting. Business not emanating from the chair shall not be put before a Church Meeting, except for a meeting convened in the event of a dispute between the pastor or officers and the Church (Article 8), or if no pastor or officers remain in office. Members wishing to have a matter considered at a Church Meeting must present said matters to the elders for consideration. (See Article 8 for exceptions)

Parliamentary rules of order shall not be adopted in Church Meetings. Motions shall be presented from the chair as from the pastor, elders and deacons, requiring no seconding by any other. A motion may be withdrawn at the discretion of the Chairman, except for a motion to dismiss an officer. If any substantial amendment to a motion is desired, the motion shall be withdrawn for further consideration by the elders and deacons before being re-presented to the Church Meeting.

The quorum for a valid Church Meeting shall be one half of those entitled to attend and vote at Church Meetings. A record of all resolutions passed by vote shall be

recorded in a book, and signed as correct by the Chairman of the meeting. Such a record shall be binding and conclusive on all members.

Only members who have been in regular attendance during the preceding six months and have not been suspended from the Lord's Table as the result of Church discipline, may vote in any Church Meeting. Regular attendance is herein defined as participation in not less than two Church worship services per month for each of the six months. (See Special Note, Article 2)

Any resolution shall be approved by a simple majority, by show of hands, except for the election of officers when a simple majority must be in support, on a paper ballot.

In all Church Meetings women may ask questions or address matters of taste or of a practical nature, but not make directive statements and exhortations of a spiritual character.

A Church Meeting shall commence with worship and be conducted with all decency and order as befitting the body of Christ.

Article 7: Of Church Censures

It is our view that one of the fundamental ordinances Christ, the Head of the Church, has set out for local congregations to execute in order that unity, order, and purity be promoted in the worship of God is church censure or discipline. We hold this practice, in keeping with orthodox tradition, to be one of the three fundamental marks of a true church. (See Special Note, Article 2)

Varied periods in the history of the Church contain varied failings among the churches of Christ. Just so, we see church discipline to be a practice in this day that is too often avoided and equally too often poorly understood among Christian churches. In order to be judicious in addressing these failings of our day, we include here a thorough statement as to the substance and administration of the vital practice of church censure. In the interests of demonstrating ourselves to be clearly within the Baptist Puritan tradition on this very controversial matter, we recommend the reader to "A Summary of Church Discipline" [*Some Southern Documents*, pg.195] the substance of which follows.

There are punishments which Christ, by his Word, authorizes his church to inflict on its rebellious members. These are commonly called church censures, which differ in their nature according to the nature and degree of the offense, and may be denominated as rebuke, suspension, and excommunication.

1. Rebuke (the lowest degree of church censure) is a reproof of an offender, pointing out the offense, advising and exhorting him to repentance, watchfulness, and new obedience, and praying for him that he may be reclaimed, *Titus 1:13*. This, and all other church censures, must be administered in love and tenderness, *Rev. 3:19*, with Christian prudence, *1 Tim. 1:3*, a sincere aim to save the soul from death, *James 5:19, 20; 2 Cor. 13:10; Gal. 6:1*, without partiality, *1 Tim. 5:21*, and for a caution to others, *1 Tim. 5:20*.

A member becomes worthy of rebuke, (1) when he wounds the conscience of a weak brother, by the use of things in themselves indifferent, *1 Cor. 8:11, 12*; (2) when he exposes the infirmities of a brother to others, *1 Pet. 4:8*; (3) when he disquiets the peace of the brethren about matters of indifference, *Rom. 14:19-22*; (4) when he indulges anger against a brother, without a just cause, *Matt. 5:22*; (5) when he is contentious about unscriptural forms and fashions, as if they were necessary to be used in the church or among the members, *1 Cor. 11:16*; (6) when he neglects privately to admonish or

reprove a brother whom he knows to be guilty of sin, *Lev. 19:17*; (7) (*Revised 5/2015*) when he neglects to attend or is irregular in attending the stated meetings of the church, or absents himself from the called business meetings of the church, not being providentially hindered, *Acts 1:13-15, Acts 2:42, Acts 6:2*; (8) and when he attends other places of worship to the neglect of his own, *Heb. 10:25*.

2. Suspension, considered as a church censure, is that act of a church whereby an offending member, being found guilty, is set aside from office, from the Lord's Table, and from the liberty of judging or voting in any case. By this act the staff beauty is broken, but not the staff bands, *Zech. 11:10, 14*. Therefore, as this censure does not cut off from union, but only from communion with the church, the suspended member is not to be accounted as an enemy, but admonished as a brother, *2 Thess. 3:15*, and upon a credible profession of repentance the censure is to be taken off and the delinquent restored to all the privileges of the church.

This censure is to be administered in case of crimes which do not deserve excommunication, as (1) when a member breaks the peace of the church by janglings and disputings, *1 Tim. 1:6; 6:5*; (2) when he withdraws from the church on account of its wholesome discipline, notwithstanding loving admonitions have been given him, *John 6:66, Jude 19*; (3) when he leaves his place at the Lord's table for the sake of another member with whom he is offended, and neglects to do his duty by him as directed, *Matt. 18:15*; (4) when he broaches unsound, heretical principles, *Titus 3:10*; (5) when he is a busy tattler and backbiter, *Psalms 50:19-21*; (6) when he through sloth neglects the necessary duties of life, *1 Tim. 5:8*; (7) when he has committed a gross crime but gives some tokens of repentance, he is to be suspended that the church may have time to judge of his sincerity, *1 John 4:1*; (8) and when a party of members, like Korah and his company, break through their covenant obligations and attempt to set up for themselves, in an irregular manner and in opposition to all the loving persuasions of the majority, such are *trucebreakers* and *despisers of those that are good*, *2 Tim. 3:3*.

In a word, all practices that in their own nature and tendency are destructive of the reputation, peace, and prosperity of the church and yet appear not to be past remedy, merit this censure.

3. As excommunication is on all hands acknowledged to be an ordinance of Christ, the great Head of the church, and a censure in its own nature, very important, awful, and tremendous, it is highly needful that churches should well understand the nature of it.

Excommunication is a censure of the highest degree; it is a judicial act of the church in which, by the authority of Christ, she cuts off and entirely excludes an unworthy member from union and communion with the church, and from all the rights and privileges thereof. "It is a disfranchising from all the immunities of a fellow-citizen with the saints, and taking from him a place and a name in the house of God" (Gill). This censure, awful as it is, respects only the spiritual concerns of a man, as related to the church, and does by no means affect his temporal estate, or civil affairs; it does not subject him to fines, imprisonment, or death; it does not interfere with the business of the civil magistrate; nor does it break in upon the natural and civil relations between man and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; nor forbid attendance on the external ministry of the Word.

To deliver an offender unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, 1 Cor. 5:5, was an act purely Apostolical, for it was not the act of the church; "nor is this a form of excommunication; nor was this phrase ever used in excommunicating persons by the primitive churches; nor ought it ever to be used; it is what no man, or set of men, have

power to do now, since the ceasing of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which the apostles were endowed with; who, as they had a power over Satan to dispossess him from the bodies of men, so to deliver up the bodies of men into his hands" (Dr. Gill on the text). Hence the apostle writing to Timothy on a similar case expresses it as done by himself, and not by the church, *1 Tim. 1:20*.

The act of excommunication is expressed by various phrases; as by avoiding familiar conversation with such, *Rom. 16:17*, by not keeping company with them, *1 Cor. 5:9*, *Eph. 5:11*, by not eating with them at the Lord's table, *1 Cor. 5:11* by purging out from the church the old leaven, *1 Cor. 5:7*, by putting away the wicked from among them, *1 Cor. 5:13*, by withdrawing from disorderly persons, and by cutting them off from fellowship with the saints, *2 Thess. 3:6*, *Gal. 5:12*.

The subjects of this ordinance are members who are guilty of notorious and atrocious crimes, which are so, either in their own nature or by means of sundry aggravations. There are some crimes so high and pernicious in their own nature as to call for a speedy excommunication, unless the most evident marks of repentance appear in the offender, as (1) all sins that are against the letter of the ten commandments, *Rom. 7:12*, *Matt. 5:17*; (2) all that call for severe corporal punishments from human laws, provided those laws are not contrary to the laws of God, *Prov. 8:15*, *Rom. 13:1-4*, *1 Peter 2:13, 14*; (3) and all such sins as are highly scandalous in their nature and expose the church to contempt, *1 Tim. 5:24*, *1 Cor. 5:2*. We find black catalogs of sins which call for this censure, in *1 Cor. 5:11* and *6:9-10*. And indeed for crimes of an inferior nature, when aggravated by a contumacious [stubbornly rebellious] despising of the authority of the church (after the more gentle censures have been used) excommunication ought to take place.

But an offender, even of the highest rank, who gives clear, evident, and satisfactory proofs of a true, sincere, evangelical repentance is by no means to be excommunicated. Does not reason itself suggest that we ought to forgive those who repent, and those whom God has forgiven? Christ our great pattern did so, as appears in the case of the woman taken in adultery, *John 8:11*. Peter also is an instance of Christ's readiness to forgive penitents. Peter was a member of that congregation in the midst of which Christ sang praises to his Father, *Psalms 22:22*. Peter fell foully, he denied his Master with oaths and curses, a horrid crime! Did Christ immediately cut him off? No, but admonished him by a look; the offender repented; the penitent was forgiven. Let churches follow the example which Christ has set them.

The act of excommunication may not be performed by a member on himself. As consent is necessary to a person's coming into the church, so none can go out of it without its consent. To attempt it is to break covenant with the church, and, as much as in a man lies, to break up the church. By the same rule that one member may thus leave the church, another may, the pastor may, all may; the tendency of which conduct, all may see is confusion and destruction. Those, therefore, who are guilty of it, ought to be looked upon as trucebreakers, proud, arrogant, dangerous persons, and to be dealt with as such. And they should be avoided by all other churches.

No man has a right of himself to perform this censure; it is a punishment inflicted by many, *2 Cor. 2:6*. But this great censure is to be executed "by the elders [ministers] of churches, with the consent of the members of them; for they have a right to do this, previous to their having elders, and when they have none, as to receive members, so to expel them. The power of it originally lies in the church; the authority of executing it lies in the elders, with the consent and by the order of the church; as the directions to the churches concerning this matter, testify." (Gill)

To proceed regularly in this solemn business the church must cite an accused member to appear either at a stated church meeting of business or at an occasional meeting for that purpose, in order that he may have a fair trial and an opportunity of making his *defense* if he has any to make. The meeting is to be opened by prayer for direction; then the case is to be impartially examined and tried by the Word of God. If the accused member is found guilty of a crime deserving excommunication, he is not to be immediately cut off (unless it be some extraordinary case) but admonished, and some time given him for repentance and for the church to mourn over him and pray for him. If the offender continues obstinate and appears to be incorrigible, the church is under a necessity of proceeding to the execution of the great censure against him.

If the offense be private the censure may, and in some cases ought, to be laid on before the church only; but if the crime is public, and very notorious, the honor of Christ calls for the censure to be public, *1 Tim. 5:20, Jude 15*. In this case the church appoints the day and summons the guilty member to attend; the minister suits his sermon to the occasion, after which he prays to God for a blessing on the ordinance to be administered; and then proceeds to sum up the sentence of the church; lays open the odious nature of the crime and the dreadful load of guilt which the sin, with its aggravations, has brought on the offender; he takes notice of the scandal it has brought on religion, how dishonorable to God, and grievous to the church; he observes that the excommunicating act is not intended for the destruction of the soul, but is used as a last remedy for the recovery of the offender, and as a caution to others.

Then, by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the name and behalf of that church, having been authorized by consent of the body in a Church Meeting, he cuts off and secludes the offender by name from union and communion with the church; he having broken his covenant with them, they also excluded him from the privileges of a member, as unworthy; yet praying the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, to restore him by giving him unfeigned repentance that he may again be received into the sheepfold.

If the accused member should obstinately refuse to appear before the church, when cited as above, it is to be deemed a sign of guilt, a contempt of the authority of the church, and an aggravation of his crime; and the process of the church against him, should not be obstructed on account of his absence.

If it should happen, that the minister of the church is the offender or that the church is without a minister, in either of these cases, the church will proceed with exercising church discipline in keeping with the terms of Article 8 herein.

The ends to be answered by this solemn ordinance, and which should always be aimed at in the administration of it, are (1) the glory of God, which is the ultimate end of it, for as His name is dishonored by the evil practices or principles of church members, so this is the most open and most effectual way of removing the dishonor that is brought upon it; (2) another end is to purge the church and preserve it from infection, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*, and therefore *the old leaven* must be purged out, that the church may become *a new lump*; *evil communications corrupt good manners*, and therefore evil men must be put away from among the saints, *1 Cor. 5:6, 7, 13*. Lepers were to be put out of the camp that they might not infect others, and erroneous persons, whose words do eat as a canker, must be removed from the communion of churches; (3) a church of Christ is like a garden or vineyard, which, if not taken care of, as it is not, when this ordinance of excommunication is neglected, will be like the vineyard of the slothful, overrun with thorns, nettles, and other weeds; but by means of this it is cleared of the weeds of immorality, the bitter roots of false doctrines eradicated, and withered

branches gathered and cast out; (4) and the good of persons excommunicated is another end which is sometimes effected by it, God blessing his own institution when rightly performed, which is for edification and not destruction; and for the saving of the souls of men who are hereby brought to shame and repentance for their sins, in which case they are to be received again with all love and tenderness and to be comforted that they may not be *swallowed up with overmuch sorrow*, *Jude 23; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 2:7.*

Article 8: Of Contention between Officers and Church Body

If a majority of the members of the Church, who are eligible to vote at a Church Meeting, shall at any time desire to have a Church Meeting called, they shall give notice in writing signed by them to the Officers specifying the particular business they desire to discuss or transact; and if the Officers cannot satisfy their concerns and fail to convene a Church Meeting within one month of the delivery of such a notice, those who gave notice to convene a Church Meeting may do so on their own authority.

Such a Church Meeting shall be advertised by letter sent to all members stating the purpose of the Meeting. Such a Meeting shall take place not less than three weeks after the sending of that letter.

At a Church Meeting called under this rule, a man shall be elected, preferably an existing officer should circumstances permit, to preside as Chairman by a majority of members present and entitled to vote; and equal time shall be accorded to the representatives of both sides of any dispute.

Any resolutions agreed upon as a result of such meeting shall be considered the will of the body and shall be binding on the Church.

In keeping with the principles of unity, love, and sobriety which govern the body of Christ, as well as the New Testament principles governing the ordinary function of the local church, such measures herein described ought to be resorted to with great hesitation and after all practical, Biblical means of settling any contentions in the Church have been exhausted.

Article 9: Of the Ordinances

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper should be observed at least once each month, the Pastor presiding, or in his absence, another Officer.

It shall be the practice of this Church to have a closed table, so-called. Only those presently a member in good standing, as defined herein, will be permitted to commune.

In the case of unbaptized worshippers settled in this Church, steps of encouragement and admonition shall be taken by the Pastor and Officers to bring them to obey the ordinance of Believers' Baptism, and to seek admission to the membership of the Church.

The ordinance of Believers' Baptism by total immersion in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit shall be observed from time to time with the Pastor as baptiser, or in the event of his absence or infirmity, an Officer. Those desiring Baptism must give a testimony of salvation which is satisfactory to the Officers and Church.

(Regarding Particular Persons and the Ordinances, See Special Note, Article 2)

Article 10: Of Services and Activities

The Church shall gather regularly for worship, instruction, evangelism, prayer, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and also, from time to time, for the ordinance of Believers' Baptism.

No other doctrine may be taught except that which is not contradictory to the *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* [with stated reservations*].

The Church shall use other opportunities for evangelism and ministry towards both adults and children, including the printed page, so long as the spoken or written proclamation of the Bible shall be the principal objective. Theatrical or dramatical methods, music of profane style, and the pursuit of signs and wonders are eschewed.

Wholesome recreational activities shall be permitted for young people as part of evangelistic meetings on weekdays but not as part of any Lord's Day ministry.

The Church may engage in benevolent and educational activities and also give support to other Christian organizations for evangelism or benevolence.

Women shall be permitted to pray audibly in prayer meetings, but not to contribute in worship meetings or to teach, excepting in the teaching of other women.

Worship shall be formal in character and led by the Pastor or other Officer. Reverent psalm versions and post-biblical hymns shall be sung in worship accompanied by either piano or organ, but so-called choruses, except those forming part of traditional hymns, shall not be used in worship. (See Special Note, Article 2)

Article 11: Of Special Cultural Concerns

In order to bolster the assertions of our *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, which are to be understood in some respects to be expressive of the historical context and concerns in which they were penned, with further declarations pertinent to the spiritual warfare of our day, we humbly offer the following observations on two issues which we see as threats to the stability or prosperity of the church.

First, given that biblical marriage is now under systematic attack and is being redefined in the minds of the world and many professing Christians, we wish to identify with the sanctity and purity of this lofty institution by re-asserting its nature, in our New Testament context, in the Scriptures.

Marriage is a monogamous and heterosexual covenantal relationship – a contract before God and between two people. It is designed by God to be a compact between two people in which they act as one physically, emotionally, spiritually, vocationally, and verbally to further the dominion and perpetuation of the earth and the building of God's kingdom. [See Chapter 25, *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*]

(¶3-8 added 8/2014) Because marriage is a covenant which God Himself instituted at creation, we affirm its perpetual nature as originally ordained (Gen. 2:24), and that, since the fall, one, and only one, circumstance may sever the marriage bond – death. We acknowledge that our Lord, in correcting the abuses and restoring the original purity of the ordinance (Matt. 5:31-32, 19:3-9), permitted one, and only one, cause upon which this bond may be terminated by divorce – fornication, or the infidelity of a spouse. Yet, this permission does not require nor command divorce in such cases, and it is fitting, especially for believers, to grant forgiveness and seek reconciliation, as such is becoming to our Christian testimony and a following of God's example of faithfulness to His covenant with His people (Jer. 3:1).

We are greatly grieved that the civil government has increasingly deviated from God's standard and limitation of divorce, allowing divorces for nearly any reason, and has thereby caused much disregard for and contempt of the covenant of marriage in our

society. Notwithstanding, it is the obligation of the church to uphold and enforce God's requirements for both marriage and divorce among its members and those seeking to join in covenant with the body.

We maintain, therefore, that every divorce, other than for the one cause of fornication, is under the censure of Christ as unlawful, and should either spouse so divorced enter into a subsequent marriage, both the divorced spouse and the one with whom they unite in marriage are guilty of adultery, as expressly stated by the Lord (Matt. 5:32, 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18; Rom. 7:3). Should at any time a member of the church enter into such a union, the church will proceed immediately to discipline such a member.

Further, we affirm that the church is obligated, for the maintenance of its purity, as a part of its spiritual examination of those seeking membership to inquire concerning their marital status and union. If it is determined that such persons have entered into an unlawful union as defined by Scripture, the church shall receive from them a satisfactory statement of their confession of this sin prior to their acceptance into church covenant.

Finally, we also maintain the obligation of a minister of the Gospel to sustain a life and testimony singularly above reproach (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:7-9), which obligation extends to his marriage relationship. As the priests under the Old Covenant were forbidden of God to take to themselves wives who were divorced, or profane, or a harlot, that the dignity of their office might be preserved in the highest degree (Lev. 21:1,7,10,13-14; Eze. 44:22), so is a pastor/elder to be 'blameless, the husband of one wife' (1 Tim. 3:2) and, as well, are deacons to be 'the husbands of one wife' (1 Tim. 3:12). Therefore, the church shall not appoint a pastor/elder or deacon who has himself been divorced or who has taken a wife divorced from another man for any cause, that the dignity of the office may not be diminished nor his usefulness impaired within the church and among the community.

Secondly, in a time when distinctions of every sort, which have been set in place by God, are being challenged or ignored we wish to address the subject of racial and cultural distinctions. We assume, indeed, that there are such distinctions; and that they warrant careful consideration in circumstances where varied cultures or races intermingle. It is our view that racial and cultural distinctions have been blurred or ignored to the detriment of the purity and simplicity of gospel worship and of order, peace, and clarity in domestic, civil, and religious matters.

We do maintain that all human beings are created in the image of God and, as such, are precious in God's sight and to be respected accordingly. We celebrate the diversity of race and culture with which God has been pleased to populate His creation. Yet, we recognize also that, within this variety are recognizable racial and cultural groups, some markedly similar and some markedly dissimilar, and it is God that has ordered it so. We conclude, therefore, that it behoves us in our families, our marriage contracts, our churches, our business enterprises, and our governments to honor God's distinctions among men with circumspection and prudence when faced with questions of intermingling and interaction of varied races and cultures. [The reader is referred to Dr. R. Rumburg's, *Raping Sacred Scripture*]

Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 - Permitted Reservations.

Three reservations shall be permitted when an Elder, a Deacon, or a prospective member is required to affirm their acceptance of the Baptist Confession *of Faith of 1689*, and these reservations apply also to the doctrines which are bound to be taught within the Church.

- 1.** It shall not be necessary to affirm that the Pope of Rome is the literal Antichrist and man of sin, although it must be believed that he is the servant of a church so-called, which is Antichrist in nature, and the enemy of the true Gospel (chapter 26:4).
- 2.** It shall not be necessary to affirm that an Elder or Deacon should be set aside by the laying on of hands of the Eldership, or with fasting, although it must be affirmed that they are to be chosen by common consent and vote of the Church, with prayer (chapter 26:9).
- 3.** It shall not be necessary to affirm that churches should meet with each other through appointed messengers to seek and obtain advice about any matter in dispute either within a church or between churches, although it must be affirmed that such consultation may take place subject to the common consent of the church and, should any such consultation take place, the gathered messengers cannot exercise any censure over any churches or persons or impose their determination on any churches or their officers (chapter 26.15).

**The Family Covenant
Of Coweta Particular Baptist Church**
(Original by: Benjamin Keach, 1689)

We who desire to walk together in the fear of the Lord, do profess our deep and serious humiliation for all our transgressions. And we do solemnly, in the presence of God and of each other, give up ourselves to the Lord in a church state according to the apostolical constitution that He may be our God and we may be His people, through the everlasting covenant of His free grace, in which alone we hope to be accepted by Him. Our acceptance by Him we see to be only through His blessed Son Jesus Christ, Whom we take to be our High Priest, to justify and sanctify us, and our Prophet to teach us and to be subject to Him as our Law-giver and the King of saints and to conform to all His holy laws and ordinances for our growth, establishment, and consolation that we may be as a holy spouse unto Him and serve Him in our generation, waiting for His second appearance as our glorious Bridegroom.

Being fully satisfied of the saving work of grace in some good measure upon one another's spirits, we do solemnly join ourselves together in a holy union and fellowship, humbly submitting to the discipline of the Gospel, and all holy duties required of a people in such a spiritual relation.

- 1.** We do promise and engage to walk in all holiness, humility, and brotherly love, as much as in us lieth to render our communion delightful to God, comfortable to ourselves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord's people.
- 2.** We do promise to watch over each other's lives and not to suffer sin upon one another, so far as God shall discover it to us, or any of us and to stir up one another to love and good works; to warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with meekness, according to the rules left to us of Christ in that behalf.
- 3.** We do promise in a special manner to pray for one another and for the glory and increase of this church and for the presence of God in it and the pouring forth of His Spirit on it and His protection over it to His glory.
- 4.** We do promise to bear one another's burdens, to cleave to one another, and to have a fellow-feeling with one another in all conditions both outward and inward as God in His providence shall cast any of us into.
- 5.** We do promise to bear with one another's weaknesses, failings, and infirmities, with much tenderness, not revealing them to any outside the church, nor any within, unless according to Christ's rule, and the order of the Gospel provided in that case.
- 6.** We do promise to strive together for the truth of the Gospel and purity of God's ways and ordinances, to avoid causes, and causers, of division, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 7.** We do promise to meet together on Lord's-days, and at other times, as the Lord shall give us opportunities, to serve and glorify God in the way of His worship, to edify one another, and to contrive the good of His church.
- 8.** We do promise according to our ability (or as God shall bless us with the good things of this world) to communicate to our pastor or minister, God having ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

Bearing in mind the heavy penalty for those who violate such a covenant in the face of God, these and all other Gospel duties we humbly submit unto, promising and purposing to perform, not in our own strength, being conscious of our own weakness, but in the power and strength of the blessed God, whose we are, and whom we desire to serve. To whom be glory now and for evermore. Amen.

Profession of Membership

I have this day become a member of the visible church of Christ; have openly professed myself His follower, and, in presence of God, angels and men, bound myself, by the most solemn vows to live henceforth to His glory. By thus solemnly entering into covenant with the people of God, I have unequivocally declared that I have come out from the world; that I view the customs and fashions of it as things that are passing away, and which are no longer worthy to engage my attention; that my treasure is in heaven, and that I seek a better country. I have declared my belief that the only object worth my pursuit, is the advancement of the cause of Christ in the world, and that I am determined to devote all my energies, my time, and my talents to the cause which I have espoused; for Christ has said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." I have declared also, by this act, that the children of God are my chosen, my favorite companions; that, as brethren, their welfare lies near my heart; that their joys are my joys, their sorrows my sorrows. I have declared that I love Jesus Christ better than any earthly good, and am willing to take up my cross and follow Him through evil as well as through good report. I have promised to renounce all my idols and to serve God with singleness of heart; to resign all my schemes of worldly prosperity, and follow the example of Him who came not to do His own will. In connecting myself with the saints of God, I have engaged to love them, to bear with them, to do them all the good in my power, to assist them by my example and sympathy, in all the various circumstances in which we may respectively be placed. I have given myself away to Christ and His church, for time and eternity.

(Excerpted from *The Memoir of Eliza G. Jones* (1803 - 1838), Philadelphia, 1842)