

Core Beliefs and Doctrines of the Episcopal Church

Human Nature

We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God. That means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God. From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God. Our help is in God, who first helped us by revealing himself and his will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially through the prophets of Israel.

God

From the revelation to Israel, we learn that there is one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. This means that the universe is good, that it is the work of a single loving God who creates, sustains, and directs it. It means that the world belongs to its creator; and that we are called to enjoy it and to care for it in accordance with God's purposes. It means that all people are worthy of respect and honor, because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God. This revelation was handed down to us through a community created by a covenant with God.

The Old Covenant

A covenant is a relationship initiated by God, to which a body of people responds in faith. The Old Covenant is the one given by God to the Hebrew people. God promised that they would be his people to bring all the nations of the world to him. God required the chosen people to be faithful, to love justice, to do mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. The covenant with the Hebrew people is to be found in the books which we call the Old Testament. God's will for us is shown most clearly in the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are the laws given to Moses and the people of Israel. From them we learn two things: our duty to God, and our duty to our neighbors.

Our duty is to believe and trust in God:

1. To love and obey God and to bring others to know him;
2. To put nothing in the place of God;
3. To show God respect in thought, word, and deed;
4. And to set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways.

Our duty to our neighbors is to love them as ourselves, and to do to other people as we wish them to do to us:

5. To love, honor, and help our parents and family; to honor those in authority, and to meet their just demands;
6. To show respect for the life God has given us; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures of God;
7. To use all our bodily desires as God intended;
8. To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God;
9. To speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence;
10. To resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him.

The Ten Commandments were given to define our relationship with God and our neighbors. Since we do not fully obey them, we see more clearly our sin and our need for redemption.

Sin and Redemption

Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation. Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted. Redemption is the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death. God sent the prophets to call us back to himself, to show us our need for redemption, and to announce the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah is one sent by God to free us from the power of sin, so that with the help of God we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation. The Messiah, or Christ, is Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of God.

God the Son

When we say that Jesus is the only Son of God, we mean that Jesus is the only perfect image of the Father, and shows us the nature of God, which is love.

When we say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, we mean that by God's own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother. The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God's kingdom. By his obedience, even to suffering and death, Jesus made the offering which we could not make; in him we are freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God. By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life.

When we say that he descended to the dead, we mean that he went to the departed and offered them also the benefits of redemption.

When we say that he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, we mean that Jesus took our human nature into heaven where he now reigns with the Father and intercedes for us.

We share in his victory over sin, suffering, and death when we are baptized into the New Covenant and become living members of Christ.

The New Covenant

The New Covenant is the new relationship with God given by Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to the apostles; and, through them, to all who believe in him. In the New Covenant Christ promised to bring us into the kingdom of God and give us life in all its fullness.

Christ commanded us to believe in him and to keep his commandments. He taught us the Summary of the Law and gave us the New Commandment.

The Summary of the Law:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The New Commandment:

Love one another as Christ loved us.

What Christians believe about Christ is found in the Scriptures and summed up in the creeds.

The Creeds

The creeds are statements of our basic beliefs about God. This Church uses two creeds: The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed is the ancient creed of Baptism; it is used in the Church's daily worship to recall our Baptismal Covenant. The Nicene Creed is the creed of the universal Church and is used at the Eucharist.

The Athanasian Creed is an ancient document proclaiming the nature of the Incarnation and of God as Trinity. The Trinity is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church even now. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Covenant as the giver of life, the One who spoke through the prophets, and in the New Covenant as the Lord who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ.

We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures, commonly called the Bible, are the books of the Old and New Testaments; other books, called the Apocrypha, are often included in the Bible. The Old Testament consists of books written by the people of the Old Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to show God at work in nature and history. The New Testament consists of books written by the people of the New Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to set forth the life and teachings of Jesus and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom for all people. The Apocrypha is a collection of additional books written by people of the Old Covenant, and used in the Christian Church. We call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible. We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

The Church

The Church is the community of the New Covenant, described in the Bible as the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members. It is called the People of God, the New

Israel, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of truth.

The Church is described in the creeds as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Church is one, because it is one Body, under one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ; holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, consecrates its members, and guides them to do God's work; catholic, because it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time; and apostolic, because it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and is sent to carry out Christ's mission to all people.

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The Church pursues its mission through the ministry of all its members as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

The Ministry

The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.

The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to

proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.

The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

Prayer and Worship

Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words. Christian prayer is response to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord gave us the example of prayer known as the Lord's Prayer.

The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence. We praise God, not to obtain anything, but because God's Being draws praise from us. Thanksgiving is offered to God for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to God. In penitence, we confess our sins and make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives. Oblation is an offering of ourselves, our lives and labors, in union with Christ, for the purposes of God. Intercession brings before God the needs of others; in petition, we present our own needs, that God's will may be done.

In corporate worship, we unite ourselves with others to acknowledge the holiness of God, to hear God's Word, to offer prayer, and to celebrate the sacraments.

The Sacraments

The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and

certain means by which we receive that grace. Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills. The two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church are Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. The outward and visible sign in Baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.

At Baptism it is required that we renounce Satan, repent of our sins, and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Infants are baptized so that they can share citizenship in the Covenant, membership in Christ, and redemption by God. Promises are made for them by their parents and sponsors, who guarantee that the infants will be brought up within the Church, to know Christ and be able to follow him.

The Holy Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again. It is called a sacrifice because the Eucharist, the Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself. The Holy Eucharist is called the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion; it is also known as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offering. The outward and visible sign in the Eucharist is bread and wine, given and received according to Christ's command. The inward and spiritual grace in the Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people, and received by

faith. The benefits we receive are the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life. It is required of us when we come to the Eucharist that we should examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people.

Other Sacramental Rites

Other sacramental rites which evolved in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit include confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation of a penitent, and unction. Although they are means of grace, they are not necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and the Eucharist are.

Confirmation is the rite in which we express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop. It is required of those to be confirmed that they have been baptized, are sufficiently instructed in the Christian Faith, are penitent for their sins, and are ready to affirm their confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Ordination is the rite in which God gives authority and the grace of the Holy Spirit to those being made bishops, priests, and deacons, through prayer and the laying on of hands by bishops.

Holy Matrimony is Christian marriage, in which the woman and man enter into a life long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows.

Reconciliation of a Penitent, or Penance, is the rite in which those who repent of their sins may confess them to God in the presence of a priest, and receive the assurance of pardon and the grace of absolution.

Unction is the rite of anointing the sick with oil, or the laying on of hands, by which God's grace is given for the healing of spirit, mind, and body.

God does not limit himself to these rites; they are patterns of countless ways by which God uses material things to reach out to us. Sacraments sustain our present hope and anticipate its future fulfillment.

The Christian Hope

The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world. By the coming of Christ in glory, we mean that Christ will come, not in weakness but in power, and will make all things new.

By heaven, we mean eternal life in our enjoyment of God; by hell, we mean eternal death in our rejection of God.

We pray for the dead, because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God's presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is.

By the last judgment, we mean we believe that Christ will come in glory and judge the living and the dead.

By the resurrection of the body, we mean that God will raise us from death in the fullness of our being, that we may live with Christ in the communion of the saints. The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.

By everlasting life, we mean a new existence, in which we are united with all the people of God, in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and each other.

Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Adapted from the Catechism in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.)

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