

Calvary Memorial Church Elder Affirmed Teaching Positions

The basic doctrinal stance of Calvary Memorial Church is detailed in our Articles of Faith, which is contained within our Constitution. Any changes to our Articles of Faith require congregational approval by Calvary's membership. Additionally, adherence to Calvary's Articles of Faith is a prerequisite for service as an Elder or Deacon. However, Calvary's Articles of Faith do not address every doctrinal issue that often concerns sincere Christians. This document is an effort to provide such clarity. It is not a constitutional document, and thus adherence to the doctrinal positions contained herein is not required for service in the church. The intent of this document is to provide helpful clarity for those seeking to better understand the theological culture at Calvary, as well as to help guide our preachers and teachers on doctrinal issues that lie outside of our Articles of Faith. The doctrinal conclusions noted here are subject to the governance and direction of the Eldership, and have been articulated in conformity with the teaching ministry of Calvary's Senior Pastor.

The Bible and Modern Science

One of the great tragedies of the past two hundred years is the chasm that has grown between the Bible and science. Christians have often felt caught between affirming the biblical witness of God as the creator of the world, and the modern scientific consensus that life is the result of random natural processes. Since Darwin, Christians have made various efforts to harmonize the apparent tension between the Bible and modern evolutionary science. Some Christians have adopted a "young earth Creationist" position that gives precedence to a literal reading of Genesis 1-2, while offering an alternate (non-evolutionary) scientific reading of natural history and human origins. Other Christians have adopted an "evolutionary Creationist" position that maintains a figurative reading of Genesis 1-2, while accepting the modern scientific consensus. Still other Christians have adopted harmonizing approaches somewhere in between, such as Intelligent Design, Old Earth Creationism, etc.

At Calvary, we believe the Bible and modern science can be reconciled. However, we do not adopt a formal position on how to reconcile "God's two books" (i.e., Scripture and nature). We reject the belief that all who adhere to young earth creationism are small-minded and inherently anti-science. Likewise, we reject the belief that all who adhere to evolutionary creationism are unchristian and inherently unbiblical. Good, sincere Christians arrive at both positions.

Regardless of one's perspective on how to reconcile the Bible and science, we believe that: (1) the Bible is true in what it affirms about creation and human origins; (2) the God of Abraham is the creator of humanity and the material world; (3) the material world and all that God has made is good; (4) creation was a process of sorts, spanning a "week" that climaxed with humanity as the pinnacle; (5) humanity (as male and female) was made in

the image of God and is thus a special object of God's love; (6) humanity's purpose is to multiply and exercise benevolent dominion over the earth; and (7) God rested on the seventh day, thus signaling the completion of his creative work and sanctifying the seventh day as a day of holy rest.

Politics

Calvary is a church that seeks to transcend political distinctions, while yet resisting the retreatist impulse to be non-political. The central confession of Christianity is "Jesus Christ is Lord!" This confession means not only that Jesus is our personal Savior; it also means that he is the cosmic King and Ruler of all things in heaven and earth. As such, the lordship of Jesus means that the church is inherently and unavoidably "political"—i.e., concerned, in a spirit of love, with the well-being of the earthly polis and its inhabitants. As such, the Church's unity is not based on any earthly temporal kingdom, but on our shared identity as God's people in God's eternal heavenly City.

And yet sadly, Christian engagement with politics has often led Christians to divide from each other along political party lines. Both politically conservative and liberal Christians often equate their political beliefs with the Christian political position, demonizing the other side as inherently anti-Christian. At Calvary, we believe this is not right. The best of both conservative and liberal impulses reflects the heart of God and corresponds to distinctly Christian impulses. Political conservatism, at its best, recognizes the importance of truth, law, personal responsibility, the need for sacrifice, safety, rules, justice, and order. While political liberalism, at its best, recognizes the importance of equality, community responsibility, fairness, liberation, kindness, social justice, and the need to love. Both sets of impulses are good and Christian impulses. Christianity, at the heart of its gospel, holds together these mutually supporting sets of virtues.

The problem arises when we allow political polarization to separate these twin sets of virtuous impulses. For instance, conservative retributive justice decoupled from liberal social justice results in a heavy-handed legal system that tends to marginalize the already marginalized. Likewise, liberal notions of community responsibility decoupled from conservative notions of personal responsibility tend toward enablement. Neither side serves the world well when it isolates itself from the virtuous contributions of the other.

Given the polarized nature of American politics, Calvary acknowledges that every vote will necessarily involve a measure of compromise. Deciding which set of virtues to prioritize, and which set of virtues to compromise, requires much wisdom and discernment; we recognize that honest Christians will arrive at different conclusions on this matter. As such Calvary grants freedom to individual Christians to make their own personal judgments related to politics.

Calvary has meaningful "left/right" political diversity that comes together under the lordship of Jesus, in common love and fellowship. As a unified people who confess Jesus as Lord, we strive to be a body that displays to the world the truth and love of the whole

Gospel—embodying in our congregation a gospel unity that the larger fractured culture is unable to achieve. We see this as a great opportunity to live out the barrier-breaking power of the gospel and to make Jesus Christ known to the surrounding community. For more on Calvary’s approach to politics, see: www.calvarymemorial.com/politics

The Lord’s Supper

At Calvary, we blend together two historical views on the Lord’s supper—a “memorialist” view and a “real presence” view. In keeping with the memorialist view (most often associated with baptistic Christianity), we recognize that Jesus calls on us to partake of communion “in remembrance” of his sacrifice (Luke 22:19, cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). Just as the Passover meal was a commemoration and memorialization of God’s redemption of the Jewish people out of slavery, so too the Lord’s supper is a commemoration and memorialization of our redemption out of sin. This memorialist emphasis calls for sober and genuine self-reflection prior to participating in the supper.

In keeping with the real presence view (most often associated with Reformed and Anglican Christianity), we also believe that the Lord’s supper is a means of grace that brings Christ and the believer near to each other in a unique way. As the apostle Paul rhetorically asks, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). In the Lord’s supper, we are not merely remembering Jesus’s sacrifice and death; we are, through the Holy Spirit, uniquely participating in his risen life. This “real presence” perspective calls for genuine rejoicing and celebration as we embrace the kindness and love of God for us in Jesus.

Calvary currently celebrates the Lord’s Supper on the first Sunday of the month, as well as weekly during the seasons of Advent, Holy Week, and Lent. Communion is open to all who have a sincere and saving faith in Jesus.

Baptism

Calvary affirms and practices believer’s baptism. This means that we believe baptism should be undertaken upon one’s conscious profession of faith. We hold baptism to be a covenantal sign that signifies our spiritual and physical union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and as a sign of membership in his Church (his body). Much like a marriage ceremony, baptism functions as an entry rite into the visible Church. Just as the marriage ceremony enacts and signifies the spouse’s covenantal commitment to the marriage, so too baptism enacts and signifies the believer’s covenantal commitment to Jesus and his church. As the entry rite into formal Christian communion, baptism signifies our mutual dependence upon the body of Christ and our union with all other trinitarian Christians, regardless of denomination. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4-5, “There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...”.

Tragically, however, differing baptismal practices have been used to divide the church. While Calvary formally practices believer's baptism, we recognize that many sincere Christians adhere to infant baptism. We do not believe that differing baptismal practices are worth dividing over. Given Christianity's long-standing acceptance of infant baptism, as well as the theological weight behind its practice, we admit to full church membership those convinced of infant baptism, without requiring re-baptism. Therefore, while we limit our baptismal practice to believer's baptism, our baptismal theology allows for broader unity with those who hold to infant baptism.

Ordination

The long-standing Christian tradition—in keeping with Jesus' example of selecting only men as apostles, as well as the New Testament's explicit teaching regarding eldership—has been nearly universal regarding its affirmation of male-only ordination—i.e., that the office of presbyter (i.e., pastor, elder) must be limited to qualified men (see 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7, Titus 1:5-6). This stance has been the official position of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and global Protestantism. However, since the 1960's, certain elements of Protestantism have begun to increasingly re-evaluate the New Testament's teaching on male-only ordination—either by explicitly rejecting the apostolic authority of scripture (i.e., “the apostle Paul was simply wrong about women,” or “Paul didn't write 1 Timothy”), or by more modestly reinterpreting the traditional passages in ways that render them no longer applicable for our contemporary context (i.e., “Paul's comments in 1 Timothy were relevant only to the situation in Ephesus, and do not apply more broadly or universally”).

Despite the shift by some Protestant churches, Calvary has continued on in the historic tradition regarding male-only ordination. We hold to the long-standing position for four primary reasons: 1) we believe it is affirmed by the apostolic authority of scripture; 2) we respect the weight of the Church's long standing tradition; 3) we believe that it underscores the complementary nature and interdependence of both sexes—all the more important in a culture that is erasing gender distinctions; and 4) we believe that male-ordination, when exercised in a spirit of Christ-like humility and cruciformity, uniquely embodies the importance of male-cruciformity for the sake of women, in ways that female cruciformity cannot. Men, more so than women, need to be reminded to cruciform their power for the sake of others. A male-presbytership, when conducted in a Christ-like cruciform manner, models for men the Christian truth that male power must always be used for the sake of others—most especially for women. As such, we believe that male-only ordination has, among its chief goals, the flourishing of women in the home, the church, and the world. For more on how male ordination uniquely communicates the importance of male cruciformity to men, and thus secures the flourishing of women, see: www.pastortheologians.com/podcasthomepage/2021/8/16/christian-patriarchal-feminism

Women and other lay leaders at Calvary serve in all non-ordained presbyterial capacities—as full-time ministry staff, deacons, small group leaders, mixed gendered adult

education teachers, administrators, communion servers, corporate prayer, worship leaders, finance officers, and beyond. Further, we encourage women to use the full range of their gifting, to include the gift of leadership, in the home, in the church, and in the wider world.

Charismatic Gifts

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, sought to clarify the proper use of the “sign gifts” (i.e., speaking in tongues, prophecy, words of faith, miraculous healing, etc.). The New Testament is clear that these supernatural gifts were in use in the apostolic age—so much so that Paul had to rebuke the Corinthian church for their improper use of the sign gifts. Paul’s framework establishes two truths: 1) not all Christians have been given sign gifts (1 Cor 12:27-31), and 2) Christians should not forbid the use of sign gifts (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

Today, however, debate surrounds whether or not these gifts are still active, specifically whether the gift of tongues has “ceased” (see 1 Cor. 13:8). While the Holy Spirit may uniquely use the sign gifts to enable the church to bear witness to Jesus (especially in “frontier” mission situations), we do not believe that the manifestation of the sign gifts is a universal or necessary phenomenon. Insofar as the sign gifts are only mentioned in Acts and 1 Corinthians, it does not seem that the Church—in the main—is required to manifest these gifts. Rather, the church’s primary focus and function is to bear witness to Christ in loving words and deeds (1 Cor 13). We are open to their use and reality in God’s larger economy, but we do not actively practice them in our services or ministries.

In short, we are neither a charismatic church nor an anti-charismatic church.

The “End Times”

Christians look forward to the “blessed hope” of Jesus’ second coming at the end of the age (Titus 2:13). In Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Jesus about the timing and signs of his return. Christians have been historically divided over how to understand Jesus’ answer. Three basic views have arisen: premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. These three positions each reflect a different reading of Revelation 20:1-10, which speaks of an earthly “millennial” kingdom during which time Jesus will exercise his reign upon the earth.

For premillennialism, Jesus’ second coming will take place before a literal thousand-year kingdom.

For amillennialism, the millennial kingdom is best understood as a non-literal spiritual kingdom that was inaugurated at the time of Jesus’ first coming. In this reading, the church is currently living in the millennial kingdom. According to amillennialism, Jesus’ second coming will take place at the end of the current spiritual millennial kingdom.

Postmillennialism maintains that Jesus' second coming will take place after a literal millennial kingdom. According to postmillennialism, the current mission of the church is to bring about the millennial kingdom by proclaiming the gospel and thus progressively improving society. When the church has established the rule of Jesus upon the earth, Jesus will return to usher in the eternal age.

Good and sincere Christians have maintained all three views: Irenaeus and many of the early church fathers held to premillennialism; Augustine and Calvin held to amillennialism; Jonathan Edwards and the Puritans held to postmillennialism. Calvary does not have a formal millennial position; all three positions are represented among Calvary's pastors, elders, deacons, and ministry staff. Calvary strongly affirms the personal, bodily, and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's return, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and motivates believers to godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic Gospel mission.