

HARPETH HILLS

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What We Believe

Occasional settings call for churches to state their convictions, policies, and practices relative to specific issues of doctrine or ethics.

At other times, it may be necessary to give the reasoning behind a change of policy on some issue of judgment that influences church staffing, worship, evangelism, or missionary work. This is a series of documents designed to state the consensus view of the Harpeth Hills shepherds and teaching ministers.

Churches of Christ are non-creedal, and we attempt to follow biblical teaching rather than human guidelines for our faith and practice.

At the same time, we are aware that intelligent and godly people do not always come to the same conclusions about matters of biblical interpretation.

These short statements are attempts to define the understanding of several key doctrines that guide our life together as a church.

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The Nature of God

We believe in the one God who is Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer of the world.

We affirm that there are three distinct persons: God the Father Almighty, God the Eternal Word and Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The term generally used to describe the relationship of these three equal persons is the Holy Trinity. Just as two separate persons can be one in marriage because of their covenant unity (Genesis 2:24), so are Father, Word, and Spirit one God in their unity of nature and purpose. Thus, we sometimes speak of the mutual love and unity of the divine family—Father, Son, and Spirit—as the ideal model for both the human family (Matt 19:6) and the church (John 17:21).

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6; cf. Matthew 28:19-20).

We believe in God the Father Almighty—Creator of Heaven and Earth, of all things visible and invisible. In using the language of fatherhood in Scripture, we believe God is inviting all people to see Him as a loving provider who uses His great creative power for the benefit of His human creatures. Therefore, we pray, “Our Father in Heaven ...” (Matthew 6:9).

We believe in Jesus Christ—the Eternal Word (Logos) who has been revealed to us in human form. The purpose of God’s entry into flesh was not only to reveal the divine glory to us (John 1:1,14) but also to redeem His physical creation from the curse of sin and, most particularly, to rescue human beings from evil (Romans 8:18-25; John 3:16). The life of Christ as revealed in Scripture serves as the standard in our relationships and attitudes toward others (Philemon 2:1-8).

We believe in the Holy Spirit—the indwelling presence of God both in the church (1 Corinthians 3:16) and in the body of every Christian (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Spirit of God is among the people of God to empower them for holy living (Ephesians 3:16) and to assist all those who belong to the community of faith in our attempts to live within the divine will (Romans 8:26-27).

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

The Church

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), and Paul declared that it was “bought with [Jesus’] own blood” (Acts 20:28). Anything so central to the work of Jesus and so valuable that He would die for it should be important to us as well.

We believe Christ’s church came into existence on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The story of that day—the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-21), the preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:22-36), and the response of 3,000 to Christ (Acts 2:37-47)—resulted in the formation of a Christ-centered community that has continued until this day. That church exists in diverse local groups around the world.

The church is not a building or street address on a map. It is not a Sunday-morning event. Instead, we understand the church to be a Christ-formed community of acceptance, accountability, and nurture where continuous transformation by the Spirit of God takes place to the glory of God the Father. In the 2,000 years since Pentecost Day of A.D. 30, Satan has been successful in fragmenting and dividing Christ’s church into rival groups. We lament division in Christ’s body and seek to respect the unity Jesus prayed for among His people (John 17:21).

We want to live as citizens of Heaven (Philemon 3:20) who are exiles in a culture that needs to see the beauty, life, and power of God as an alternative to the anger, violence, and hatred of our present age. We are not our own; we belong to God by the purchase price of the blood of Messiah Jesus. Together, we seek to bear witness to the power of God’s grace at work in human lives and invite others to open their lives to that same presence and power in them. Because we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), we seek to honor the Savior in our corporate existence and personal lives.

In terms of modern church history, Harpeth Hills Church of Christ is rooted in the American Restoration Movement—sometimes also called the Stone-Campbell Movement—of the nineteenth century. Concerned for the division among Christian denominations on the American frontier, various persons called for the unity of believers by means of a return to a common practice of the original, essential, and universal features of the Christian religion.

The goal of this movement was unity in Christ through the elevation of Scripture above human creeds, confessions, and denominations. As with other “unity movements” in Christian history, the American

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Restoration Movement has not always been true to its principles and has contributed to division by some of its distinctive interpretations of Scripture.

The Harpeth Hills Church is a welcoming body that invites everyone—from curious to committed, from skeptic to scholar, from doubter to devotee—to join us in exploring the life, teachings, and claims of Jesus Christ. We teach and uphold what we believe honors Christ.

The Final Judgment of all humanity is reserved for Christ at His return (Acts 17:31).

Until Christ comes back for His people, our task is to worship God in the splendor of His holiness (Psalm 96:9) and to tell the world of the free gift of eternal life in Jesus (Romans 6:23). We believe that lives disoriented and wrecked by sin can be healed by the restorative power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:10).

We challenge ourselves as a church to obey the two great commandments identified by Jesus of Nazareth—to love God wholeheartedly and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40).

We attempt to practice what Scripture calls “pure and faultless” religion through compassion and personal righteousness (James 1:27).

The Bible

The Harpeth Hills Church of Christ affirms the 66 books of the Bible to be the very Word of God revealed to men and women created in His image. We affirm for the entirety of Holy Scripture what the apostle Paul said of what we call the Old Testament:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”
(2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible is the unfolding narrative of the work of God from the initial creation of the cosmos (Genesis 1:1ff) to its renewal as a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1ff) at the return of Jesus. The Old Testament story focuses on the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and the expansion of that call to the Jewish nation through Moses (Exodus 19:3-6). The task of ancient Israel was to be God’s light to the pagan nations and to extend salvation to them (Isaiah 49:6; cf. 42:6-7).

The high point of the knowledge of God came to humanity through Jesus Christ—the ultimate “light of the world” (John 1:9). The Four Gospels tell the story of His birth and life, ministry and teaching, death and resurrection. Together, they constitute the message of Good News of salvation for all humankind in Christ. The Book of Acts tells how the earliest believers carried that message to the world of their time and place—a task that is ours in this generation.

Even as the New Testament documents were being written by such Christians as James, Paul, Luke, and John, one of those earliest authors made this important affirmation:

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

We hold the same confidence that the Holy Bible is not limited to the human insights, personalities, and interpretations of God’s will that even the best and brightest of people could attain. We believe the Holy Spirit worked through these human agents to give human beings a reliable guide in the critical matters of faith, the fundamental issues of morality, and the life and ministry of Christ’s church.

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While we believe that Scripture is inspired by God and the final authority for all matters of faith and life, we do not claim divine inspiration for our insights into and understanding of the Bible. We continue to study and learn, pray and listen. As a church body, our quest always is for better understanding, deeper faith, and true obedience.

All Scripture points to Jesus Christ. As humble and teachable disciples, we seek to follow Him faithfully in all things.

Salvation & Eternal Life

We believe the fundamental need of every human being is to know Jesus Christ as Savior, for the sake of receiving and sharing the gift of eternal life.

Scripture teaches that a good God created a good world and placed males and females who were created in His own image to inhabit their world in righteousness, joy, and peace (Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 14:17). Because of human rebellion against God, the cosmos and all life within it have been shattered and diminished from heaven's original purpose (Romans 3:23; 8:7-8).

God's great love would not leave us under the curse of sin and without hope for rescue. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The source of our hope is, therefore, not in our regret and improvement of character, for our good deeds can never be enough to deserve salvation (2 Timothy 1:9). To the contrary, rescue from sin's guilt and its hold on our behavior is a gift of divine mercy, love, and grace. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Specifically, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead give human beings hope not only for a new beginning as a forgiven person but also for sharing in a life that is yet to come when mortal life has ended (1 Peter 1:3-6). The good news of this rescue and renewal is called the gospel (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

God's grace is received through a faith that trusts in Christ alone for salvation. That faith is not mere intellectual agreement that the Christian message is true but the actual surrender of a person's life to Christ (James 2:18-19). The initial actions of a living faith that confesses Jesus are one's resolve to turn from sin (i.e., *repentance*) and a physical confession of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in baptism (i.e., *immersion*) in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; John 3:3-5). These actions of faith do not "earn" or "contribute to" one's salvation; to the contrary, they are visible actions of acknowledgment that only God's grace through Christ can save.

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“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

The free gift of God that is eternal life is both a present possession of Christ’s people (1 John 5:13) that expresses itself now in a newness of life that exhibits righteousness, joy, and peace (Romans 14:17) and a future share in the New Heaven that will be inaugurated for the people of God at Christ’s return (Revelation 21:1-5).

Our desire is for all people to know the Good News of salvation in Christ, and the Harpeth Hills Church is committed to the sharing of this message with the world.