

Hopewell Church

# **BASIC FAITH**

A Manual for Helping Prepare You for  
Your Public Profession of Faith



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# THE BIBLE

## **The Bible is a Special book**

The Bible is unlike any other book in the world. That's because it is God's book. He gave it to us so that we can know Him and understand how He wants us to live.

You probably have a lot of books in your house: cookbooks, textbooks, works of fiction, dictionaries, etc. But there is no book like the Bible. The Bible is different because it is God's word. This book is special because God speaks in it and reveals himself by it.

This is why the Bible is so important for Christian people. As God's word it has authority over our lives. It is to shape everything we believe and do. Faith, you may say, is receiving and believing what God has said in His word.

**1. God wrote the Bible.** One of the things that makes the Bible special is that He is its author. Sometimes we say that God "inspired" the Bible. That is a way of saying that God used ordinary men in the process of writing the Scripture.

Look at the following verses. Notice how each one points to the fact that God is the ultimate author of His word.

*And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13

The Thessalonians understood that even though the Apostle Paul was the one who was talking with them, the words he was speaking were God's words. God was speaking through Paul.

*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 competent, equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16–17

When you talk, air is coming up through your throat, past your tongue and through your mouth. Your speech is a “breathing out.” This passage tells us that the Bible is God's speech. What is written are the words that were “exhaled” by God's Spirit.

*No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Peter 1:20–21

Have you ever seen a sail boat floating on the sea? The wind blows, fills the sail, and pushes the ship through the water. The boat is “carried along” by the breeze. That is the image that Peter uses to describe how God brought the Bible into being. He exercised the same sort of influence upon the prophets and apostles. His Spirit supernaturally directed them and caused them to write exactly what he wanted.

**2. God's word can be trusted** – Since we know that God wrote the Bible, we can trust that it won't lead us

astray. We can believe everything it says because it is all true.

This is another reason why the Bible is special. No other book can make the claim of being without error (inerrant) and perfectly trustworthy (infallible). Notice what King David said of God's word:

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*

God's word is "perfect" and "sure." The word perfect reminds us that there are not any errors in the Bible. The men who wrote the Bible might have been sinful, but that didn't matter to God. God was so powerful that He could overcome that and produce a book that did not have any faults.

The word "sure" is a word that you would use in regards to a house being built. A foundation has to be sure. Otherwise it will cave in or fall over. The Bible is "sure" in that it gives us a sturdy foundation of truth to believe.

### **Conclusion**

Christians have always been called a "people of the book" because the Bible is central to everything we believe and do. We study it and seek to live by it because it is the very word of God.



**GOD**

When you make a profession of faith at Hopewell, it should be obvious that you are professing faith in God. Specifically, you are professing faith in the *Christian* God.

### God Exists

This, of course, assumes that you believe in the existence of God. There are many influences in the world today that try to tell you otherwise. Schools and museums often teach evolution. At its basis evolution is a philosophy that denies the existence of God.

Most television shows and movies also deny God's existence too. They depict people who go through life and get along without prayer, worship, or any other acknowledgment of God.

Yet the Christian understands that denying God or His existence is a great sin. Moreover, by making your profession of faith you stand with the Bible's teaching that "God exists and is the rewarder of those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

### What is God Like?

The Bible teaches much about God. We can learn about how he is gracious, perfect, loving, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, and just. We can learn about how he created the world and rules over every part of it. We can learn about His miracles, works, and so much more. But the most foundational thing to know is that there is only one God and He exists in three persons. This is what is often called the doctrine of the Trinity.

***There is Only One God*** - It is common today to hear people say that “there are many roads to heaven” or that “all religions are basically the same.” Such statements suppose that there are either many gods or that all religions worship essentially the same god. This couldn’t be farther from the truth. There is only one God, and He is the Christian God. Consider what the Bible says:

*I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.* Isaiah 45:5

*Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.* Deuteronomy 4:39

*There is no one holy like the Lord, indeed, there is no one besides you, nor is there any rock like our God.*  
1 Samuel 2:2

All other gods are all false gods (be it the god of Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Hinduism, etc). They do not exist because they have been created by men and their wicked imaginations. The Bible tells us not to worship them because they are worthless idols who cannot help. We worship the Christian God because he alone is God and there is no other besides him.

***God Exists in Three Persons*** - The Bible tells us that this God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is important to recognize that these are not three different gods. As has been established above, there is only one God.

To be sure, the plurality and unity of God is a great mystery. We cannot comprehend it completely. But we can accept it by faith, recognizing that God is far above us and greater than the limitations of our little minds.

We do acknowledge that God has revealed that there is a plurality of persons within the Godhead. For instance, in the opening pages of Scripture we see references to this unity and plurality:

*Then God said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness"... So God created man in **his** own image, in the image of God **he** created him; male and female **he** created them.*

Genesis 1:26-27 ESV

The rest of Scripture gives more detail. The following serves as one example,

*Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Matt 28:19*

In your profession of faith you acknowledge that the Father is God (Matthew 6:8), the Son is God (John 1:1-18), and the Spirit is God (John 15:26).

# **SIN & SALVATION**

## I Am a Great Sinner

“Do you humbly acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath and displeasure and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?”

This is the first question that you answer when making profession of faith at Hopewell. It is the most basic questions as it deals with your desperate condition and deepest need in life.

The most widely held belief in the world today is that man is basically good. This could not be further from the truth. We are great sinners in the sight of God.

*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*  
Romans 3:23

*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*

Romans 3:10-12

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?*

Jeremiah 17:9 ASV

Sin is any violation of God’s law. If you tell a lie, you have broken God’s command to be honest (“You shall not bear false witness”). If you take something that is not yours, you have transgressed God’s command not to steal.

Each day we break the laws of God repeatedly in thought, word, and deed. This is because we are sinners by nature.

Our sin has brought us under God's wrath and curse. We have provoked God to anger and deserve to be condemned for our deeds.

Jesus is a Great Savior

*Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and savior of sinners and do you receive and rest upon him alone for your salvation as he is offered to you in the gospel?*

This is the second question you will answer in your public profession of faith. It may be considered the most important, for it gets at the supreme truth of Christianity: Jesus.

"Gospel" is a word that means "good news." Christianity proclaims that Jesus is the good news because by Him God has provided a way to escape his wrath and curse.

*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12*

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6*

Earlier we acknowledged that Jesus was very God of very God. The Bible tells us that Jesus, for us and for

our salvation, came down from heaven. He became man by being born of the virgin, Mary. He then lived a perfect life and died on behalf of sinners.

In his death Jesus took the punishment that we sinners deserve. His perfect life also fulfills God's demand for righteousness, and becomes the means by which we can be accepted by God.

In your profession of faith you acknowledge Christ to be your savior and admit publicly that you personally trust that He is the only one who can deliver you from sin.

### I Believe

You may notice that this question asks if you believe *in* Jesus as the Son of God & savior of sinners. It does not ask if you believe *that* Jesus is the Son and savior. These are two very different things.

The latter has to do with bare historical facts. The former asks if you personally trust in Christ. It is the difference between simple head knowledge and heart devotion. You can know that Christ is the Son of God (intellectual assent to a Bible doctrine), but it is very different to actually *believe* in Christ as the Son of God (true saving faith).

Believing in Christ is further explained in the above question when it says "do you receive and rest upon Christ as he is offered to you in the gospel?" When a friend comes to your door, you open it and receive that person into your home. You accept them as a guest. At Christmas, you may receive a gift.



This is what it means to receive Christ. Welcome Him (and do not reject Him). Accept the free gift of God's pardon which is available to you through Jesus and His sacrifice.

When you sit in a new chair, you rest in its ability to hold you up. You do not worry that it will give out and come crashing down. You have no confidence at any point that you can hold yourself up.

You rest in Christ in the same way. You do not rest in your own righteousness and think that it can hold you up in the Day of Judgment. You know it is not able to give you eternal life. You rest in Christ, trusting that His righteousness will fully please God and grant you to be acquitted of all charges against you.

# CHRISTIAN LIVING

## A New Direction

There are three questions left in the membership vows. Each is a promise having to do with living your life for God. In your answer to these questions, you pledge to live like a Christian.

This may be summed up in the word “repentance.” To repent is to turn from sin to God. It means that you point your life in a new direction. Instead of following your own desires or the customs of men, you now devote yourself to obeying God and the commandments He gives in the Bible.

God’s grace continues to be operative in your life. Jesus came to save you from sin. He does not just save you from the guilt and punishment of sin, but from the presence and power of sin too. This ongoing work of Jesus will manifest itself in new obedience and a righteous life.

## And Now for Something Completely Different

Christians live differently. To put it another way, Christians are called to be “holy.” The word holy basically means “to be different.”

God is holy in that He is radically different than us. His transcendence and moral perfection make him wholly unlike anything in creation.

As Christians we must be holy like God.

*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*  
Leviticus 19:2

*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* Ephesians 1:4

This means that we are to be different than the rest of the world because we are living for God and avoiding the sins that the world embraces.

This difference, it should be noted, may be costly. We can end up losing friends and loved ones as a result of wanting to live for God. We may even be persecuted. But a holy life is not without reward. The Lord will surely bless those who are obedient to Him.

But it boils down to God's word and the instructions for life he has put in it. God's will can be summed up in the 10 commandments. These are the principles that are to guide our lives.

In your profession of faith, you are pledging obedience to God and promising live your life according to His word.

# BAPTISM

Symbols and signs are frequently used in life.

1. When a couple marries, they exchange rings as a sign of their new relationship. They also seal (or confirm) their vows with a symbolic kiss.
2. When a student graduates his diploma will typically have the school's insignia pressed into it. This seal is to affirm that the school backs his education.
3. In ancient times kings would have special signet rings which they would press into official documents. This little symbol would confirm to whomever read it that document that what was written was true and not to be taken lightly.

The church has signs and symbols too. We call them sacraments and there are two of them: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ instituted them so that we might have visible reminders of His covenant with us.

In these sacraments we are reminded of the truth of the gospel and have the reality of it further impressed upon our hearts.

The first sacrament is baptism and we read about it in several places in the New Testament.

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20*

*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 2:38 ESV*

*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' Acts 22:16*

In baptism a person is washed with water, either by pouring or full immersion of the body. This rite is rich in its symbolism and useful for building up the believer's faith all through life.

One thing that baptism symbolizes is God's promise of complete forgiveness. As the water flows over the person we are reminded that the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin.

Baptism also shows that we now belong to God. A cowboy might brand his cattle. He puts his special mark on the hide of that animal to show his ownership of that cow. Baptism is similar in that it is God's special mark upon us. Once we did not belong to God. We belonged to sin and Satan. But God saved us and brought us unto himself. God then puts his mark on us in baptism and makes us to be distinguished from all the other people of the world—a people belonging specifically to Him.

There are other things signified in baptism, but here we note that baptism serves as useful symbol. It helps to confirm God's promises. Whenever we are weak or doubting, we can remember our baptism and the little sermon that is preached in it. God says by way of a

visible message: “You are mine. I will be your God. I promise to forgive you and wash away your sins.”

Our response is to trust that promise and obey Him from the heart.



# THE LORD'S SUPPER

The second sacrament of the church is the Lord's Supper, which we sometimes call Communion. We call it the Lord's Supper because Jesus himself instituted it and is lord of it. We call it Communion because it is a time where we commune with Christ in a spiritual way for the building up of our faith.

There are two basic symbols used in the Lord's Supper: bread and wine. They represent Jesus body and blood and they remind us of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Jesus' body was beaten and nailed to the cross. His blood was shed to pay the penalty for our sin and take away God's wrath from us.

While baptism is rightly given to the children of believers, the Lord's Supper is reserved for those who have made a credible profession of faith. This is because of what Paul writes about the sacrament in 1 Corinthians 11:

*Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

At the Communion Table, one doesn't just hear God's promise of salvation through Jesus, he actively proclaims his belief in it. By physically taking the bread and eating it, you are testifying that you yourself take Jesus as your Savior and believe in him.

Since this is so, Paul warns that some people are acting hypocritically. They are eating the meal, but not really demonstrating true faith in Christ. As a result, they are bringing judgment upon themselves.

This is why we have encouraged you to work through this booklet and learn a little about the faith before being admitted to the Communion table. We want to help ensure that you believe and will benefit from this special time.

We can sum up the Communion service as a time for building your faith. Just as food and drink strengthen our bodies, the Lord's Supper strengthens our spiritual lives. As we partake of this symbolic meal, we are reminded again of what Jesus did for us. The Spirit uses this time to confirm the truth of His saving promises and stir us up to greater obedience.