

# **Sovereign Grace Churches State of the Union 2023**

## **Apart From Christ We Can Do Nothing**

### **Introduction**

- Even though SG is changing, becoming a multigenerational, globally diverse family of churches, how do we, the pastors of Sovereign Grace (SG), lead so that SG doesn't fundamentally change?
- How do we lead in a way that we remain a gospel-centered family of churches with a defined ecclesiology that is led by zealous pastors who are tenaciously committed to our theological convictions found in our Statement of Faith, and who build together relationally so that, as a "family of churches" we, together, continue to advance the gospel throughout the world for the glory of God?

### **Scripture**

- John 15:1-8

### **Abiding is Essential to Bearing Fruit**

**For my waking breath for my daily bread  
I depend on You, I depend on You  
For the sun to rise for my sleep at night  
I depend on You, I depend on You.**

Verse<sup>1</sup>

**You're the way the truth and the life  
You're the well that never runs dry  
I'm the branch and You are the vine  
Draw me close and teach me to abide.**

Chorus<sup>1</sup>

- As our family of churches changes, becoming multigenerational and globally diverse, how do we lead so that SG doesn't fundamentally change?
- By abiding in Jesus saying, "we are completely dependent on you."
- How do we lead in a way that we remain a gospel-centered family of churches with a defined ecclesiology that is led by zealous pastors who are tenaciously committed to our theological convictions in this cultural and evangelical moment?
- By abiding in Jesus knowing that apart from Him we can do nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Williams, *Abide*, Dwell Songs, January 29, 2021

Abiding in Jesus is essential for us to produce fruit in these 6 ways.

## 1. Abiding Produces Zeal

**“Theologically, John’s point is that Jesus displaces Israel as the focus of God’s plan of salvation, with the implication that faith in Jesus becomes the decisive characteristic for membership among God’s people.”<sup>2</sup>**

- Abiding in Christ intimately is vital to being pastors who have zeal for Christ consistently.
  
- Zeal for Christ is also important for a couple of other reasons.
  1. As SG becomes a multigenerational, global family of churches, our zeal for Christ and his church now and in the future must not change.
  2. Zeal for Christ is important in this cultural and evangelical moment.
    - When your people arrive on Sunday morning they don’t first and foremost need your take on the most recent cultural issue, they need your zeal for Christ so that when you do talk about a cultural issue, they will have hope in Christ.

## 2. Abiding Produces Conviction to Stand for Truth

*“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word...”* John 14:23a

*“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”* John 14:24a

**“If there is one recurring theme throughout the book it is that the church of Jesus Christ cannot be sustained-and indeed never was founded on doctrinal indifferentism. From the very beginning, Machen argues, the Christian movement was not just a way of life, but a way of life founded upon a message. ‘It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words, it was based upon doctrine.’”<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, BECNT, Baker Academic 2004, pg. 448

<sup>3</sup> Kevin DeYoung, Foreword, *Christianity & Liberalism 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, Westminster Seminary Press 2023, pg. xxi

**“It is not enough to say what is true, we must also make clear what is false.”<sup>4</sup>**

**“After Obergefell and Bostock, LGBTQ+ describes *who* someone is rather than *how* someone feels. Freudian ideas about sexuality replaced biblical ones and became the new and preferred anthropology.”<sup>5</sup>**

**“The world is always trying to replace Christianity with a spiritual counterfeit that is another religion entirely, as J. Gresham Machen pointed out a century ago. Rosaria Butterfield eposes today’s ideologies that seek to force the church into the mold of sexual perversion and self-deification. And she reminds us...that the answer to these soul-destroying lies remains the same as it always was: knowing and abiding in God’s word.”<sup>6</sup>**

- Providing theological leadership now is important for our immediate and long-term future for many reasons, but here are two.
  1. Providing theological leadership protects our churches from drifting theologically now and in the future.
    - Every pastoral team must ask: Where will my church be theologically three generations from now? How strong will our complementarian convictions be?
  2. Orthodox Christians including members of our churches today are feeling marginalized, described as bigoted, and may think they’re losing influence.

**“Loss of influence is not a cause for panic. The doctrines, experiences, and practices that the church needs today are much the same as the ones she needed in the eighteenth century, and the tenth, and the second. We are responsible for obedience not outcomes, faithfulness not fruit; if we do not see the results we used to by praying, worshiping, reading Scripture, serving the poor, preaching the gospel, sharing the sacraments, and loving one**

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin DeYoung, Foreword, *Christianity & Liberalism 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, Westminster Seminary Press 2023, pg. xxi

<sup>5</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, Crossway 2023, pg.25

<sup>6</sup> Joel Beeke, endorsement for, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, Crossway 2023

**another, we carry on with those things regardless and walk by faith and not by sight.”<sup>7</sup>**

**“Courtesy wherever possible, clarity at all costs.”<sup>8</sup>**

### **3. Abiding Produces Christ-Like Churches**

*“No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.” 1 John 3:6*

**“Record of the early church’s counter-cultural witness has been preserved in an anonymous letter written by and unknown Christian apologist to an unknown person named Diognetus...This ancient defense of Christianity contrasts Christian belief and worship with Graeco-Roman polytheism and Judaism.”<sup>9</sup>**

**“They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh.”<sup>10</sup>**

**“Whether the issue is abortion, divorce, cohabitation, marital infidelity, homosexuality, so called same-sex marriage, or the legion (pun intended) of issues associated with gender ideology, the church today has the opportunity to present itself once again as a true counterculture. And Christians should seize this opportunity to communicate and demonstrate the fullness of the gospel as a better, richer, fuller, more satisfying way of life...”<sup>11</sup>**

### **4. Abiding Produces and Protects our Gospel Heritage**

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Remaking the World*, Crossway 2023, pg. 288

<sup>8</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Seven Principles for Cultivating a Christian Posture Toward the World*, Kevin DeYoung blog, June 9, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Swan, *A Return to Counter-Cultural Sexuality*, Eikon Spring 2023, pgs. 6-7

<sup>10</sup> Unknown Apologist, quoted in Jonathan Swan, *A Return to Counter-Cultural Sexuality*, Eikon Spring 2023, pg.8

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Swan, *A Return to Counter-Cultural Sexuality*, Eikon Spring 2023, pg. 9

- D.A. Carson has said that a church is never more than three generations from losing the gospel: one generation to believe it and proclaim it, a second generation to assume it and a third generation to lose it.

## 5. Abiding Produces Future Pastors

- We have 294 SG Pastors in our database.
- Of those for whom we have a birthdate recorded in our database (207)
  - 56 pastors 60 and older.
  - 42 pastors 50-59
  - 60 pastors 40-49
  - 39 pastors 30-39
  - 10 pastors 20-29
- 47% of our pastors are in their 50's and 60's. In other words, almost half of our pastors will transition the primary leadership of our churches to the next generation over the next decade.
- See SGCL Leadership Pipeline.

## 6. Abiding Produces Faith to Plant Churches

*“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” John 15:7*

*“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:37b-38*

*“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18b*

## Conclusion

**“Without me you can do nothing.” Be it so. Brethren, are you not all agreed? Do you wish to have it altered, any of you that love his dear name? I am sure you do not; for suppose, dear friends, we could do something without Christ, then he would not have the glory of it. Who wishes that? There would be little crowns for our poor little heads, for we should have done something without him; but now there is one great crown for that dear head which once was girt with thorns; for all his saints put together**

**cannot do anything without him...Let him be crowned with majesty who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.”<sup>12</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Without Christ-Nothing*, October 23, 1881, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Volume 27