

What We Believe

The Basic Beliefs, Values, History,
Priorities, Organization, and Mission
of the Heath Church of Christ



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What We Believe

“What is the Church?”

Welcome

Planned Topics for this study:

What is the Church?

A Biblical Church: Beliefs, Values, History and Organization of HCC

What we believe about baptism and becoming a Christian

What we believe about communion

Church membership and the growing Christian

Discovering and using your spiritual gifts for ministry

Today – What is the Church?

Some *general Biblical ideas* concerning the church:

KEY NEW TESTAMENT WORD – ECCLESIA

A Greek word meaning “assembly.” In reference to the church, *Ecclesia* is the assembly of God’s new covenant people – the set apart community of those who have been saved in Christ.

WHO NEEDS THE CHURCH?

The Church is God’s idea – when we come to Christ we join this new, special, set apart community. When you become a Christian, you become a part of the church.

It is important to understand the difference between the universal and local church. When you become a Christian you join the universal church. We express this membership by participating in a local church.

IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

Read and discuss the images and pictures the Bible uses to describe the church. Reflect: What do these images communicate about the nature and purpose of the church?

- The Body – 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27
- The Bride – 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-32, Revelation 19:7, 21:2
- Priesthood – 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10
- Family or Household – Ephesians 2:19, 3:15, 1 Timothy 3:15, Revelation 5:9

- Pillar and Foundation of Truth – 1 Timothy 3:15
- Temple of God – Ephesians 2:21, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
- Lampstand – Revelation 1:20

THE EARLY CHURCH

While there is no perfect church today, we can read about the closest example we have of an ideal church in the book of Acts (our model). In Acts 2 and 4, we read snapshot summaries of the “acts” and patterns of the first church.

Read Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35.

Acts 2:42 provides a summary of the practices of the early church. These four practices or “pillars” should always be at the heart and core of the disciple community:

TEACHING – the proclamation of the Gospel.

FELLOWSHIP – this refers to more than coffee and donuts; this describes the shared life of God’s people.

BREAKING OF BREAD – apparent expression for communion (Matthew 26:26, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 10:16). When the early church met together, they worshipped God and focused on the sacrifice of Christ by celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

PRAYER – the church is a supernatural community empowered by God. This pillar reminds us of our true source of strength and transforming power.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Consider these passages: Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Ephesians 3:10-11, 1 Peter 2:9-12

The Unique Mission of HCC: Reach, Teach and Equip

WE REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST – worship, missions, friendship, lifestyle, community outreach.

WE TEACH PEOPLE THE WORD OF GOD – worship, programs, SS, Wed classes, groups, and other various ministries.

WE EQUIP CHRISTIANS FOR SERVICE – every member is a minister; all need to seek ways to serve in and outside the church.

What We Believe

“A Biblical Church”

OPENING QUESTION – What are you looking for in a church (what is important to you)? What has brought you to HCC? Is it important to you that your church strives to be a Biblical church?

HCC strives to be a Biblical church. This means that we seek to follow the clear teaching of the Bible regarding our beliefs, values, and organization.

TODAY – A Biblical Church: Beliefs, Values, and Organization of HCC

Biblical Beliefs

What beliefs are important and essential to you?

The Bible is our authority here at the Heath Church of Christ. As a Bible-affirming church, the following doctrinal statement faithfully summarizes the core beliefs of the Heath Church of Christ (not exhaustive). This general statement of faith aligns with what the orthodox/confessing church has believed from the very beginning (Ephesians 4:4-6; Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds).

GOD is the eternal, sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:12; 1 Timothy 6:15; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 4:11). He is our holy, loving, heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9). As our personal, heavenly Father, God loves and cares deeply for each of us (Psalm 103:11; John 3:16). God has made himself known through His creation, the Bible, and supremely in Jesus (Psalm 19; John 1:18). God, who has one essence (Deuteronomy 6:4), has revealed himself to us as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

JESUS is the Son of God and God in the flesh (Matthew 16:16; John 1:14). He was born of the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:23). He worked miracles (Mark 4:41) and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah (Luke 24:44). Jesus died for our sins on a Roman cross and was raised bodily from the grave (Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6; 1 Peter 3:18). Jesus now reigns at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34). He will return to earth in the future to be the Savior and Judge of all humankind (Hebrews 9:28; Acts 17:31).

THE HOLY SPIRIT dwells within each Christian as a comforter, counselor, teacher, and encourager (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:8, 13). God’s Spirit convicts us of sin, empowers us to be holy, endows us with spiritual gifts for Christian living, and is the seal of adoption confirming our salvation (1 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Ephesians 1:13-14).

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS are the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is our standard as Christians in all we believe, say, and do. We plead for the union of all Christians on the Bible alone.

HUMAN BEINGS are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We have rebelled against God's design for our lives by our own free choice. Our sinful rebellion separates us from God and leads to spiritual death (Romans 6:23). God, in his grace, offers salvation through Jesus to all sinners who would accept this free gift (Romans 3:23-24, 5:8; Ephesians 2:8). Following the example of the early church, we accept God's gift of salvation by: Believing in Jesus as God's Son (Acts 16:31); Confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9); Repenting of sin (Acts 3:19); and being Baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Those who follow this Biblical plan can have the assurance of God's salvation (1 John 5:13).

LORD'S SUPPER - We celebrate the Lord's Supper each week in memory of Christ's death and in anticipation of his final coming (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). All Christians are welcome to share in this family meal.

BAPTISM - We practice believer's baptism by immersion. In baptism, new Christians are promised God's gifts of the forgiveness of sin and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21).

THE CHURCH - The Church is the Body of Christ composed of all Biblically-faithful Christians around the world (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). Christians demonstrate their membership in Christ's universal Body by identifying and serving with a local congregation, such as the Heath Church of Christ (e.g. Ephesians 1:1). The Church is God's chosen agency to save and transform the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). The Church changes the world through prayer, the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and through loving witness and service performed in Jesus' name.

SECOND COMING - We look forward to the second coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, and the beginning of the New Heaven and New Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16; John 5:28-29; Revelation 21:1). The universe and the human story have a destination. The world will be over when Jesus returns again (1 Corinthians 15:24). Jesus will return as the Savior and King of all Christians (Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28) and as the Judge of all those who rejected God and His salvation during their earthly lives (Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10). On the Day of Judgment, the saved will enter eternal life with God, while the condemned will be assigned to eternal hell (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:11-15). We prepare for this time of judgment by accepting Jesus as Lord today (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Biblical Values

HCC is part of a tradition of churches known as the Restoration Movement (basic idea of restoring NT principles and practices). Historically, our churches have been known more (rather than official doctrinal statements or creeds) for slogans that convey cherished values. Reflect - What value does each slogan communicate?

“WE ARE NOT THE ONLY CHRISTIANS; WE ARE CHRISTIANS ONLY.”

“NO CREED BUT CHRIST, NO BOOK BUT THE BIBLE.”

“WHERE THE SCRIPTURE SPEAKS, WE SPEAK; WHERE THE SCRIPTURE IS SILENT, WE ARE SILENT.”

“IN ESSENTIALS, UNITY; IN MATTERS OF OPINION (NON-ESSENTIALS), LIBERTY; AND IN ALL THINGS, LOVE.”

“THE BIBLE IS OUR ONLY RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.”

“These statements were (and are) more than just clichés. They represented a firm determination to accept the Scriptures as the only authoritative rule, to reject sectarian (denominational/religious) division, to work for the restoration of the ancient church in faith and practice, and to promote the unity of all believers” (David Eubanks, retired president of Johnson Bible College).

Biblical Organization/Structure

Summary – We are a free congregation, not ruled by a denominational headquarters or hierarchy, but self-governed by leaders with faith and spiritual maturity. We elect our own leaders, call and support our own ministers, and decide where to best utilize mission’s giving.

HOW IS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH ORGANIZED?

The New Testament church is a body made up of many parts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27-31; Ephesians 4:11-13)

The New Testament church has one head/leader – Jesus (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15-16; Colossians 1:18)

The New Testament teaches that all Christians are a part of the priesthood of believers (Romans 12:6; Philippians 1:5-6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9, 4:10-11; Revelation 1:6)

Within the New Testament church, some are called to fulfill important leadership roles including elder, deacon, and evangelist/minister (Acts 6:1-6, 14:23; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 4:5)

New Testament leaders are to follow the example of Jesus (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-15)

HOW IS THE HEATH CHURCH OF CHRIST ORGANIZED?

HCC is led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:14). Elders are spiritually mature men (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-8) who: provide vision and oversight to the mission, finances, and ministries of the church (Acts 11:30, 15:4, 21:18, 1 Timothy 5:17); offer pastoral care to the members of the congregation (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4); guard and protect the teaching of the church (Acts 20:29; Titus 1:9); and who partner with the deacons and staff of the church to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus. In short, the Bible teaches that elders are ultimately accountable for the welfare of a local congregation.

Deacons assist and partner with the elders (and staff) of HCC to accomplish the ministry of the church (Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1). Literally, a “deacon” is a “minister” or “servant” of Christ. The Bible actually says little about the specific responsibilities of deacons, though it does emphasize the importance of deacons displaying godly character, personal integrity, and spiritual maturity (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

At HCC, deacons and elders (along with “Trustees” and staff) meet together for regular board meetings to discuss, report on, and plan the ministries of the church. Elders and deacons are nominated and voted on by the congregation. Elders and deacons serve one year terms at HCC (can be re-elected each year).

What role does the ministerial staff play in the life and organization of the church? Following the model of the “evangelist” in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5), the staff is employed by the church eldership/board to perform various specialized tasks of ministry such as preaching, teaching, leading worship,

administration, ministry to students and children, and pastoral care. The staff works closely with the elders and deacons in accomplishing the mission and ministry of the church.

ADDITIONAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION:

- YEARLY CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
- FINANCE COMMITTEE
- MISSIONS COMMITTEE
- VARIOUS OTHER COMMITTEES

What We Believe

“What We Believe About Baptism”

Baptism was a common benchmark and source of unity in first century (shared experience of all Christians) – Galatians 3:27-28 and Ephesians 4:5

Though some distortions, there was basically one view of baptism up until the time of the Reformation (16th Century) and that is that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.

The Reformation opened the door to various views (loss of importance) and created much confusion concerning the purpose of baptism, its relationship to salvation, and the process of becoming a Christian.

What is the answer to calming the troubled waters of baptism? The early leaders of the Restoration Movement believed that the answer was to return to the source – What does the New Testament say?

At the Heath Church of Christ we believe that the New Testament teaches:

- That baptism is for believers old enough to have faith and repent of sin
- That the proper form of baptism is total immersion
- That baptism is for the forgiveness of sin
- That in baptism we are assured of the gift of God’s Holy Spirit
- And that baptism marks our formal union with Christ and entrance into Christ’s Body, the Church

Direction for this lesson:

What does the New Testament teach about baptism?

What is the Biblical form of baptism?

Who is the Biblical recipient of baptism?

What is the relationship between baptism and salvation?

What is the normal practice of becoming a Christian in the New Testament?

WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH ABOUT BAPTISM?

Some select key passages:

Matthew 28:19 – The mission of the church is to make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

Acts 2:38-41 – Faith, repentance, and baptism are presented as conditions for salvation. Christians are assured of the gifts of “forgiveness of sin” and “the Holy Spirit” in baptism. Baptism meets the

Christian's need for personal assurance of salvation (a benchmark) and the Church's need for a communal marker indicating who is a part of the local congregation.

Acts 8:12 – Belief and baptism go hand-in-hand

Acts 8:36 – The natural response of new belief is baptism

Acts 16:33 – New faith in Christ leads to immediate baptism. Baptism is not a decision to postpone.

Romans 6:3-5 – We are buried with Christ and united with the saving work of his death in baptism

Colossians 2:12 – We are buried and raised with Christ in Baptism

1 Peter 3:21 – Baptism is our appeal to God for cleansing and salvation

Additional passages: Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 16:16, John 3:3-5, Acts 9:18, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 16:15, Acts 18:8, Acts 19:5, Acts 22:16, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 4:5, Titus 3:5

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL “FORM” (MODE) OF BAPTISM?

In the Christian Church/Church of Christ we practice the “form” of immersion for several reasons. *First*, the Greek words employed in the New Testament (“*bapto*,” “*Baptisma*,” and “*baptizo*”) literally mean “dipping under,” “dunking,” “submerging,” and “immersing.” Our word “baptism” is a transliteration [sounding out of sounds] of the Greek word. “Immersion” is a more accurate translation of the Greek terms for baptism.

Second, the New Testament contains several clear examples of immersion (John 3:23 and Acts 8:38).

Third, history tells us that baptism by immersion was the universal norm for the first several centuries of the Church. To this day, the Greek Orthodox Churches—who know Greek better than anyone—still baptize by immersion only! Moreover, it is the one baptismal form that is accepted across the denominational spectrum today (source of unity).

Fourth, and perhaps most important, the Apostle Paul describes baptism as being buried with Jesus into his death (Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12). This powerful image is faithfully dramatized and preserved through the “mode” of immersion.

WHO IS THE BIBLICAL RECIPIENT FOR BAPTISM?

In the Christian Church/Church of Christ we practice “believer’s” baptism; that is, we maintain that a person must consciously and personally love, believe in, and commit their lives to Jesus in order for baptism to have true meaning (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; Colossians 2:12). Moreover, a candidate for baptism must be mature enough to comprehend and repent of sin (Acts 2:38).

Historically speaking, the Church began to baptize infants in the third and fourth centuries because of four, related, non-Biblical factors: a growing sacramental view of baptism; the developing doctrine of original sin; a high infant mortality rate; and, the establishment of Christianity as the official state religion at the end of the fourth century. Biblically speaking, however, the New Testament contains no commands to immerse or sprinkle infants. It also does not report any examples of small children being baptized (silence).

Many people come to a Christian Church/Church of Christ as adults who were sprinkled as infants by their parents. It is important to acknowledge that parents who have their children baptized as infants are acting in faith with Godly intentions. A parent's desire to dedicate their child to God is beautiful and praiseworthy; however, the Bible clearly does not teach that we are saved by someone else's faith (no proxy salvation).

The New Testament presents baptism as a person's individual decision to commit their life to God. Consequently, we believe that adults who were sprinkled as infants should be baptized by immersion to complete their commitment to Christ and to be faithful to the clear teaching of scripture.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BAPTISM AND SALVATION? More specifically, what does the Bible teach about the purpose of baptism?

When we talk about the purpose of baptism we need to avoid some extremes. Historically, some Christians have maintained that it is the physical act of baptism itself that saves (devoid of faith – almost a magical view). On the other hand, historically other Christians have reacted to this distortion by going to the opposite extreme and maintaining that baptism means very little—a nice way to show we love Jesus and it marks our entrance into the church (but nothing more).

Again, we need to return to the original source. What does the NT teach about the purpose of baptism? Simply stated, baptism is presented as an essential part of our response to God's grace. The New Testament links baptism to many essential actions and promises of God:

- Baptism is connected to forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38, 22:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11)
- Baptism is connected to union with the saving events of the gospel (Romans 6:1-5 and Colossians 2:11-12)
- Baptism is connected to adoption into God's family (Galatians 3:26-29)
- Baptism is connected to new life in the Spirit (Acts 2:38-29; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5)
- Baptism is connected to entrance into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5)
- Baptism is connected to spiritual rebirth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5)
- Baptism is connected to our hope of future resurrection (Romans 6:5)
- Baptism is connected to disciple-making (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Baptism is connected to incorporation into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- And Baptism is connected explicitly to our salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21)

All of these Biblical connections should inform our understanding of the purpose of baptism. So if we return to the source we would have to conclude that the NT teaches that baptism is a necessary part of our response to God's grace.

The Apostle Paul teaches famously in Ephesians 2:8 – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is the gift of God.” We are not saved by our good works. But baptism is not a work. We don't trust in the merits of our baptism; we trust in the merits of Christ on the cross. Baptism is all grace. It is God's gift to us. We don't even baptize ourselves. We have to humbly surrender to be immersed in the waters of life. We are the passive recipients in baptism, humbly accepting God's promises with the open arms of faith.

So if we're saved by God's grace through faith in His Son and by no work of our own, how exactly is baptism related to our salvation? We believe that the New Testament teaches that: Baptism is the normal, appointed time when God enters into a covenant relationship with those who trust in His Son as Savior and Lord. It's the sacred occasion when we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, as Ananias instructed Saul, “Rise up, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

We could summarize the NT by saying that we are saved by grace, through faith, on the sacred occasion when we are immersed in the waters of new life.

LASTLY, WHAT IS THE NORMAL PRACTICE OF BECOMING A CHRISTIAN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Becoming a Christian can be compared to taking a journey. When taking a journey it is important to make sure you have reliable directions.

John 14:5-6

Bible Directions For Becoming A Christian

1 Timothy 2:4-6; Romans 5:8

(1) Start Out On **BELIEF BOULEVARD** (faith).

Hebrews 11:6

(2) Pass Through **CORRECTION CROSSROAD** (repent).

Acts 2:37-38a

Four ways people respond to sin:

-Rebel (I know it's wrong, but I don't care.)

-Redefine (By giving this wrong thing a new name, I will make it right.)

-Rationalize (I'm going to have a really good reason to sin. Not as bad as. . .)

-Repent (I acknowledge it as sin and will do my best to change.)

(3) Merge On To **PUBLIC PARKWAY** (confess).

Matthew 10:32; Matthew 16:13-16

(4) Drive Down **SURRENDER STREET** (baptism).

Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4

What We Believe

“What We Believe about Communion”

Opening discussion: Why is the Lord’s Supper so important to a Christian’s worship and spiritual life? Share your past experiences with the Lord’s Supper.

On the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples (recorded in Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). During this final meal, which Christians refer to as the “Last Supper,” Jesus shared bread and a cup with his disciples. Jesus explained that the bread represented his broken body and the cup represented his shed blood.

Following the example of Jesus, the first Christians began to celebrate the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20) during their weekly assemblies (Acts 2:42, 46, 20:7 – the “breaking of bread” and 1 Corinthians 11:20). For the past two thousand years, Christians have gathered to remember and celebrate the saving benefits of Jesus’ death on the cross by participating in “communion” (a term derived from the Greek word *koinonia* meaning “fellowship” or “participation” – 1 Corinthians 10:16) or the “eucharist” (a transliteration of the Greek term for “giving thanks” – Matthew 26:27).

Some Doctrinal and Practical Questions

WHAT IS THE OF NATURE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER?

The bread and juice of communion represents the broken body and shed blood (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) of Jesus on the cross. Historically, some Christian groups have interpreted Jesus’ words more literally. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that during the Mass the elements are actually transformed into the real body and blood of Jesus (this doctrine is known as “transubstantiation”).

Somewhat related to the Catholic interpretation, other Christian traditions (e.g. Lutherans) have historically maintained that Christ is physically present with (the doctrine of “consubstantiation” – “real presence”) the elements (though the elements physical substances remain the same).

While Christ certainly is present with his church during the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Matthew 18:20), we believe (along with many other traditions) that the most natural way to interpret Jesus’ words is metaphorically or symbolically.

On many occasions Jesus used metaphor to communicate spiritual truth (for example, John 6:35, 51). We believe that the Lord’s Supper is best described as a memorial (Luke 22:19), with the bread and cup representing the body and blood of Jesus. Christians should remember the sacrifice of Jesus (along with his love, grace and salvation) when they partake of communion. This weekly commemoration should remind us of our salvation, identity, and future hope in Christ.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

We offer the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis each Sunday morning and evening. While the New Testament records no explicit commands regarding how often Christians should participate in communion, apparently it was the practice of the early church to "break bread" (Luke's description of the Lord's Supper) on a weekly (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:20) and even a daily (Acts 2:46-47) basis. Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 11:26—"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup"—implies that Christians have liberty concerning the frequency of their participation in the sacred meal.

Some Christian groups observe the Lord's Supper on a quarterly or even yearly basis. Their rationale is that when communion is taken weekly it becomes routine or even trivial. Clearly, we have to be careful not to allow communion to become a spiritless ritual; however, we believe that the spiritual benefit and blessing possible through participation in the Lord's Supper is too vital to the life of the Christian (and corporate church) to take so infrequently.

The communion event provides every believer with one specific occasion each week to join with fellow Christians in remembering and celebrating the salvation and identity we share in Christ.

DO YOU HAVE TO BE A MEMBER OF THE HEATH CHURCH OF CHRIST TO PARTAKE OF COMMUNION?

Our church practices an "open" communion; that is, you do not have to be a member of the church to participate in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper belongs to Jesus, not the church. We contend that participation is between the individual Christian and Christ; however, to fully experience the meaning and blessing of communion requires that a person be a believing Christian (traditionally we neither "invite nor debar").

Paul's serious teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 implies that a person taking communion should understand the significance of Jesus' death on the cross, as well as have a love and commitment to the church community—the body of Christ.

HOW OLD SHOULD A CHILD BE IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNION?

Again, the Bible is silent on this issue. A good standard to follow is to have children wait to take communion until they are old enough to be baptized into Christ. When a child is old enough to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, then they are probably ready to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This will vary from child to child according to their physical and spiritual maturity.

Conclusion – It has been said that at the Lord's Table we look back (we remember), look within (we examine), look around (we love one another – context of 1 Corinthians 11), and look forward (we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes).

What We Believe

“Church Membership and the Growing Christian”

Church membership and Spiritual Growth

Church membership and your wedding day

Theme today is our commitment to the Heath Church of Christ - A commitment to church membership is the difference between dating the church and being married to the church.

Today we are going to focus on four important questions about church membership.

What is church membership?

The most important teaching about the meaning of membership is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. For Paul, being a member of the church meant being a vital part/organ of a living body—specifically, the Body of Christ. Look at several key passages:

Romans 12:4-5 – “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

1 Corinthians 12:12, 27 – “The body is a unit though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

Paul teaches that the church is Christ’s body, both in actuality and function. The church is not a building, an institution, or primarily an organization. The church is the living body of Jesus Christ—it is made up of many parts/many members. If you are a Christian, then you are a member of Christ’s body.

We demonstrate our membership in the universal Body of Christ by committing to be an active member in a local.

In the New Testament, if you confessed faith in Christ and were baptized into him, then it is assumed that you are married and actively participating in the church of your local community. This naturally leads to the next question.

What are the requirements for becoming a church member?

Biblically speaking, the requirements to become a Christian are the same requirements to become a member of Jesus’ church—faith in Christ, repentance of sin, and baptism in Christ (simple NT practices).

A key passage is Acts 2:41 – “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

The Bible tells us that the first Christians “accepted the message” (believed) and they were baptized into Jesus. The three thousand who believed and were baptized were then “added to the number.” From this point forward, the church is set apart from the world (you are either a part of the world, or you are a member of Christ’s new community, the church, the body of Christ).

When we confess faith in Christ and are baptized, God adds us to the “number” of his called-out, new covenant community.

Upon being added to the “number” of God’s church, we then must identify with a local body of believers.

What are the benefits of membership?

The following are some practical benefits of church membership:

Church membership **PUBLICLY IDENTIFIES YOU AS A BELIEVER** in Jesus Christ.

Church membership provides you with a **SPIRITUAL FAMILY**.

Church membership serves as a **CLASSROOM AND LAB** for learning and discovering how to live the Christian life.

Church membership provides needed **ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINE** for many essential areas of the Christian living.

Church membership offers many opportunities **TO DISCOVER AND USE YOUR TALENTS AND GIFTS** for service in God’s Kingdom.

Church membership **PLACES YOU UNDER THE LEADERSHIP** of church elders.

Church membership allows you to **VOTE** on important church issues and **SERVE** in key leadership and teaching roles.

What are the expectations for all members who call the Heath Church of Christ their spiritual home and family?

I want to share a definition with you that reflects high expectations for church members:

Membership is an *active* and *visible* commitment to a particular church. It is a *positive affirmation* that we commit ourselves to and identify with the ministry of a specific local congregation.

Moreover, membership involves a *two-way* commitment between member and congregation. It is a

promise by the congregation to help every member grow and mature in the faith. It is a *pledge* by the member to participate in the life and ministry of the church.

When we make a membership commitment to the church we vow:

TO MAKE REGULAR WORSHIP ATTENDANCE A PRIORITY (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Revelation 4).

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH (Acts 2:42, 46; 1 John 1:7).

TO SUPPORT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

TO SERVE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH (Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:16; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

TO PROTECT THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH (John 17: 20-23; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:1-3, 29; Philippians 2:1-3; Colossians 3:15; Matthew 18:15-16; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

TO GIVE FINANCIALLY TO SUPPORT CHURCH MINISTRY AND MISSION (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 12, 9:6-7).

TO LET OUR LIGHT SHINE AS A WITNESS FOR CHRIST (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 5:1, 8; Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9, 12, 3:15-16).

TO SHOW LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:10).

Conclusion

When we date the church we get to know the people, the ministries, and spirit of the congregation. There is a place for dating.

But after we have made a decision for Christ and gotten acquainted with his people, then it becomes time to make a deeper commitment and marry the church.

Leroy Lawson comments concerning beauty of church membership – “When you become a member of a church, you are not so much joining an organization as you are becoming part of a body, a member of a family, intertwining your life with others in common purpose and mutual up-building. You have promised yourself to God and to others who have made the same pledge. You were baptized as they were, you enjoy the same Communion as they do, you study the same scriptures, have the same hope, serve the same Lord. You are no longer alone.”

What We Believe

“Using our Gifts in Ministry”

When a new believer walks up the baptistery steps, immediately following their baptism, the first thing they receive is a towel. The towel is a fitting symbol for the nature and purpose of the Christian life. The Christian life is a life of service. As Christians, we follow the example of Jesus who did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45).

Christians serve God by using their spiritual gifts. What are spiritual gifts? Consider these definitions:

“A spiritual gift is an ability given by the Holy Spirit to every Christian according to God’s grace and design for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.”

“A spiritual gift is a God-given ability that enables a Christian to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and success.”

“Spiritual gifts are grace-gifts; that is, they are special abilities that God, in His grace, endows to His children for the purpose of accomplishing ministry.”

In this lesson, we are going to study how we can use our divinely given abilities and talents to serve God in and through the Heath Church of Christ.

Here at the Heath Church of Christ we believe that every member is a minister (1 Peter 2:9).

HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH FUNCTION?

Romans 12:4-8 – Paul describes the church as a body with many members who belong to one another. Each member of the body has a different function (thus, the church is to have diversity within unity).

1 Corinthians 12: 4-12, 27-31 – Paul explains that there are many kinds of spiritual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit of God. Verse 7 affirms that each Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift (a synonym of “manifestation”) for contributing to the common good of the church—which is the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 – Paul teaches that Jesus has given grace to Christians—specifically gifts of grace as described in verse 11. The purpose of these gifts is for the building up and maturing of the body of Christ. Paul explains that it is the role of church leaders to equip and prepare members to perform ministry.

1 Peter 4:10-11 – Peter summarizes the gifts of God under two general categories—speaking and serving.

Discuss – In light of these passages, how should the Biblical church function? Compare and contrast the “Pyramid” church model and the “Circle” church model.

WHAT IS MY ROLE IN MINISTRY?

PROPHECY (PROPHET) – The ability to proclaim and apply God’s truth so that believers are edified, encouraged, consoled, and challenged.

SERVICE – A general gift that could apply to many areas of ministry. Probably what Paul has in mind is ministering to the needs of the church body, and perhaps specifically the less fortunate.

TEACHING – The ability to understand, remember, and communicate knowledge of Christian truth to others for the purpose of building up the Body.

ENCOURAGEMENT – The ability to motivate and empower believers to live the Christian life. This person will offer love and support in this process.

GENEROSITY – The ability to earn and contribute money wisely, sincerely, and faithfully to the Lord’s work.

LEADERSHIP – The ability to lead in the church with eagerness, vision, wisdom, devotion, and integrity.

MERCY – The ability to empathize with, show compassion, and love hurting people.

WISDOM – Ability to apply God’s truth to an immediate problem, situation, or need. Some define the gift of wisdom as knowledge applied to moral situations.

KNOWLEDGE – Closely related to the gifts of wisdom (Paul links together in 1 Corinthians 12:8) and teaching. Knowledge is the ability to recall, comprehend, and share God’s truth.

FAITH – A conviction that God can and will reveal His power in a special way and in a specific circumstance. It could also more generally refer to a believer’s special ability to place complete trust in God.

DISCERNMENT – The ability to distinguish between truth and error, right and wrong.

APOSTLESHIP – Clearly, the term “apostle” was used in a unique sense to describe people who were individually selected and “sent out” by Jesus. The root sense of the word “apostle” is “one who is sent out on a mission.” Missionaries and church-planters are probably the closest modern equivalent to this ancient gift.

HELP – Closely related to the gift of service, this is the ability to recognize the needs of others and to respond willingly to meet those needs.

ADMINISTRATION – The ability to organize and guide human activities in such a way that Christ's mission is carried out.

EVANGELISM (EVANGELIST) – The ability to communicate the gospel to unbelievers in a clear and meaningful way.

PASTOR/SHEPHERD – The ability to oversee and care for the spiritual lives of others, patiently loving, teaching, and guiding them to maturity.

DISCUSSION THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS:

1. What surprises you about this list?
2. Are there other spiritual gifts not explicitly named in the Bible?
3. How do I know what gift(s) I should be using for ministry?

What are you most passionate about concerning faith, God, the Church, etc?

What areas of church life are you most concerned with?

What experiences have you had that have shaped your life? Could God use these experiences for His purposes?

Have you been affirmed by others in a particular area of ministry?

Is God blessing your current ministry?

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ASSESSMENT

CONCLUSION

GOD'S MOSAIC – God has given all of us gifts. The Bible talks about gifts of service, leadership, speaking, encouragement, generosity, mercy, wisdom, evangelism, and hospitality to name just the tip of the iceberg. God has granted us natural abilities and talents. He has given us hands to build, to fix things, to create, to direct, to act, to play music, to hold a baby, to shake a hand, to prepare communion, to write an encouragement letter, to paint, to draw, and to serve.

God has made each of us with unique personalities. Some of us are quiet, patient, compassionate, outgoing, intense, people-oriented, task-oriented, book-oriented, sensitive, courageous, and so on. God has designed each of us to have special passions such as a desire for the lost, a longing to create beautiful music for worship, a thirst to know and understand, a love for children, a heart for missions, a compassion for the hurting and the lonely, or a desire to create buildings and facilities used for God.

God has created the church to be a true mosaic of gifts, talents, abilities, and passions—of people. And the circle church is going to try to tap into all these things to become the unique community God has planned. Again, consider as we conclude: What has God planned for you? How has he been preparing you in your life? What act of service causes you to think, “I was made for this moment?” What role is God calling you to play in the specific circle of this church and the all-encompassing circle of his Kingdom?

God intends for all of us to unite together as the Body of Christ and use our gifts to strengthen the church, spread the gospel, and bring glory to Jesus. An army's effectiveness is not judged by how many people sit in the mess hall; rather, an army's strength is determined by how many people are trained and active on the front line. The same is true for the church.

If you are in the Body of Christ, then you are called to serve on the “front lines.” How are you going to use your gifts for ministry?

