

Holy Spirit

Included in the seal of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a descending dove, the traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit. It also raises the question, “What does the Evangelical Presbyterian Church believe about the Holy Spirit?”

In our doctrinal statement of faith called “The Essentials of the Faith,” we read, “The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth and seals us for the day of redemption.”

Our beliefs about the Holy Spirit—drawn from Scripture—are summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, where the following description of the nature of the Holy Spirit is found:

“The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son, of the same substance and equal in power and glory, is together with the Father and the Son, to be believed in, loved, obeyed, and worshiped throughout all ages” (Chapter 34, The Holy Spirit).

Therefore, we believe the Holy Spirit to be God, just as we believe the Father and the Son to be God in the mystery of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit remains, however, the least understood of the three. God the Father has a title that helps us define Him, and the Son took to Himself a body like ours. But the Holy Spirit by name seems less comprehensible to us and is therefore subject to greater misunderstanding than either the Father or the Son. How, then, does the Evangelical Presbyterian Church understand the Holy Spirit?

As previously stated, we understand Him to be fully God. His primary function in this age is to glorify Christ by reconciling lost humanity to God.

“The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask Him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by

Human Sexuality

In a time when views of human sexuality and marriage are rapidly changing, we believe it is necessary and helpful to state clearly and compassionately to the church and the world our beliefs about God's design for human sexuality. We wish to do so with love toward all as we attempt to imitate God's love for us.¹ We long for the Church as well as society to conform to biblical standards of sexuality; but our ultimate desire is that, through the gospel, all may come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and receive His gift of eternal life. We also know that, having come to believe in Him, we enjoy His blessing by walking with Him according to His Word. We believe the Bible to be God's Word and that to understand and obey His will leads to the greatest human flourishing.² What follows is what we believe the Scriptures teach and the Christian Church has held to be true since the time of the apostles, and what therefore holds the greatest prospects for human happiness and well-being, even as we strive and long for a time when God will make all things new.³

The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality

Human sexuality is a gift from God. Being made in the likeness of God⁴ as male and female, we reflect the loving complementarity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Scriptures present a grand vision of husband and wife mirroring the intimate fellowship of the Trinity through union with a covenant partner who is both similar (human) and different (opposite gender), leading to fruitful procreation of humanity. In this profound mystery, we discover God's purposes for our sexuality and His will for how we are to express our sexuality.⁵

At the fall of humankind, recorded in Genesis 3, we began to distort and misuse the gifts of God to our own demise, but through His gracious redemptive work in Jesus Christ, God is leading us from brokenness and rebellion to a full and beautiful restoration of our relationship with Him and of our human dignity and purpose.⁶

¹ 1 John 4:10; John 15:12; 1 John 3:10; Ephesians 5:1-2

² Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4

³ Revelation 21:5

⁴ Genesis 1:27

⁵ Genesis 2:18-25; Song of Songs, Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

⁶ John 10:10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-8

Ordination of Women

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church does not believe that the issue of the ordination of women is an essential of the faith. The historic Reformed position on the scriptural doctrine of government by elders is believed to be that form needed for the perfecting of the order of the visible church, but has never been considered essential to its existence.

The Westminster Confession of Faith makes it clear that the church catholic is sometimes more, sometimes less, visible according to the purity of the church at a particular time. Also, the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.

Nonetheless, in spite of such failures to be all God wants His church to be, the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms that, “...there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to His will.”

Thus, while some churches may ordain women and some may decline to do so, neither position is essential to the existence of the church. Since people of good faith who equally love the Lord and hold to the infallibility of Scripture differ on this issue, and since uniformity of view and practice is not essential to the existence of the visible church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has chosen to leave this decision to the Spirit-guided consciences of particular congregations concerning the ordination of women as elders and deacons, and to the presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as ministers.

It is in this context that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church states in its Book of Government, Chapter 6, titled “Rights Reserved to a Local Church” that “The local church has the right to elect its own officers” (6-2). This right is guaranteed in perpetuity.

Finally, the motto of our church summarizes our stance: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

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Abortion

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is convinced that the Bible strongly affirms the dignity and value of every human life based on what the Scriptures clearly teach:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5 NIV).

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth” (Psalm 139:15 NIV).

“Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name” (Isaiah 49:1 NIV).

“for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born” (Luke 1:15 NIV).

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41 NIV).

To further differentiate mankind from any other living creature, we read: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27 NIV). Unlike any other created being, Scripture also teaches: “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7 NIV).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, a confessional statement shared by most Reformed churches, forbids the taking of innocent life while demanding the preservation of life from the moment of conception through to natural death:

“The Sixth Commandment requires all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others.” (Question 68).¹