

## Hilltop Bible Church Distinctives

Hilltop Bible Church exists to: 1) glorify God and exalt Him through worship; 2) evangelize non-Christians in our local community and around the world; 3) and edify and equip Christians through faithful discipleship and the teaching of God's word.

### Distinctive Number 1: A Worshiping Community

The *primary purpose* of the church is to worship God. All other responsibilities delegated to the church will cease when it is raptured, but it will continue to worship for eternity (Rev 5:11-14). If the church's first obligation is to worship and serve God, then it must worship in the manner prescribed by God. True worship must flow from a heart sincerely devoted to God. As such, true worship comprises all the actions and attitudes of life devoted to the obedience of God's Word. The Christian is to present his entire life as a holy sacrifice to God (Rm 12:1), and the true worshiper must worship God "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23). Jesus made it plain in His discourse with the woman at the well that true worshipers cannot be identified by their loyalty to a particular place (or format) of worship, but rather by their worship of God "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23-24). Worshiping "in spirit and truth" means rendering to God such honor and devotion in which the entire heart is involved, and that is in full conformity with the truth of God revealed in His word.

The Bible does not contain a detailed 'how-to' formula for *corporate* worship, but it does provide a framework of activities that should comprise the bulk of our public worship. Central to all of these is the preaching and teaching of God's Word (Acts 2:42; 20:27; Tit 2:1). Our corporate worship must emphasize and feature biblically based, hermeneutically sound expository preaching of Scripture, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Every component of the corporate worship service should point to, prepare for, and compliment the sermon, for it is the sermon which is the primary means of feeding the flock of God (2 Tim 2:14-15). Other activities would include, but are not limited to the following: the public reading of Scripture (Eph 3:4; 1 Tim 4:13); corporate prayer (Col 4:2-4; Phil 4:6; 1 Tim 2:1, 8); the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23-26); giving (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8-9); the use of spiritual gifts (1 Pt 4:10); discipleship (1 Thes 5:14); church discipline (Mt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13); praise to God through Word and song (Neh 12:31-43; much of Psalms; Col 3:16).

The *personal* nature of New Testament worship is not devoid of outward expressions. For the Christian it is both a privilege and a responsibility to worship his/her Creator. This involves reading and meditating on God's word (1 Pt 2:2), sharing the gospel with unbelievers (Acts 6:4; Rm 15:16), living a holy, self-sacrificial, humble life (Eph 4:1; 25-32; 5:1-2; Phil 2:3-4), prayer (Col 4:2-4; 1 Tim 2:1, 8), sacrificial giving (2 Cor 8-9), thanksgiving (Phil 4:6), and service to others (1 Pt 4:10).

Music and singing have played an integral role in the worship of God, both in the Old and New Testament. Music itself is not an element of worship, but a means of expressing worship to God. While the New Testament makes no direct assertion

concerning the use of musical instruments by the early church, there is no reason to assume that the early Christians ceased using them in their corporate worship services. The songs which were sung continued to be the theologically rich psalms of the Old Testament, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). In other words, the songs of the early church were composed of a variety of styles. Not only were these sung to the praise and glory of God, but they were also a means of mutual teaching, admonition, and edification (Col 3:16). Given the combined example of the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that the music of the early church was excellent both in its musical quality and theological content. In other words, there was a high view of God, music, and worship.

First Corinthians 14 teaches us that the church's worship services must be orderly (14:33), planned and directed (14:40), and all those attending should be edified (14:26).

### Distinctive Number Two: A Witnessing Community

The second fundamental purpose of the church is to bear witness to the divine truth of Scripture. This mandate means that the church has no authority to teach or preach anything other than God's Word. It bears the authority and responsibility, as "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15) to proclaim the Word of God not only to itself, but to a lost world that has been blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor 4:3-4). The Great Commission is repeated five times (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:46-47; Jn 17:18; Acts 1:8) in Scripture, leaving no ambiguity as to what Jesus has commanded His church to be doing. Evangelism is a mandatory function of the church. The task of evangelism was not abdicated to the pastor or a select group within the church, nor was a prepackaged evangelistic program prescribed for the church. Rather, the church *is* God's evangelistic program.

Many have fallen into the error of thinking that the corporate worship service is to be evangelistic in nature. This is a mistake. The worship service is for believers, not unbelievers. The church gathers for worship and edification (Eph 4:11-16), then "scatters" for evangelism (1 Thes 1:8). The first century church was incorrigibly evangelistic (Acts 4:19-20; 8:4), and the twenty-first century church should be no less.

A consistent Christian life is requisite for effective evangelism (1 Pt 3:16), especially since the non-Christian world often judges the value of the gospel by the consistency with which they observe it lived out in the lives of believers (Tit 2:1, 7-14). Character is everything, but a godly life cannot substitute for sharing the gospel. Likewise, a humble rather than argumentative attitude should accompany the Christian's evangelistic efforts. It is the responsibility of the church leadership, especially the pastor, to motivate the congregation for evangelism by modeling these traits for the church (2 Tim 2:24-26; 4:5), equipping them to evangelize (Eph 4:11-12; 2 Tim 2:2), and reminding them that God holds us individually accountable to fulfill the Great Commission (2 Cor 5:10-11).

Missionary activity is evangelism and ministry to people groups outside the local community (Acts 1:8) with the goal of planting and establishing churches that will grow and be self-supporting. Hilltop Bible Church is committed to supporting and equipping

both indigenous and international missionaries who are actively involved in taking the gospel to our own Judea and Samaria, and to the “remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

### Distinctive Number Three: A Working Community

The third fundamental purpose and solemn duty of the church is to minister to, that is, nurture and edify the saints of God (Eph 4:7, 11-13). The sole purpose for which God has endowed Christians with various spiritual gifts is the edifying of the body of Christ and building up the Body in love (1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:15-16). No spiritual gift is to be used selfishly simply for one’s own benefit (1 Pt 4:10-11). The church suffers when spiritual gifts are exercised at the expense of love (1 Cor 13:1-3), or when all the members do not contribute their spiritual gift to the Body (1 Cor 12:12-31).

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul describes the gifted people given to the church, and declares that their purpose is to equip Christians for the work of ministry for the edification of the church. Since the church no longer has the office of apostle and prophet, it is the specific role of the pastor, which includes the elders, to help the people under their charge discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts so the church may grow spiritually and physically (13-16), the ultimate goal being a community serving one another and united by the bond of God’s love. This unity depends upon the fact that the various parts of the Body are interrelated, each seeking the benefit of the other (Rm 12:4-5).

## What We Teach

### SALVATION

We teach that salvation is wholly and completely of God by grace based on the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of any human merit or works, whether actual or foreseen (Jn 1:12; Eph 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Pt 1:18-19).

**Regeneration.** We teach that regeneration is a supernatural, mysterious work of God in which He imparts spiritual life within us, sometimes called “being born again” (Jn 3:3-8), bringing us from spiritual death to spiritual life (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13; Jm 1:18; 1 Pt 1:3). It is an instantaneous, one time event accomplished through the instrumentality of the Word of God (Jm 1:18; 1 Pt 1:23), which effects our whole person, not just our spirit (2 Cor 5:17). Regeneration comes *before* repentance and saving faith. It is this fact which gives spiritually dead sinners the ability to repent and exercise saving faith (Acts 16:14). An unregenerate heart is incapable of responding to God’s call and exercising saving faith (Jer 13:23; Rm 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14). The lost sinner can only be the passive recipient of new life, never its initiator. However, from a human perspective regeneration and saving faith seem to happen at the same time. Genuine regeneration will always manifests itself over time in righteous attitudes and behavior that are pleasing to God (1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 2:10; 1 Jn 2:3-6).

**Conversion.** We teach that conversion is a willing response to the gospel, in which a person sincerely repents of their sins and places their trust in Christ alone for salvation. The word “conversion” means “turning” – turning away from sin and turning to Christ. Turning from sin is called repentance, and turning to Christ is called faith (Acts 14:15; Col 3:5-14; 1 Thes. 1:9). Repentance and faith are never separate, and one does not precede the other but they always occur together ( 2 Cor 7:9-10) in one act of conversion. There can be no true saving faith without genuine repentance. The result of genuine conversion is a changed life that bears righteous fruit for the glory of God (Jm 2:17-20; Tit. 1:16; Col. 2:6; 1 Jn 3:10). True saving faith always responds in loving obedience (Eph 2:10; Hb 5:9). It is not enough to simply profess agreement with certain facts about Jesus. Demonic beings believe in the one true God and respond in fear (Jm 2:19), but they do not love and obey Him.

**Election.** We teach that election is an act of God by which, before the creation of the world, God graciously chose in Christ those whom He would regenerate, grant repentance and saving faith, sanctify, and glorify (Rm 8:28-30; Eph 1:4-11; 2 Thes 2:13; 2 Tm 2:10; 1 Pt 1:1-2). This election is unconditional and not conditioned upon any merit that God might see in us that would make us worthy of His saving grace (Eph 1:5).

We teach that sovereign election does not absolve the sinner from the duty and responsibility to repent of their sins and to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior (Ezk 3:18-21; 18:23, 32, 33:11; Jn 3:16-19, 36; Rm 9:22-23; 2 Thes 1:8; 2:10-12), nor does it negate the responsibility of all believers to share the gospel with everyone as God grants opportunity, and to proclaim a universal call to salvation through obedience to the demands of the gospel (Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8; Mt 11:28; Rm 10:8-13). The doctrine of election, properly understood, is neither fatalistic nor mechanistic. Rather it acts as an encouragement to evangelism (2 Tm 2:10) because it guarantees that some of our efforts will be successful. Nevertheless, since sovereign grace supplies the means of receiving the gift of salvation – regeneration (Jn 1:13), repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tm 2:25; Hb 12:17), and faith (Eph 2:8) – as well as the gift itself, sovereign election always results in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith will be received by the Father (Jn 6:37-40, 44; 10:27-29; Acts 13:48; Phil 1:29; 2 Thes 2:13).

We teach that God’s sovereign election is in no way predicated upon any foreseen merit (i.e. our faith) on the part of the sinner (Titus 3:5), but is based solely on His grace, mercy, and sovereign purpose (Jer 1:5; Gal 1:15, 16; Eph 1:4-7; Phil 1:6; 1 Pt 1:2). We regard the view which sees God’s election to be based on His foreknowledge of our faith as a form of salvation by merit, and not salvation by grace alone, thereby making salvation a synergistic combination of grace and human ability, and seriously diminishing the glory due God for our salvation.

**Justification.** We teach that justification is an instantaneous, one time, forensic (i.e. legal) act of God whereby He responds to the believer’s faith and declares all those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as sovereign Lord and Savior to be righteous in His sight (Rm 3:26, 28; 5:1; 8:1). This is an alien righteousness and separate from any

work or virtue of man (Rm 3:20; 4:6; Gal 2:16), but is completely a result of God's grace. God can declare us righteous because He imputes the believer's sins to Jesus Christ, and imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer (Is 53:4-6; Rm 5:19; Gal 3:13; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; 1 Pt 3:18). In this way God is able to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rm 3:26).

**Sanctification.** We teach that as a result of justification, every Christian is sanctified (set apart) unto God, and is thereby holy and identified as a saint. This sanctification is a one time, instantaneous act of God known as positional sanctification and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. Positional sanctification has to do with the believer's standing before God, not their present lifestyle or condition (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Hb 2:11; 10:10, 14).

We teach that there is also a progressive work of God in sanctification that continues throughout a Christian's earthly life, whereby the believer, through the empowering of the Holy Spirit and active obedience to God's Word has the ability to live a life of increasing holiness and becomes more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 17:17, 19; Rm 6:1-22; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Thes 4:3-4; 5:23; 1 Pt 1:2). Throughout the earthly life of a Christian, there should be a continual growth in sanctification (Hb 12:14), along with a continual struggle with sin and the flesh, but the process of sanctification is not completed in this life. Therefore all claims to "entire sanctification" as found in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition are unscriptural. Complete freedom from sin is not possible in this life, but the Holy Spirit does provide for increasing victory over sin (Gal 5:16-25; Eph 4:22-24; Phil 3:12; Col 3:9-10; 1 Pt 1:14-16; 1 Jn 3:5-9).

**Security.** We teach that all whom God brings to Himself are kept by God's power and are secure in Jesus Christ forever. It is impossible for a true Christian to lose his/her salvation (Jn 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rm 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Hb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pt 1:5; Jude 1, 24).

We teach that the believer's assurance of salvation is to be a cause of rejoicing and a motivation to obedience, and not to be used as an occasion for sinful living and licentious, carnal behavior (Rm 6:1, 2, 15-22; Rm 13:13, 14; Gal 5:13, 25, 26; Eph 4:17-22; Col 3:5-11; Tit 2:11-14; Jude 4).