



Heritage

Christian Fellowship

MEMBERSHIP MANUAL



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Welcome!

We are really excited that you are taking this important step toward understanding, appreciating, and committing to the local church! Membership in the local church in the New Testament was always assumed. Everyone who confessed Jesus as Lord was baptized, added to the church, and was engaged in mutual ministry to and with one another.

Acts 2:41–47 — So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They continued in one accord, gathering, and worshipping together, and continuing to have new believers “added” to the body (Acts 5:12–14). In the early church, and in much of the world today, there is little doubt about who genuinely understands and is committed to Christ and the Gospel. To make that profession and commitment through baptism often puts a person’s very life in danger. It is not culturally comfortable to be a Christian.

While we don’t see a membership process outlined in Scripture, we do see the patterns of “adding” to the number of those whose professions and actions evidenced belief and commitment to the gospel (Acts 5:12–14). We see the churches having a clear and distinct understanding of “removing” some and distinguishing who were the “insiders” and “outsiders” (1 Corinthians 5:10–13).

Centuries of cultural acceptance, doctrinal drift, and denominational confusion in Western and American Christianity makes it necessary to formalize a process for identifying, embracing, and committing to those who truly know and worship Jesus through the Gospel, and desire to commit to the ministry of His body through the local church.



The Gospel

Essential Truths about God

1. God is the Holy Creator.

He has a right to your life. You belong to Him.

Psalm 100:3 — Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Revelation 4:11 — Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

See also Romans 1:18–32; Acts 17:24.

2. God is the Righteous Judge.

God's righteous, holy character is seen in His perfect Law. As with any law, His law provides a standard for you to live by, punishment for those who don't meet that standard, and freedom to those that do meet the standard.

Hebrews 9:27 — And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

See also 1 Peter 1:16 and Acts 17:22–31.

3. God is Loving.

God is loving to all men (even His enemies—see Matthew 5:43–48), but this does not mean all people are in right standing with God.

John 3:16 — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

4. God is gracious to all who repent.

The delay in the Lord's return reflects His desire to show patience and grace to those who repent.

2 Peter 3:9 — The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.



Essential Truths about Man

1. Man was created to know God.

God wants men to seek Him and find Him. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 describes God creating mankind so they might worship Him, and He might dwell among them. The Bible's storyline—God's plan of redemption—is designed to recapture this purpose while putting all the attributes of God on display.

Acts 17:26–27 — And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

John 17:3 — And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

2. Man sins against God.

Sin is breaking God's law. Sin is falling short of the perfection of God. The Gospel enables man to be saved from his rebellion and sin.

1 John 3:4 — Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Romans 3:23 — for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

3. Man cannot stop sinning; He is helpless in his sin.

Romans 3:10–20 is an indictment on mankind and expresses our hopeless condition and helplessness in sin. In our natural-born state, humanity is dead in trespasses and sin.

Ephesians 2:1–3 — And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Jeremiah 17:9 — The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

4. Man is separated from God because of His sin and bound for eternal death.

Because we are alienated from God because of our sins we have incurred God's wrathful displeasure and apart from saving faith in Christ will be separated from God forever.

Isaiah 59:1–2 — Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Romans 6:23 — For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Essential Truths about Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh.

What was said about God is also true of Christ. He became a man to be a mediator between God and man.

John 1:1, 14 — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Colossians 2:9 — For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

1 Timothy 2:5 — For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

2. Jesus Christ is the sin-bearer, or sin-substitute.

Isaiah 53:5–6 — But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Peter 3:18 — For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

Jesus Christ was the substitute payment for the penalty that we deserved for our sins. His death is God's only provision for the forgiveness of our sin and the appeasement of God's wrath against us. Christ's perfect life of obedience is imputed to us for our right-standing before God, and our sin is borne by Christ in His own body on the Cross to atone for our sin.

3. Jesus Christ rose from the dead – He is alive today!

The resurrection displays and guarantees the life-giving power of God through the gospel—that we too can be delivered from the death we deserve (Romans 6:23). The same power that raised Jesus from the dead gives life to sinners. The resurrection also declares that God was satisfied with Jesus Christ's payment of death on behalf of sinners.

Matthew 28:5–6 — But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

1 Peter 1:3 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Corinthians 15:17 — And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Romans 6:4 — We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.



4. Jesus Christ is Lord.

All men must submit to Christ as their Master. It is impossible to say you truly believe in Jesus if you do not submit to Him in humble adoration and obedience. This worship and obedience is the goal of faith.

Romans 10:9–10 — because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Titus 2:11–14 — For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Essential Truths about Man's Response

1. Man's response includes faith.

"Faith" as it is used in Scripture has elements of knowledge (what you know), belief (what you embrace as true), and trust (what you rely upon because it is true). Any time a man has "saving faith" it contains all of these elements.

John 3:16 — For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 3:23 — And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

2. Man's response includes repentance.

Repentance—a change of mind that causes a turning *from* sin *to* God—is a necessary part of obtaining salvation. It is a gift of God's grace that He would change our hearts, cause us to hate our sin and to desire Him, and enable us to turn and follow Him in repentant faith. Without repentance from sin and the fruit of good works, there is no evidence of genuine conversion. These two ideas of faith and repentance comprise the biblical idea of conversion.

Matthew 3:2 — [John the Baptist preached] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17 — From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Acts 2:38 — And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 20:20–21 — [Paul said] ...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.



Acts 17:30 — [Paul preached that] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

Titus 1:16 — They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

James 2:14, 17 — What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

3. Repentance and Faith are gifts given by God in Regeneration.

Man's response in saving faith and repentance is initiated by God at the New Birth, (2 Cor. 5:17, John 3:3-7) at which time he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is an act of free grace on the part of God and a consequence of Divine election and foreknowledge from before the beginning of time. Sinners who repent and believe with saving faith do so by the effectual calling of God through the Word and by the Spirit which enables them to believe and repent.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 — Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. NASB

Ephesians 2:8-9 — For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; NASB

John 6:65-65 — And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father." NASB

Acts 16:14 — And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. NASB

Romans 8:28-30 — And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. NASB



Core Values

“Core Values” are fundamental and foundational values from which our practices logically flow.

The Scriptures place a preeminent importance on these principles, as you will see. That is why they are at the “core” of all that we say and do. They are important, necessary, and influential. In fact, these core values undergird and energize everything we do here at Heritage Christian Fellowship. Their fundamental and foundational nature leads us to do ministry in a certain kind of way, our Philosophy of Ministry. Because we are all on the same team, working toward a common goal (Phil. 1:27), it is important that we all understand and allow these values to inform our ministry together (Eph. 4:11–13). This is how we both glorify and enjoy God in our local church.

These are the core values of Heritage Christian Fellowship:

- A High View of God
- A High View of Scripture
- The Gospel
- Commitment to the Local Church
- Progressive Sanctification
- Discipleship

Now we will take a detailed look at each of these values and their importance.

A High View of God

We value the Triune God far above everything, for He is the most worthy and valuable being that exists. It is imperative to see Him as He really is, the Creator of everything and paragon of all virtue, the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is our utmost desire to glorify God by pursuing a **high view of God**. To know God and to love Him is the all-consuming passion of our lives. The continual proclamation of His character and nature is a fundamental element in our worship. In fact, this is the definition of worship, to ascribe worth to God and to see, comprehend, experience, and exalt the glory of God.

A High View of Scripture

We value the special revelation of God He has given us in His written Word, the Bible. Since the Holy Scriptures are in fact all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant, we seek to always have a **high view of Scripture**. The 66 books of the Christian Canon which make up the Holy Scriptures contain all that we need for life, faith, and godly living because they are a true and divine revelation of God Himself. We therefore seek always to understand the Bible better and teach the Bible very clearly. Clear and expository Bible teaching is a fundamental element in our worship.

The Gospel

We value **the person and the work of Jesus Christ**, and this Gospel message of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the center of our worship. Christ’s perfect life of obedience to God’s Law, His atoning sacrifice, and Resurrection are the most important events in the history of creation, and the Gospel is the message of what He has accomplished for those who believe with repentant faith. The Gospel was the fulfillment of Christ’s work as our High Priest and the full payment for the redemption of mankind from his sins.



In the Gospel we have the completed work of justification, which is available to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The cross is central to the attitude of Christian living and the supreme example of God's love to mankind. If there ever was an act of divine wonder to worship and glory in, it is the cross of Jesus Christ, who is Himself fully God and fully human, our supreme treasure!

Commitment to the Local Church

We value **the Church** because it is central to all that Christ is doing in the world. Every Christian is baptized into the body of Christ, the universal Church, upon conversion by the Holy Spirit, and is called to live out his or her Christian life in a local assembly. The local church is the primary institution where Christian sanctification happens, where we live out the many "one another" commands with each other to thereby glorify God. Much of the New Testament is given to instructing Christians about how to be fruitful and effective worshipers in the local church. Therefore, we strive to model Heritage Christian Fellowship after the biblical standard, and nurture it to grow and build itself up in love, as each member uses their gifts for the strengthening of it. Christians must have strong affection for the local church, commit themselves to a specific local church, and consider the other members of the local church to be their family.

Progressive Sanctification

We value **progressive sanctification** and personal holiness. Becoming like Christ is chief among our pursuits and the way we glorify God and enjoy Him. Sanctification is something we continually strive for so that we take on the character and likeness of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds. True saving faith in Christ brings about an obedience to God's commandments which powerfully changes our lives. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives is our humble desire. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, and our cooperation with Him is a central element of our worship. Humility and forbearing love are values of importance in our relation to God and to one another.

Discipleship

We value the ministry of **discipleship** within the body of Christ. This is the biblical method and divine example of true spiritual ministry within the church. The principles of fellowship, teaching, mentoring, spiritual authority, and accountability are vital to the spiritual growth of Christians. We strive to form and equip mature disciples of Jesus Christ who will themselves become disciple makers. Through the mutual encouragement of discipleship and the expression of each of our own personal spiritual gifts, we seek to be effective and productive ministers of the Gospel. This is a vital part of the Christian life for all who seek to obey Christ.

Conclusion

These core values are foundational principles that we desire to undergird and energize every aspect of ministry at Heritage Christian Fellowship. A robust understanding and practice of these values produce a fully informed worshipper of God and a mindset that informs our philosophy and methods for ministering the Gospel of Christ to and with one another. Because we are all on the same team and working toward a common goal (Phil.

1:27), it is vital that we all understand and allow these core values to inform our ministry together (Eph. 4:11-13).



Doctrinal Statement

At Heritage Christian Fellowship we respect that people hold a variety of doctrinal positions. With the assumption and aim that we are all continually submitting ourselves to Scripture, we will over time come to more and more doctrinal unity. However, it is important for all Christians to affirm the essential Christian doctrines that have been affirmed by the Church since the Apostles. We desire to see our members heartily affirm the following doctrinal statement, but if they cannot affirm every point, please speak to the elders about what differences you may have in your membership interview.

Orthodoxy:

The Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. The Holy Scriptures are inspired by God (God-breathed), not only in the general sense, but in every word. The Bible is without error and infallible as originally given. Being the written revelation of God, it is the divine, final, and complete authority in all matters pertaining to mankind, salvation, and the church. For the purposes of our faith, practice, doctrine, policy, and discipline, the eldership, being under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, bears the responsibility of being the final interpretive authority on the meaning of Scripture and its application at Heritage Christian Fellowship. (Zech. 7:12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:3–4, 19–21; Heb. 4:12–13)

The Triune God

There is only one true God who exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are equal in divine perfection, co-eternal, and execute distinct but harmonious offices. God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is holy, sovereign, and personal. God knows all things, is everywhere present, and is all-powerful. God is love, gracious, and merciful, and in every way good. God is spirit, self-existent, and transcendent. Being the Creator of all things, it is in Him that we live and move and exist. (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 34:6–7; Lev. 11:44; Isa. 9:6, 44:8, 45:5; Jer. 23:23–24; Dan. 4:35; Matt. 3:16–17; John 4:24; Acts 17:24–28; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Tim. 1:15–16; 1 John 3:20; 4:8; Rev. 4:11)

God the Father

God the Father is the first person of the Trinity (Godhead) who orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to all His promises, works all things together for good for those who love Him, and in His unfathomable grace gave His Son Christ Jesus for mankind's redemption. It was He who sent His only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, to be the Savior of the world, raising Him from the dead, glorifying His Son, and seating Him at His right hand. Recognizing the authority of God the Father, God the Son obeyed the Father in all things. God the Father being the only Sovereign, upholds, governs, and oversees all creation and creatures, for all exists for His glory. (Matt. 6:25–32, 28:18; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:39–42; John 1:14, 3:16, 8:27–29, 11:42, 12:49–50, 17:18–23, 14:16–17, 26; 15:26, 16:26–28; Acts 1:4, 2:22–24, 33, 3:13–15, 5:30–31, 10:39–41, 13:28–34; Rom. 8:11, 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:1;



Eph. 1:3–14, 18–23, 4:6; Phil. 2:5–11; Col. 3:1; 1 Thess. 1:9–10; Heb. 1:3, 2:9, 10:12; 1 Pet. 1:20–21; 1 John 4:14)

God the Son

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, truly God and truly man. As God incarnate, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He therefore lived a sinless life and perfectly fulfilled God's law, and his righteousness is imputed to those who believe by the Father. He glorified God by saving His people from their sins, taking our sins upon Himself, and dying on the cross under the punishment of God as the atoning sacrifice. Having been raised from the dead, He ascended into heaven and is at the right hand of God where He ever lives to make intercession for His saints. Christ is the only means whereby mankind can be forgiven of their sins and their guilt removed. At the appointed time He will return bodily in power and glory to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate His redemptive purpose. (Matt. 5:17; Luke 1:26–33, 2:6–7; John 1:1–3, 5:22–29, 14:6, 16:7; Acts 4:12, 17:31; Rom. 3:21–26, 8:11,34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:15–18; 2 Thess. 2:7–10; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 2:21–24; 1 John 3:5)

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God, possessing all the characteristics and attributes thereof. The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, to convict men regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment—and to regenerate the sinner. Sent by the Father and the Son to indwell all believers, the Holy Spirit baptizes each believer into the body, and guides the believer into all truth. He instructs and empowers the believer for godly living and service. He is the One who imparts spiritual gifts to the body as He wills for the edification of the body and for various works of ministry in the world. These gifts are to be earnestly desired and practiced in love. (John 14:16–17,26, 16:7–15; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 6:19, 12:7–13; Titus 3:4–6; 1 John 2:27)

The Creation

The creation (all material things, all mankind, and all angels), exist for the purpose of manifesting the glory of God. He created the physical universe (including mankind) in six literal days. God rules over the entire creation, being the rightful owner and proprietor thereof, bringing all things into conformity with the purpose of His will. (Gen. 1:1–2:3; Ex. 20:11; 1 Chron. 29:11–13; Ps. 148; Prov. 16:4; Isa. 42:8–12; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:9–11; Rev. 4:11)

Man

Mankind, male and female, was both holy and good when originally created. God created humanity in the image of God, and thereby distinct from all other living creatures. Therefore, we are of surpassing value before God, this being manifested in the price paid for our redemption. All of mankind is under God's authority and are accountable to God for our actions, speech, thoughts, and motives. (Gen. 1:27; Eccl. 12:13–14; Ezek. 18:3–24; Luke 2:14; John 3:16; Rom. 2:16, 3:19; Heb. 4:12–13)



Sin

Humanity forfeited its original state of righteousness by willfully sinning against God. God holds us accountable to pay the debt of our sins—death. Sin is either a transgression of God’s law or His character. Beginning with Adam and Eve, all have sinned, bringing death (physical and spiritual) to all. Since our fallen nature is corrupt, we naturally desire to do what is contrary to God’s will. We are completely incapable of delivering ourselves—in whole or in part—from either our guilt or corrupt nature. In this condition, we are under God’s wrath and are liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. (Gen. 3:6, 8:21; Ezek. 18:20; Eccl. 12:13–14; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 25:46; Rom. 3:9–12, 19–23, 5:12–21, 6:23, 7:7–13, 8:6–8; Eph. 2:1–3; 2 Thess. 1:8–10)

Salvation

God is sovereign in all things, which includes the salvation of men. In eternity past, God the Father, knowing that all men, if left to themselves, would reject Him and coming under His judgment would die in their sin, by an act of His own will graciously determined to save a people for Himself. Being a free gift of God, salvation from sin is offered to all men, which God Himself provided by His grace (alone), through the granting of faith (alone), because of the redemptive work of His Son, Christ Jesus (alone), to His glory (alone). In its broadest sense, salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Regeneration is the divine act of God whereby the sinner is granted the capacities needed to repent and exercise saving faith. Justification is an act of God whereby He declares the sinner righteous based on the merits of Christ and imputes that perfect righteousness of Christ to the sinner. Sanctification is the work of God in which the believer cooperates with God in the practical outworking of his/her new birth. Glorification is the work of God which is the consummation of one’s salvation whereby the believer is given a glorified, spiritual body that is immortal and no longer subject to sin. The believer lives in this state of glory thereafter, forever, world without end. (John 3:3–6, 14–21, 6:37, 44, 65; Rom. 3:19–30; 8:28–30; Eph. 1:4, 11, 2:1–10, 3:10–11; Phil. 1:29, 2:12–13; 1 Thess. 4:3–8; 2 Tim. 1:9–10, 2:25)

The Lordship of Christ

The Christian life has at its core the desire to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, always being eager to honor and please God. This is accomplished by the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer as they walk by faith. Christians are God’s instruments to lead others to a saving knowledge of Christ and to nurture and disciple them to maturity. Christians live always and continually striving against sin and by God’s grace are being transformed progressively into the image of Christ. Self-sacrificing love to God and others, humility, joy, the desire to seek peace, the ability to forgive others as Christ has forgiven them, are among the fruit which are to be evident in the true Christian’s life. Genuine faith will produce good works, although they in no way merit salvation. (John 20:28; Rom. 6:12–23; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22–24; Phil. 2:5–11; Col. 1:10–12, 3:12–17; Heb. 13:21; James 2:14–26; 2 Pet. 1:5–9; 1 John 3:21–24)



Man's Eternal Future

The Lord Jesus Christ will one day return visibly and bodily to the earth with His powerful angels and all mankind will be resurrected and face God's judgment. The present heavens and earth will be destroyed, and a new heavens and earth created. Those who have not been saved will be eternally damned for their sins in the lake of fire, the penalty demanded by divine justice for sin. Those who have been saved will live eternally in the presence of God, worshipping and enjoying Him. (Matt. 24:29–31, 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; Rom. 6:23; 2 Thess. 1:7–10; Heb. 9:27; 2 Pet. 3:10–13; Rev. 20:12–15)

The Ordinances

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two ordinances of the church that we observe. Christian baptism by immersion is the public testimony of a believer's faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life. It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is for believers who have made their faith publicly known to the Church through baptism. The Lord's supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination, private confession of sin, and the recognition of our need for divine grace and the fact that divine grace is available to us. (Matt. 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:1–23; Acts 2:38–42; 8:36–39; Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Cor. 11:20–34)

The Church

The Church is the universal body of Christ, those who by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and who upon repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus have been baptized into Christ—the only Savior from sin—and who are unified in submission to His Lordship and the Word of God, the Bible. At the same time the Church is comprised of autonomous local gatherings of believers who are governed by Christ in accordance with His Word through the service of its officers—the elders and deacons—and are accountable to all its members. The universal Church assembles in local gatherings of believers (small “c” churches) for the purpose of instruction in the Holy Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, worship, exhortation, encouragement, and the observance of the ordinances. The Church is responsible to propagate the Kingdom of God in the world through evangelism and discipleship, by the Spirit, and through the preaching of the Word, being the only voice of the Gospel message to the nations of the world. The Church is the bride of Christ, endowed with all the gifts and privileges afforded to her by Christ, the head of the Church. She eagerly awaits her triumphant victory when she will be united to Christ forever at His second coming. (Matt. 28:19–21; Acts 4:12, 15:19, 20:21, 20:28; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:13,27; Eph. 4:7–12, 5:32; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Tim. 4:1–4; 1Pet. 3:15, 5:1–4; Rev. 19:7–8)



Doctrinal Questions & Answers:

Below is space for you to jot down notes from the doctrinal "Q&A" during the class.



Specific Doctrinal Highlights:

In keeping with our submission to our only Sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ, and His Holy Word, we are committed to upholding His will as we carry out the requirements of our ordination as shepherds over His Church. Let it be known to all that we unwaveringly hold to the following positions and their respective doctrines as stated in Scripture:

Orthopraxy:

Marriage

We hold to the sanctity of marriage as part of God's creative order (Gen. 1:26–28, 2:18–25). Marriage is to be a covenantal union between one man and one woman (Mal. 2:14b; Matt. 19:4–6). Marriage is ordained, established, and regulated by God to be a life-long commitment (1 Cor. 7:39) of two becoming “one flesh” united in companionship both physically and spiritually (Gen. 2:18–25). Their physical union is given by God for companionship (Gen. 2:18), and their physical union is given for procreation (Gen. 1: 28), for raising a godly heritage (Mal. 2:15), and for conjugal rights (1 Cor. 7:3). It is only within the covenant of marriage that the “marriage bed” is held in honor and undefiled by adultery (Heb. 13:4). Within the Christian community marriage should only be allowed between two Christians (2 Cor. 6:14–18) with no provision to dissolve it through divorce except by two biblical provisions given by God (outlined below under Divorce and Remarriage). Marriage follows God's order of creation in that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife—with each reflecting the love of Christ to each other (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–33) and maintaining interdependence to God's glory (I Cor. 11:3, 9–12). Marriage is a reflection of Christ and His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:31–32).

Divorce and Remarriage

We teach that all divorces are based on sin although not all divorces are sinful (Matt. 19:8–9). A divorce is not sinful when it is acquired on biblical grounds. There are two provisions that grant permission for (but do not require) divorce: Adultery (Matt. 19:3–9) or desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:13–15). Remarriage is permitted only when a divorce is established on biblical grounds (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15). God regulates all unbiblical divorces (1 Cor. 7:11) and makes no provision nor gives permission to remarry in such cases. Remarriage without biblical grounds to divorce results in adultery (Matt. 19:9). In the event that a divorce should occur between two professing Christians without Scriptural grounds, they are required by God to remain unmarried or be reconciled to each other (1 Cor. 7:10–11).

Preparation for Marriage

Each Pastor-Elder at HCF believes that it is both wise and prudent for couples seeking to be married to undergo premarital counseling and preparation for marriage with an HCF Pastor-Elder before being married. If you desire to be married by an HCF Pastor-Elder, please contact the HCF office or an HCF Pastor-Elder directly.



Gender and sexuality

The language of the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God created mankind as male and female, calling them to multiply through procreation, (Gen. 1:26–28). Sexuality is designed by God and to be experienced between one man and one woman within the context of marriage. The Bible makes no provision for a third gender or for the crossing over of genders. When mankind transgresses God's Word through unbridled desires and or physical sexual intimacy they do so against God's expressed design and will, resulting in abomination (Rom. 1:18–32). Any expression of sexual intimacy outside of marriage is fornication—whether heterosexual or homosexual—is forbidden and falls under the category of sexual immorality. We recognize no other rule of sexual conduct outside of God's authoritative word (2 Tim. 3:16–17). God has created male and female distinctions purposefully. A husband and wife together, as sexual beings, are designed intentionally to procreate and produce offspring, each in their own role according to their gender (Gen. 1:27–28). God is sovereign in the assignment of gender—and for anyone to reject, seek to redefine, or act in a way clearly contrary to God's good Providence in such assignment is to rebel against Him and reflect an idolatrous arrogance and contempt against His right as Creator to fashion His creatures as He wills (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 5:4–5; Gal. 5:19).

Sanctity of Life

We believe that life is sacred because of its origin and reflection. The Bible is the authoritative source of this declaration. Mankind was created by God and bears the image of the triune God, (Gen. 1:26–27). Because God is holy His creation is holy. God not only created man by fashioning him but also breathed life into the man that he should be a living being (Gen. 2:7). Mankind originated from God; therefore, humanity belongs to God and is accountable to Him for the life He has granted. God does not grant permission for anyone to act autonomously in the taking of a life through homicide or suicide, both being an act of murder. Abortion is murder (Ex. 20:13).

Membership

New members are received on a regular basis. Prospective members join HCF by verbal affirmation in the presence of the congregation after completing both this membership class and a successful interview with the elders—having given a credible profession of faith, heartily affirmed their submission to the authority of the Bible and acknowledged their alignment with the HCF Statement of Faith. New members are normally introduced to the congregation at our next communion service, so that existing members can receive them into biblical church fellowship. Several benefits follow:

- Members will be able to put a name with a face and know who is willfully committed to our church family. This will allow us to identify those whom we have a biblical responsibility to love, serve, and care for as members of our own church family—and to know from whom we can expect/receive the same.
- Pastor-Elders will know those for whom they must give an account to God for their souls (Heb 13:17). They will be able to identify those who have willfully committed to our fellowship as their own local church and submitted themselves, according to the Word, to their pastoral authority, so that they might serve them by leading, teaching,



healing, and protecting them. Also, for such members to support, respect, help and pray for the Pastor-Elders.

- Deacons will know those who have willfully committed to our fellowship as their own local church and submitted themselves, according to the Word, to their diaconal authority, so that they might serve them by meeting the practical needs of HCF. Also, for such members to support, respect, help and pray for the Deacons.
- To establish a list of active members who are approved to serve in official ministry positions.
- To establish an accurate membership roll for the purposes of establishing a quorum for the congregational vote related to the purchase or sale of properties owned by HCF.
- To provide official communications about a member's standing and history at HCF if they should need or desire to leave and be recommended to another church fellowship.
- For those in good standing, requests to be removed from the membership roll will be honored at the time of their request. For those under church discipline, each request will be taken under review. No resignation will be accepted for the purpose of avoiding the biblical discipline/restoration process.

We believe it is an issue of utmost importance and self-evident that those who consider HCF to be their own local church should publicly identify as such, for the purposes stated above.

Church Discipline/Restoration

We here at Heritage Christian Fellowship, in obedience to the rule of Jesus Christ, are committed to practicing church discipline. Jesus Christ commanded that all members of a local church body cooperate in the privilege and responsibility of participating in or receiving church discipline if they or another church member are found to be in unrepentant sin. It is our firm commitment to honor Jesus Christ in seeking to win our brothers and sisters caught in unrepentant sin and to restore them to obedience to Christ and proper fellowship within the body of Christ. If the sinning member refuses to listen to individual admonitions, we will seek to admonish them in the presence of two or three witnesses. If there is continued refusal to repent, we will seek to include the entire membership in the process of calling them to repentance. With continued refusal, we are committed to the final step of removing a person from fellowship—to be treated as an unbeliever in hopes that they will be caused to repent and be restored to fellowship.

We are also committed to publicly dealing with public sins and to avoiding divisive individuals who factiousness harms the local body of Christ. (Matt. 18:15–18; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 2:6–14; 1 Tim. 5:19–22; Titus 3:10)



Mutual Commitments

At Heritage Christian Fellowship we respect that people hold a variety of doctrinal positions. It is not our desire to discourage those who love God and love His Word to abandon or deny their beliefs if they are different from our own. However, we desire there to be a spirit of unity and a humble willingness to yield and defer to the elders without causing dissension. We are convinced that over time, submitting to Scripture and being willing to dialogue humbly about these matters, believers will grow more and more toward doctrinal unity.

What do we believe that humble submission and dialogue regarding differences should look like from the perspective of both church leaders and church members?

We believe the elders have a general responsibility to guard the truth (1 Tim. 6:20), while being able to gently instruct and care for the flock.

2 Timothy 2:24–25a — And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

We believe members also have some general responsibilities to appreciate their leaders, and to be teachable and willing to yield to them.

Hebrews 13:17 — Obey [be persuadable] your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 — We ask you, brothers, to respect [know, appreciate] those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish [instruct] you.

Keeping these admonitions in mind, what kinds of specific commitments do we believe the shepherds and the flock are making when they join hands in ministry through membership?

Commitments of the Elders

1. We will strive to hold and teach our convictions with humility, and not be personally critical or condescending toward those who differ; instead, we will do our best to appreciate every member and the diversity they bring to the body.
2. We will strive for a unity of spirit centered around Christ and the Gospel that will cultivate an atmosphere of openness and mutual appreciation.
3. We will provide spiritual instruction and resources to help members understand any matters of doctrine they desire to grasp more fully or deeply.
4. We will commit to respecting your personal convictions and beliefs, and properly grant you liberty of conscience in matters of doctrine and beliefs.
5. We will not hinder a member’s service in the church in any way, providing that they are not living in any serious or life dominating sin and also providing they are holding their convictions humbly, and not teaching or promoting doctrines contrary to those held and taught by the elders.



Commitments of the Members

1. The member must strive to hold his or her convictions with humility, and not be personally critical or condescending toward the elders, or others in the body with whom they disagree.
2. The member will strive for a unity of spirit centered around Christ and the Gospel that will cultivate an atmosphere of openness and mutual appreciation.
3. The member acknowledges that Holy Scripture is our only authority for faith and practice. The member, along with the elders, submits to the mutual accountability that the Scripture instructs us, and commits to obey the Scripture as our only guide for Christian worship and living.
4. The member will strive to love, pray for, and appreciate those in authority over them in the church.
5. The member, in keeping with Hebrews 13:17, will strive to maintain a teachable spirit, avoid stubbornness, cultivate a willingness to be persuaded, and have a heart willing to yield even when the differences in doctrine remain.
6. The member commits to not teaching or promoting doctrines contrary to those taught and held by the elders, and to be respectful in any and every conversation where those doctrinal differences might arise.

Conclusion

The desire of your shepherds is to care for your spiritual health and to see you walking in the truth. In fact, like the Apostle John, we would be able to say...

3 John 4 — I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

We believe this kind of care—being fed well spiritually and cared for practically—can happen effectively in a context where doctrinal differences exist. The prerequisite for that to happen is humility, genuine affection, abundant grace, and mutual respect in every heart. That is our prayer and desire, from our hearts and from yours.



Commitment to a Local Church

Today we will talk about our relationship with Christ, not primarily about our personal relationship with Him, but our relationship to Christ in its corporate expression – how relationship with Christ implies and makes necessary a relationship with everyone else that is related to Him.

Much is said about our personal relationship with Christ, but our corporate relationship with Him (with His “body,” “family,” “household,” “church”) is just as important. You can’t have one without the other. The Scriptures teach us that we should put just as much effort into developing our corporate relationship with Christ as we do our personal relationship.

Sadly, there are many who think their personal relationship with Christ is all that is important. Many people feel guilty about their lack of commitment when it comes to their personal relationship with Christ, but they think very little of their lack of commitment when it comes to their corporate relationship with Christ—their commitment to the local church.

What does it mean to be committed to the church? What does God require? What do the Scriptures teach?

We are going to examine FIVE aspects of a proper commitment to the local church.

These biblical principles, and their implications, should help all Christians see the importance of joining together in a mutual commitment to one another in a local church setting.

I. The Local Church is Central to God’s Plan

The first aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is recognizing that the local church is central to God’s plan for ministry. It is also to be central to the life of every Christian. The New Testament does not conceive of living the Christian life apart from the local church. Commitment to the local church is not optional. It is not dispensable.

In 1 Timothy 3:14–15, the Apostle Paul told Timothy and the rest of us how important the local church is to God. He points out four realities about the local church in order to highlight its importance in God’s economy. First, here is the text of that passage.

1 Timothy 3:14–15 — I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

The local church is the “the household of God” (the family of God).

If you consider yourself to be a Christian, you should consider yourself to be a part of the family of God. Who would want to be without a family? Who would want to be without a local church? Who would want to be loosely connected to a family? Who would want to be loosely connected to the local church? If the two share certain qualities (and God says that they do), then we should also see how both must have a similar importance in our mind and in our commitments.



The local church is “the church of the living God.”

God owns the local church. He started it, builds it, energizes it, grows it, and purifies it. We should desire to be committed to what God is doing. He is building His church, and that activity is happening in relational ways in the local church.

The local church is “the pillar of truth.” It holds God’s truth up for all to see.

The church is the “pillar of the truth.” Through baptism, the Lord’s Supper, authoritative preaching, humble listening, regular attendance, and personal accountability, the truth of God is held up for all to see, appreciate and receive. It is God’s means of holding up the truth for all to see. You should desire to be committed in a dynamic way to a local church so you can both “see the truth for yourself” regularly, and to be a part of holding up the truth for others to see as well.

The local church is “the support of the truth.” It is the foundation.

What does it mean to have good ground support—a proper foundation—on a building? It makes the building firm and stable. The local church provides stability for God’s truth. The local church, alone, is able and responsible to proclaim the truth, to defend the truth, to live out the truth in their daily lives, and to hold one another accountable to do the same. Commit yourself to a local church so you can be a part of God’s plan for proclaiming and preserving His truth!

This may be the first time you have considered how God’s program for saving people, growing Christians, glorifying Himself, and proclaiming truth is centered around the local church. Don’t lose sight of this! Trying to live the Christian life independent of others in the family of God is not only unbiblical, it will detract from allowing the church to fulfill all of the purposes for which God designed it.

Get on board and make your personal commitment to the local church known. That leads us to the second aspect of a proper commitment to the local church.

II. Commit Yourself to ONE Local Church

This is the second aspect of a proper commitment to the local church. You need to CHOOSE, and you need to choose ONE!

Many people attempt to live the Christian life without a stated commitment or regular participation in ONE local church. Some claim being a member of an organized church is completely unnecessary. Others are just very irregular in their attendance at the church they claim to be their home. Many others hop around from one church to another, never really committing or building lasting relationships.

If people thought or acted this way in regard to their literal family, most people would think it unusual. So why don’t all Christians see it as unusual when their brothers or sisters in Christ are so distant, disengaged, and independent toward their spiritual family?

The Scriptures teach that you are to commit yourself to one local church. How does Scripture teach this principle directly? We will look at five ways the Bible teaches that we need to be part of a local church. The first three consider the biblical metaphors used for



the church. The last two consider the Bible's direct teaching that we have certain obligations and responsibilities to both church leaders, and to other Christians.

1. You are a member of a family

We already pointed out above that the church is referred to as the "household of God." This means you are part of a family. If a member of a family only came home to sleep at night and ate their meals at a neighbor's house five nights a week, we would consider them to be a poor family member (at the very least, an inactive one). God has designed the church to be like family. We are to share meals, share a mutual concern for one another, enjoy life together, and have an active life of love toward one another.

2. You are to be a brick in a building.

God has a temple—and you are a brick in it.

1 Corinthians 3:16–17 — Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

When he said, "You are God's temple" he was speaking of the whole church. "You" is plural, meaning that "all of you together constitute a temple of God" (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). The followers of Christ are not to be scattered around the earth's landscape, but carefully placed together to form spiritual temples. You may think you are spiritually strong on your own. You may think you are sturdy as a brick, but God intends to make something of you. He intends for you to be a brick in His spiritual temple.

Charles Spurgeon said:

Now I know there are some who say, "Well, I hope I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to the church, because ____." Now why not? "Because I can be a Christian without it." Now, are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? ...There is a brick—a very good one. What is the brick made for? To help to build a house with. It is of no use for the brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it's kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick! Until it is built into the wall, it is no good! So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose—you are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live—and you are much to blame for the injury you do! (C. H. Spurgeon, *Joining the Church*, Published 10/24/1869)

3. You are to be a member of a body.

1 Corinthians 12:18–25 — But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,



that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

God uses this metaphor to describe the local church so that we may understand the importance of having unity and commitment among the members of the body. Though the church is made up of individuals, those individuals are definitely one body. You don't keep your toes in your pocket until you need them. They are joined to the body. They are members of the body. They are not loosely connected. You are a member of the body of Christ. Don't try to be loosely connected. Commit yourself to one local church.

When you watch the news, you will notice that even in times of great tragedy—like that of a terrorist attack—they don't often show pictures of people's bodies dismembered. It is unnatural. It is gruesome. It is disgusting. It is grotesque. Somehow, you'll find many Christians who think it is not that big of a deal to be loosely connected to the local body of believers. When God sees members of His body—the body of Christ—loosely connected or dismembered it is ugly and grotesque. We are the body of Christ.

4. You are to fulfill “one another” commands with those in your church.

Love; serve; admonish; encourage; live in peace; be patient; be of the same mind toward; build up; comfort; confess your faults to; pray for; show hospitality toward; and the list could go on. There are many passages of Scripture that speak of responsibilities that Christians have toward one another. All of them are present tense verbs, meaning they are ongoing and continual responsibilities.

Galatians 6:10 — So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This means that you are to prioritize some people over others. You are to prioritize those in your church household/family over those who are not in your church. It would not be possible to fulfill these responsibilities toward everyone who calls himself a Christian. Because these commands are given in Scripture, we know that God's design is for individual Christians to be members of a local church.

5. You have responsibilities toward your church leaders.

There are many passages of Scripture that teach us that, as followers of Christ, we have certain privileges and responsibilities toward our church leaders. Those Christians that have not committed to a local church could not possibly know to whom they owe those privileges and responsibilities. Do you know who your leaders are?

Many Christians are content to skip over the commands given to them regarding pastors, elders, and overseers. Others fool themselves into thinking that they just need to have a humble, helpful attitude toward all church leaders (not specific ones). Sadly, the end result is that there is a whole list of biblical commands that they cannot obey—because they do not know to whom they are responsible.

What are those privileges and responsibilities? Here are some representative examples of biblical commands and principles that all Christians must live out in order to be faithful to God's calling on their life. Notice that as the writers of Scripture pen these words, it is assumed that Christians will know who their leaders are.



1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 — We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Hebrews 13:7 — Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

People who are not committed to a local church do not know who they are to know, appreciate, obey, submit to, bring joy to, follow, or imitate. Godly, biblically qualified elders are appointed in a church (this is God's pattern, as we will learn), and every Christian should be able to name those under whose care they are to be fulfilling these spiritual duties. Without a commitment to a particular local church, with identified members and leaders, a Christian will be unable to fulfill these responsibilities truly and fully. Don't be a useless brick, or a dismembered limb, or fail to be able to identify the particular Christians (members and leaders) toward whom you have these privileges and responsibilities.

III. Commitment must be Mutual and Recognized

This third aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is a very general principle and is taught by implication and by the example of the early New Testament church. It is because of these principles and implications that we see the need for a formal membership process.

Did the early church have people fill out forms to become a member? We don't know that. Did they conduct membership interviews and have membership classes. We don't know that. But you are to be committed to the church and the church needs to be committed to you. And, you need to know of the church's commitment to you and the church needs to know of your commitment to them.

This is what it means to be a part of the church. This principle is true for both the leaders of the church, as well as all of the other members. We will now look at the biblical reasons why.

1. You and the shepherds need a mutually recognized commitment.

We pointed out above that every Christian has responsibilities toward their leaders. It is also true that leaders have a serious and solemn responsibility toward those they are called to lead. First, the Bible says they are to shepherd you.

1 Peter 5:1–3 — So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Every elder, pastor or shepherd must ask, "Who is the flock?" He will ask that question if he wants to be faithful. He must ask that question if he desires to fulfill his responsibilities before God. Do your pastors know that you are committed to your local church, and do they know that you are committed to receiving their spiritual care and oversight?



Without your verbal expression of that desire and commitment, they will not know (at least for sure) that they will give an account for your soul one day.

Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Who will the shepherds give an account for? Are you a part of this church? The shepherds need to know. If we want to be shepherded—and want the shepherds to give an account for our souls—a mutually recognized commitment is necessary.

2. You and the rest of the church need a mutually recognized commitment.

Both leaders and members of the church need to know that you desire a mutual commitment with them. Why do they need to know? As we have mentioned, every church member has responsibilities toward others in the church. Because of this, every member needs to know who is a part of their church.

We talked previously about all of the “one-anothers” in Scripture that outline many of our mutual responsibilities. There is also a responsibility to love one another by properly holding others accountable to live out the reality of one’s profession of faith.

In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus outlines this process of lovingly reproving other members of the body. Ultimately, when a so-called brother refuses to listen to the loving reproof coming from the whole church, there comes a point where the Scripture instructs us to put them out of the church. The Apostle Paul puts it this way.

1 Corinthians 5:11–13 — But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

This sobering process is a necessary part of church life (even though we all hope that it is seldom necessary). The simple point to be made under this heading is that if the church body does not know who is an “insider” and who is an “outsider” then they will not know who they are responsible to love and hold accountable in this way.

Some people simply assume that everyone will “just know” that they are a part of the church, because they regularly attend. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly what each regular attendee is actually thinking in this regard. Even though the process may be different from church to church, a formal church membership (a stated mutual commitment to one another), is a means for people to verbalize this commitment, and to clearly identify those people to whom each member owes the responsibilities of love and accountability.

So, let’s be really clear on this: Church membership is biblical. The process of becoming a member that we have developed is a means to help Christians (leaders and congregation) fulfill their biblical responsibilities. God does not command us specifically to fill out a church membership form or go to a church membership class. That is why the process is different from church to church. What these principles do teach us is that we need to have a recognized mutual commitment to each other. The process we have developed at Heritage Christian Fellowship is simply a means we have developed to help us fulfill this responsibility.



IV. Appreciate the Value of Church Membership

The fourth aspect of a proper commitment to the local church is to fully appreciate the values and benefits of being a recognized church member. While a formal church membership commitment is a helpful way to identify and fulfill one's mutual responsibilities to others in the local church, there are also many blessings that come with having this mutual commitment with the church body. It is worth taking some time to consider them and learn how to appreciate these benefits.

1. You will be blessed through loving accountability.

The Christian life is hard. God has not designed us to live this life of struggling against sin alone. We need encouragement, comfort, admonishment, and love from others. When you become a member, you are asking for this encouragement and accountability. Verbalizing it reminds everyone of the blessing of being called to live life together with others who are engaged in the same spiritual battle.

2. You bless your shepherds with joy, which will bless you too!

Remember Hebrews 13:17? It says it is unprofitable for you if your shepherds have to lead with grief. Pastors and church leaders often grieve when people are simply "Christians-at-large" rather than committed to the mutual love and accountability for other Christians. They know that a Christian will be more edified and will profit spiritually if they make this mutual commitment (and take it seriously). It is a joyful experience to teach and shepherd people who invite and appreciate this mutual commitment.

3. You encourage others by committing to your part in building up the body.

Ephesians 4:15–16 — Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

A hitchhiker is someone who wants a free ride. He doesn't assume any responsibility for the money needed to buy the car, put gas in it, or maintain it. He wants a free ride, a comfortable ride, and a safe ride. He wants the driver to take him where he wants to go. A spiritual hitchhiker takes the church for a ride. He may switch back and forth between churches. Or he may take advantage of the same ride over and over again. He wants to take advantage of certain blessings of the church without taking any responsibility. Don't be a spiritual hitchhiker. Encourage others by doing your part to cause the growth of the body.

4. You encourage other believers to commit themselves to the local church.

Hebrews 10:24–25 — And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Making and fulfilling the mutual commitments of church membership makes the church look beautiful. As the church loves one another and does good deeds for one another, it encourages others to see the value of the mutual commitments of church membership, and to pursue fulfilling their biblical responsibilities with joy and energy as well.



V. Make the Most of Church Membership

This is the fifth aspect of a proper commitment to the local church. We should not just appreciate the value of it, we should wholeheartedly commit ourselves to being part of that blessing and value to all the other members as well.

Every organ is created by God to be a functioning part of the body. Individual organs, separated from the human body, cannot survive except by some artificial sustenance for some time. But that is not what it is designed for. God intends that members of the body be functioning in the body and through that connection to be stimulated for growth and development.

Every Christian is designed by God to be an active member in a local body. You were not made a Christian for independence but interdependence. Just as a hand or a foot cannot survive if amputated from the human body, Christians are encouraged to see themselves as dependent on others in the body.

1 Corinthians 12:18–2 — But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

Don't just verbalize a commitment and forget about it. Every member of the body needs the other members. Be diligent to fulfill the commitments you make to the church body and be diligent to help others who have made that commitment. We all need one another. And the Bible talks about the fact that there are so many ways that we actually need one another.

1 Peter 4:8–9 — Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Hebrews 3:13 — But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Romans 12:3–13 — For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

What a beautiful picture of love and mutual dependence. Imagine what a glorious portrait of the value and effectiveness of Christ's love it would be if every church member were committed to this kind of love, encouragement, and service. This is truly God's design. Make the most of your church membership commitment by always striving to live your life in a manner that reflects the value of being a member in the “household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).



Distinctives and Structure

In week 1 we looked at our “Core Values,” which are the underlying principles that inform and energize everything we do as a church. In week 2 we discussed our Doctrine and how we should interact with one another in a humble way when differences in non-essential matters exist. In week 3 we discussed principles of church membership, highlighting its biblical nature, its importance, and the need for that commitment to be both public and mutually recognized. In our final installment this week, we hope to excite you about how the ministries of Heritage Christian Fellowship happen in practical ways (our Distinctives and our Organizational Structure), and then discuss what your role and responsibilities are as a committed church member.

Our Distinctives

As stated, our “Core Values” inform and energize the ministry we do—they give shape and depth to the ministry. The shape and depth of ministry developed through the application of these core values lead us to do ministry in a distinctive way. We have chosen to identify and define these distinctives because we believe they distinguish our church from many others. We are not unique in the practice of these distinctives. Hundreds—even thousands—of churches in our country and around the world also practice these distinctives. We are convinced, however, that the practice of these distinctives in a way that is energized by a faithful application of our core values potentially sets us apart from many modern churches that are driven by cultural acceptance or shaped by the latest ministry fad or program. In contrast to culture, fads, and programs, these distinctives are timeless practices that are relevant to all God’s people across generations and regardless of culture.

We have four such distinctives:

- Expository preaching
- Biblical reproof and restoration
- Home Fellowship Groups (fellowship and teaching in small groups)
- Equipping disciples for ministry

Let’s consider each one and define and discuss their nature and importance.

1. Expository Preaching

Heritage Christian Fellowship is submitted to the authority, inerrancy, and sufficiency of God’s word—the Bible. This demands that we seek to understand, teach, and preach the Bible according to the author’s intended meaning. Each verse and passage of the Bible has one meaning and yet may have many implications and applications for life today. The Apostle Paul gave Timothy and by extension the church these key mandates about teaching and preaching.

Teach Accurately. We must say what God says in a passage.

2 Timothy 2:15 — Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.



Teach Profitably. We must use the inspired scriptures to equip God's people in all areas of life.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 — All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Teach Persistently. We must keep preaching and teaching whether people like or dislike what the Bible says.

2 Timothy 4:1–2 — I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

What is expository preaching and teaching?

Expository preaching and teaching is the proclamation of God's Word in such a way where the content, tone, structure, and implications of the text are directly and explicitly displayed in the sermon. Reading, explaining, and applying the text is done in context to honor the author's intent.

Ezra 7:10 — For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Nehemiah 8:8 — They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Colossians 1:28–29 — Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Expository preaching can be done working verse by verse through a passage or by topics using a variety of verses so long as the author's intent is conveyed.

Paul refers to the repeated, proactive, and intentional teaching of biblical and systematic theology when he speaks of the whole counsel of God.

Acts 20:27 — for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Elders and pastors are also responsible for equipping the saints in the whole message of the Bible. Time constraints do not permit word by word, passage by passage teaching of the whole Bible. But elders use their wisdom to determine the speed and depth in which to cover the whole Bible. First Timothy 4:13 says, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." This will always be the practice at HCF.

There are three ways expository preaching and teaching are done at HCF

First, you will hear detailed, consecutive teaching through books of the Bible where each book is carefully chosen based on the most current, urgent needs of the congregation. This is the primary way HCF teaches on a Sunday morning and many of its other ministries.

Second, you will hear systematic teaching on foundational doctrines, being taught from their context in Scripture. This is done individually, in Home Fellowship groups, or other ministry settings.



Third, individual, case-by-case issues and needs are addressed because of false or errant teachings on particular issues about which the congregation has immediate need. This can be done in all ministry settings at HCF.

Accounting for giftedness, experience, passion, and personality of the teacher

There are certain essential elements that all teachers must bring to their teaching. These include accurate reading, explanation, and application of the Word of God. If these elements are not present, then it is not expository. However, sermons can and should be different in style, emphasis, and presentation according to the gifts, personality, and experience of the teacher/preacher. Many styles and approaches can still be expository. Theological messages focusing on just one word in a passage, topical messages focusing on selected texts of scripture, or the verse-by-verse explanation of a passage and book, can all be expository, provided they explain and apply the original author's meaning and intent in context.

2. Biblical Reproof and Restoration

Our use of the phrase “biblical reproof and restoration” corresponds to what has historically been known as church discipline. This is how the Bible instructs us to pursue members in the church who are straying from the faith, teaching false doctrine, or living in a pattern of unrepentant sin. Our choice to use the words “reproof and restoration” better communicates the biblical process and goals of loving others in this way. Biblical church discipline is aimed at promoting repentance and, when possible, reconciliation.

It is important that every church member understand these principles for at least two reasons:

First, the reproof and restoration of fellow church members is a responsibility that belongs to every church member. This is not simply a responsibility for leaders. Matthew 18:17 says that these straying brethren must listen to the church. That means everyone, not just leaders.

Second, by committing together with our church community you are committing yourself to give and receive this kind of loving accountability. Everyone in the church is subject to the same standard for reproof and restoration. At one level, we all need help to overcome sin. Membership, in part, is a commitment that declares we are willing to listen to fellow believers as they encourage us biblically in our battle against sin. While this process rarely is carried through to the final step, being a part of the church means recognizing that if we need this degree of help, we are willing to receive it.

What does the Bible teach about the church's responsibility in cases like those above? The principal passage is Matthew 18:15–20:

Matthew 18:15–20 — [Jesus said] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by



my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Let's consider practically what this passage teaches. It describes what is to be done if we know a brother or sister in Christ is acting in serious willful sin. The procedure is clearly spelled out in Matthew 18:15–20. There are four steps that are to be fulfilled if necessary.

Personal contact—Step 1

The first step involves an individual conversation that takes place when we are convinced that our brother has performed an unrepentant, willful act of sin. This confrontation should be from the Word of God...

Hebrews 4:12 — For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

...and done in private (Matthew 18:15). If he does not listen to you then you are to go on to the second step.

While the initial contact must be in private, this should not be understood to mean more than it says. It does not prohibit us from having contact with other people about the situation or to attempt to minister to others in light of the situation. Indeed, it is wise to listen to counsel...

Proverbs 12:15 — The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

and this may prevent us from wrongly or ineffectively rebuking our brother or sister. Of course, all of our communication must be for the purpose of edification.

Ephesians 4:29 — Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Group contact—Step 2

The second step is to confront with two or three witnesses. This takes place only if the sinning brother or sister "refuses to listen" and continues to be unrepentant.

These individuals are there to confirm every fact (Matthew 18:16). How are they to do this? They must confirm (1) that the act has been committed, (2) that it is indeed sinful, and (3) that it has been committed willfully and without repentance. They must also make sure the person understands the way in which their actions are clearly outside the clear teaching of God's Word and that he understands why he needs to repent.

It is best that the individuals know the person well. The advantage of this is that the motivation of the confrontation is more likely to be recognized as genuine love and concern. However, it is essential that these individuals rightly understand the facts. If he does not listen to these individuals, then we are instructed to go to the third step.

Church contact—Step 3

The third step is to tell it to the church (Matthew 18:17a). The goal is to have every relationship in the church (as many as possible and practical) used by God to persuade a



person toward repentance. The motive and purpose of this step is to increase the level of accountability and the number of people who are lovingly calling the person to repentance.

This step must involve those in the church who exercise the spiritual oversight of the church. At Heritage Christian Fellowship, this is the church elders. The elders will decide how to proceed so that the sinning brother will be ministered to effectively through his existing relationships within the church. If the person does not listen to the church, then we are to go to step four.

Non-contact—Step 4

The fourth and final step is to treat him as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer (Matthew 18:17b). This is commonly referred to as dis-fellowshipping or excommunicating. The church at this point would have no further social contact with the individual. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 5:11 where we are instructed “not even to eat with such a one.” This does not mean that if we see them that we cannot acknowledge them. We should not be rude. It simply means that we are to keep our distance from them socially until they repent. We should never give the impression that the sin issue is not important. This action on the part of the church, which severs the ties with the sinning brother and thrusts them into the world, which is Satan’s domain, is intended by God to humble them and lead them to repentance.

There is an additional principle regarding divisive individuals. The process of church discipline appears to be more direct and speedier in cases of factiousness. Titus 3:10–11 says you are to “reject [have nothing to do with] a factious man after a first and second warning.” This is due to the unique threat of division that a factious man poses to the church. While much of Matthew 18:15–20 remains applicable, care must be given in informing the church so that the unrepentant, divisive man or woman can be rejected without harming unity in the body.

Our desire to practice these principles is something that distinguishes us from many churches. Sadly, many churches have soiled their reputation and the Lord’s testimony by not dealing with divisive or unrepentant sinners in this biblical fashion. We believe this practice is a matter of obedience to Jesus’ command in Matthew 18. A high view of Scripture demands we take those commands at face value. As well, they flow out of holding a high view of God and His holiness. This high view of God makes it impossible to tolerate unrepentant sin in the body of Christ. It also is a product of understanding what the Bible says about the sinful nature of man and the power of the Gospel to transform us.

3. Home Fellowship Groups

Heritage Christian Fellowship has a vibrant Home Fellowship Ministry. HCF Home Fellowship Ministry exists to glorify God, exalting Him through the teaching of His Word so that everyone may know Christ and be conformed to His image by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Home Fellowships will accomplish this purpose as they provide an opportunity to grow spiritually through Bible study, worship, fellowship, encouragement, and accountability; to develop Christian friendships through interaction, prayer and activities; and to demonstrate Christian love through instructing, admonishing and serving one another in our group, and as opportunity arises, to demonstrate Christian love with those in our church and our communities. (Acts 2:46—42–47, Acts 5:42, Acts 20:20)



What is a Home Fellowship?

A Home Fellowship is 6–14 (ideally 8–12) adults—children welcome and not counted in the total—who commit to meet regularly together for worship, Bible study, prayer, and service in a home and as needs arise throughout the week to equip/disciple members and train new leaders.

What does a Home Fellowship do?

They commit together to:

- Praise: In spirit and truth, sing/praise God
- Nurture: Bible study, prayer, scripture memorization
- Community: Fellowship materially and spiritually, affirm and encourage, exhort and admonish, testify and share, fellowship with other Home Fellowships, meet individually and as a group outside regular meeting times.
- Mission: Service projects—believers and unbelievers, service projects with other Home Fellowships

Home Fellowship Meeting Format

- Treat/Informal sharing
- Praise
- Prayer
- Bible Study

Regular meeting: 1–2 times/month for 1 ½–3 hours

Service project: Once a year

Fellowship with another group: 1–2 times a year.

Locations: Albuquerque, East Mountain, and West Side areas as we have leaders to lead Home Fellowships in those areas.

Home Fellowship Long Range Objectives

- *To provide home fellowship(s) for each area* of Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, and the East Mountains represented in the membership of HCF.
- *To train Home Fellowship leaders* through training seminar/classes, mentoring with a Home Fellowship leader, and reading program so that each will effectively lead a Home Fellowship.
- *To develop maturing disciples* through the Home Fellowship meetings, fellowships, and service opportunities so that each one is glorifying God, knowing Christ and being conformed to His image by the power of the Holy Spirit, growing spiritually, developing Christian friendships, and demonstrating Christian love from a pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith.
- *To provide opportunities for service* for each Home Fellowship each year, by each group determining and carrying out service opportunities for each member to participate.
- *To provide opportunities for fellowship* among Home Fellowships each year.
- *To encourage scripture memorization* by all participants of Home Fellowships so that each one will memorize several verses a year.



4. Equipping Disciples for Ministry

We are determined, by God's grace and to His glory, to ensure that the entire body is equipped and functioning effectively and fruitfully in the ways God has called and gifted them.

Ephesians 4:11–16 — And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

That is a great description of how God has gifted and given teachers to the church so that they can equip others in ways that result in the whole body doing its part so that everyone would be built up. In many churches only the pastors are considered equipped to do real ministry (maybe some would add “significant” ministry, or “quality” ministry, or “expert” ministry). The tendency might be for people in the church to refer everyone to the pastor (or counselor) when they have a spiritual problem. Our desire is to do all that we can to teach, train, disciple and mentor others in the church to perform all the various functions of ministry in the body—serving, teaching, preaching, comforting, counseling, and leading. No church ministry should be dependent on only a few people.

Godly leaders seek to reproduce themselves and multiply the ability of local church members to serve and minister to one another.

2 Timothy 2:2—and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Romans 15:14—I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

The objective for every pastor of God's flock should be to fully train others to exposit the Scriptures, effectively counsel the hurting, and to reproduce themselves. The church ought to be a spiritual greenhouse for discipleship and mentoring relationships. Ministry is always focused on relationships. “The work of ministry” is more than knowledge (Eph. 4:12). Matthew 28:19–20 indicates that disciple-making involves teaching people to “observe” Christ's commands. Pastors should pass on knowledge, but they must also train others to lovingly obey Christ. Pastors, and others, must train others for effective, practical ministry. This is discipleship!

Our high view of Scripture reminds us that God's Word is sufficient to accomplish this task! Through its truth every man and woman of God can be made competent and equipped for every good work.



2 Timothy 3:16–17 — All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We work as a family—a community of people bound together by our hope in Christ—to equip one another so that all are growing in faith and knowledge of God, increasing in love for one another, and becoming steadfast in living life for God’s glory. We do this in many ways—through:

- Corporate Sunday Morning Worship
- Adult and Children’s Sunday School
- Mid-Week Adventurers and Adult Devotion and Prayer Meeting
- Home Fellowship Group Ministry
- Men’s and Women’s Ministry Meetings
- Youth Ministry
- Union Ministry (College and Career-aged members)
- Training and Care Ministry Opportunities

We’re trying to create a healthy growth environment so that everyone in the body can grow to be like Christ. Ultimately, we desire that all of us become disciple-makers. This is why we are continually trying to equip one another to study and teach the Scriptures.



Our Church Government

Heritage Christian Fellowship is an elder-led congregation. That means we have a team of spiritually minded, mature, gifted, tested, and affirmed men who collectively shepherd the flock. We see this group of men as equal in authority and accountability, but variable in giftedness and function.

You see the titles *elder* and *overseer* used interchangeably in Titus.

Titus 1:5–7 — This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

There are three different titles used: elder, overseer, and pastor.

Elder

This Greek word has two primary uses in New Testament. It can be used for an older man or old man (1 Tim. 5:1), or as a title for a community official (an elder of the church or city). There is no specific age requirement with this second usage, but it implies maturity, dignity, experience, and honor. Twenty-eight times in the Gospels & Acts it refers to the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Twelve times in Revelation it identifies the 24 elders—representatives of the redeemed people of God. Nineteen times in Acts and the Epistles, it identifies a unique group of leaders in the church.

Overseer

This is a common word for an office holder in the Greek culture and was used of secular officials of various kinds, especially local officials. It was used for any official who acted as a superintendent, manager, controller, ruler, or governor. The LXX (the Septuagint: the Greek translation of the OT used in Jesus' day) uses the word for army officers (Num. 31:14); tabernacle administrators (Num. 4:16); supervisors of the temple repair (2 Chron. 24:12, 17); temple guardians (2 Kings 11:18); city supervisor or mayor (Neh. 11:9). It occurs only five times in the New Testament; one time of Christ (1 Pet. 2:25) and the other four times for church leaders. It is especially used for Gentile congregations like Ephesus. It is a general word like supervisor, manager, or guardian—a function assigned to elders. First Timothy 5:17 further develops this idea of oversight (there using the title of "elder").

1 Timothy 5:17 — Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

We can observe from this text that all elders are supposed to "rule." Some elders rule particularly well. While all elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), some work hard at preaching and teaching; the implication is that some elders have greater teaching responsibilities, obviously because of God's gifts and calling on their life.

Shepherd

This term is also translated pastor. The noun form occurs eighteen times in the New Testament, usually for actual shepherds; keepers of animals. It is also used of Christ (Heb. 13:20–21; 1 Pet. 2:25). Only one time is it used directly of church leaders—translated



“pastor” in English versions—Ephesians 4:11. The term emphasizes the shepherd’s primary role of teaching or feeding the sheep.

The verb form used three times in context of the church’s leaders (John 21:16, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–2). Shepherding speaks to feeding (teaching), leading (guiding), tending (guarding, protecting), and caring for the flock.

Putting It All Together

Our conclusion is that the terms elder/presbyter, overseer/bishop, and shepherd/pastor, all refer to the same office. The qualifications for an overseer (1 Tim. 3:1–7) and for an elder (Titus 1:6–9) are almost identical. Paul tells Titus to appoint elders (1:5), then calls the same office overseer (1:7).

First Peter 5:1–2 brings all three concepts together into one office:

“I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...”

Similarly, Acts 20:17, 28 uses all three terms interchangeably.

Now from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [shepherd] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

The terms are used of the same office, and...

- The term elder emphasizes his character—he is spiritually mature.
- The term overseer emphasizes his function as an overseer, manager, governor, ruler, and supervisor.
- The term shepherd or pastor emphasizes his functions of feeding (teaching), leading (guiding), and protecting.

Some further Considerations

Within those guidelines and basic definitions, certain elders will excel at certain responsibilities, and therefore play a more prominent role in certain areas. This is because every man is gifted and skilled differently. Although all must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and all will “rule” (1 Tim. 5:17), some are said to “rule well” and others are said to “work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). These varied degrees of giftedness and equipping is really what distinguishes the “double-honor” elders from the “lay-elders.”

Deacons

Heritage Christian Fellowship also has Deacons. Deacons are also officers appointed in the church as servants to the elders and the congregation. That means we have a team of spiritually-minded, mature, gifted, tested, and affirmed men who collectively act as servants to the elders and congregation to care for important matters related to the church and ministry. As the Bible instructs, these men must first be qualified and tested, but they may also vary in giftedness and function. The office of Deacon arose in the early church when the Apostles were overwhelmed with ministry and needed assistance with daily tasks of ministry. Here see how the deacons were an officially recognized office of men who assisted the elders so they could focus on their ministry of preaching and teaching the



Word and prayer, and they did this by serving the physical and practical needs of the congregation. At Heritage Christian Fellowship, our Deacons oversee the church's building, finances, including benevolence ministry, the church's IT, oversight of ushers, and involvement in the church's policies and procedures and music and sound ministry, among other physical and practical needs. Deacons are a vital and very helpful part of church leadership.

Acts 6:1–6 — Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. NASB

Moving forward the Apostles provided qualifications and appointments of deacons in all the churches. These officers were part of the church government in the Apostolic churches.

Philippians 1:1–2 — Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

Moreover, specific instructions were given for their qualifications, and before they could serve, they needed to be tested. When these men were tested, they were officially recognized by the Apostles with specific duties given as servants to the elders and the church.

Acts 6:3–6 — "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. NASB

1 Timothy 3:8–13 — Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. ESV



Notice that even their wives needed to meet certain criteria, similar to the elders. After they were tested according to the qualifications, then they were appointed and ordained as official servants to the elders and the church.

Summary on Church Government

As the Bible instructs therefore, at Heritage Christian Fellowship we have these two offices of biblically qualified, tested, and ordained men to serve the church in the roles to which they have been called by God. The Bible requires no other official titles of its leadership than elders and deacons.



Our Membership Induction

Below is the announcement that you will be asked to publicly affirm at a membership induction, during a Sunday Worship service. Here you will be identifying Heritage Christian Fellowship as your own local church and the church will be affirming you as one of its dear family members.

Membership Announcement

[Elder:] Today I have the glorious privilege of publicly introducing several dear saints as new members who are identifying HCF as their local church. This is for the purpose of giving new members a proper introduction to the HCF church family and the church family to them.

When I call your name, will you please rise for the reading of the membership commitment...

Dear saints, today I am asking you to affirm the following: I affirm that I am a member of the Body of Christ by grace through faith in Christ alone and I am publicly identifying with Heritage Christian Fellowship as my local church. I recognize the Bible as God's only written Word and sole authority for my faith and practice, and I will abide by it. I will submit to the leadership of the Elders of Heritage Christian Fellowship, and I will fulfill the commitments of membership.

Please acknowledge your commitment to this statement by saying, "Amen"

Please remain standing for the reading of our commitment to you and for prayer.

We Elders and members of HCF are committed to the spiritual wellbeing of you new members. We Elders commit ourselves to provide teaching, oversight and be examples to you. And the members of this church commit to lovingly encouraging and admonishing you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To which we all say, "Amen!"



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