



# Derry Presbyterian Church

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## What We Believe

God chooses you.

God chooses to be with you and for you not because of anything you've done, but because of who God is. That's called grace. God's grace is a gift that is freely given to us. We don't earn a thing when it comes to God's love, and we only try to live in response to that gift.

God is with you and for you.

"With" is one of the primary words to describe God. Throughout Scripture God affirms God's presence with us. "I am with you," is the reason God gives us over and over again to not fear. God is with us in all things, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us.

Everyone is welcome in God.

We do our best to make Derry a welcoming community for all people, but please never equate our failure at welcoming with God's. Everyone is welcome in God's love all the time. God wants to be in relationship with you. Everyone is welcome in worship and to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper because it is Christ's Table, not ours; and Christ welcomes you.

Christ chooses you.



**The Bible** is the word of God, but the Bible is not God. The Bible needs to be interpreted, and we help you to do that here by reading the Bible with other people who help us see our blind spots (Christians in different contexts, historical and contemporary scholars, and those with different views than us). Jesus is the primary Word of God revealed, so anything in the Bible that does not hold up to the Gospel of Jesus Christ has to be interpreted in the light of Jesus. We also practice what is called a hermeneutic of love. Any interpretation of scripture must be loving. We believe you can take the Bible seriously without taking everything literally. The facts of the story sometimes can get in the way of the truth of a story. If we put too much emphasis on the facts, we may miss the truth the writer wishes us to see, and in doing so read the Bible in a way it was never intended to be read.

**Jesus died for you out of love.** Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, not to appease an angry God, but to show his love for us, defeat death by death, and raise all of humanity through his own resurrection. We are sinners in the hands of a loving God, not an angry one. Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

The story of the Christian faith, the story we live and tell here is a story about death and resurrection. It's about how God continues to reach into the graves we dig for ourselves and pull us out, giving us new life, in ways both dramatic and small. Every time we experience this new life, this resurrection, we are living into our baptism. The goal of human life is not death, but resurrection. God is constantly raising us to new life, out of our sin, despair, loneliness, hopelessness, and darkness. Ultimately, God will raise us to eternal life in the final fulfillment of our baptism, by uniting to Christ's resurrection from death.

**We serve at Derry.** We want to serve you at Derry, but we hope you don't choose to worship with us because you believe this is the best place where your needs and wants are served. We hope you worship with us because you believe this is the place you can best serve others with the love of God. Just as Christ came not to be served but to serve, so we at Derry, exist to serve. We serve each other, but we also serve our community and the world.

We seek to love God and our neighbors with our whole selves. We do this together through worship, education, mission, and fellowship. We believe love is not just a feeling but an action. We love because God first loved us. We are all ministers of Christ, helping each other live in response to God choosing us, loving us, being with us, and blessing us with amazing grace.

# Questions & Answers About Our Beliefs

Presbyterians believe a lot of things. You will see a “common beliefs” section below, but you might notice that people often understand those beliefs differently.

## **Does this mean that Presbyterians are argumentative sorts?**

No, not really. It's simply that one of our core beliefs is that “God alone is Lord of the conscience,” which means that ministers or councils do not dictate to us what to believe. We believe good Christians can differ on a whole lot of issues.

## **What about scripture? Does that determine what we are to believe?**

Yes, in a way. Presbyterians claim that the Bible is the word of God, a unique and authoritative witness, but we also understand that it must be interpreted. Two people can read the same scripture and understand it differently.

## **Then how do you keep from reading it however it suits you best?**

Self-interested readings are a danger. That's why Presbyterians always do two things when we interpret scripture:

1. We pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we read.
2. we read scripture with other people who can help us see our blind spots.

Sometimes those ‘other people’ are scholars who've written commentaries on the scripture we're reading and sometimes they are people from other cultures and sometimes they are our Christian brothers and sisters who live radically different lives. For instance, reading about Jesus with a man who lives on the streets can provide amazing insight into a man who said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Jesus is the primary Word of God revealed, so anything in the Bible that does not hold up to the Gospel of Jesus Christ has to be interpreted in the light of Jesus. Above all, at Derry we practice what is called a hermeneutic of love. Any interpretation of scripture must be loving.

## **Presbyterians do have some common beliefs, right?**

Yes. First, we believe that God loves us. Each of us. This is the starting point of faith. Some of our brothers and sisters in the faith will acknowledge this central fact of Christianity but then speak words that sound like hate. That won't do. God is a God of love. This makes sense of everything else. For instance, creation. God creates this world out of love. It is a good world. It is not a prison or a place to waste away a life waiting for heaven. It is our home—and the home of all God's creatures. We are to have dominion over it the way God has dominion over us. That is, we are to love it too. You can learn more about some common Presbyterian Beliefs below in the Common Presbyterian Beliefs section.

## **What's incarnation?**

Incarnation is the word we use to describe God becoming a human in Jesus. It means “in the flesh.” It's an act of love. Whatever flavor of Christianity, we all agree that in some way Jesus was reconciling the world to God—because “God so loved the world.”

## **You mean by paying the debt of our sin?**

Yes. That's one way scripture talks about it. That's a legal/economic metaphor for what Jesus did. But there are others: overcoming the power of sin and death, paying a ransom, reconciling estranged parties, making sacrifice, restoring the fullness of humanity, and a host of others. Each way of speaking about it points at removing whatever separates us from God. In Jesus, God has taken the initiative to end that separation. That's love. That's how we should always talk about God. In Romans 8, Paul affirms his belief that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

## **Why are we separated from God anyway?**

That's a question you could spend a lifetime answering. Some have looked at the story of the garden of Eden and come to the conclusion that humanity had a “fall.” We became a broken people through our disobedience. This is the interpretation Paul makes in one of his letters. In Christian history, it has been the

most influential answer. Others look at the bible and at their fellow humans and simply note that we live in a broken world without offering a reason why it happens. These are not very satisfactory answers, but we can only acknowledge that the moment humans have had a chance to choose, we've often chosen to hurt each other.

### **Can we talk about Adam & Eve? I'm not sure they're real.**

That's okay. Presbyterians acknowledge that the Bible is conditioned by the times in which it was written. Some stories—gasp!—might be myth. That doesn't mean they don't have great wisdom in them or that they aren't true. Sometimes stories are the best vehicles of truth. Too often we focus on facts instead of the truth. The authors of the Bible didn't intend to write books of historical or scientific facts, but books, letters, poetry, and stories about the truth of God. You do not have to believe that the Bible is without scientific or historical error in order to be a Christian. The Bible, rather, is a revelation of God's character.

It means that by reading scripture, particularly about Jesus, we can more fully know what God is like. If we look at Jesus, we discover that God cares about healing; we discover that God cares about the outcast; we discover that God cares about how we treat each other; we discover that God cares about us.

### **Isn't it easier to just believe everything exactly as written?**

Yes... but if you could still do that you probably wouldn't be reading this right now. Scripture still holds great vitality for those who have trouble believing it all. It reminds me of a story about a great theologian last century named Karl Barth. Barth was traveling in the U.S. and was giving a lecture on the very text you asked about, Adam and Eve, when a student raised his hand and asked, "Dr. Barth, you're an intelligent man. You couldn't possibly believe that a serpent could talk to Eve, could you?" Dr. Barth replied, "I'm not interested in whether the serpent could talk. I'm interested in what it had to say."

### **So what did the serpent have to say?**

Come to church, and we can read it together.

### **Let me ask you something I've heard about Presbyterians: do you believe in predestination?**

Yes. Predestination is the belief that God has given us salvation even before we are born. There is nothing we can do to gain it or to lose it. Like our birth, it is simply a gift. God elects, chooses, to be with and for each of us. God chooses us for salvation in Christ. We were made to be in relationship with God.... Predestined. Don't confuse predestination with predeterminism: the belief that everything we do in life has been pre-ordained.

### **Churches are so political these days. Are you like that?**

No and yes. We are a big tent church where Democrats and Republicans, Independents and apoliticals sit next to each other on the pew. We do not espouse a particular political platform. We do not tell you who to vote for. We do, however, believe that God is sovereign over every part of our life and that the demands of the gospel often cross over into areas where politics are as well. Since we care for the poor, for instance, we might advocate for a kinder treatment for them from some of our governmental programs. If that is political, then yes, we are a political church. If that is simply Christian, then no.

### **One last theological question: why do you baptize infants?**

We baptize our children because we believe God chooses them before they can ever make a choice for God. When they come to an age where they can make conscious choices about faith, we ask those children to confirm their baptism by making the same vows their parents made for them when they were young. We do, however, allow for parents and youth to make a conscious choice to wait for baptism until a person can make the decision for him or herself.

### **I'd like to learn more. What time should I show up on Sunday morning?**

We'd love to see you at 8 am in the Chapel, 9:00/9:15am for Sunday School or 10:30am in the Sanctuary. If you have any further questions about what we believe or why we believe it, we would be happy to talk with you more!



## Common Presbyterian Beliefs

Since the word “Presbyterian” come from the Greek word, “presbyteros,” which means “elder,” being a Presbyterian has as much to do with the way we govern ourselves as it does with what we believe. Presbyterians come in all sizes, shapes, and colors; but every Presbyterian church is governed and overseen by an elected body of elders, which we call the “Session.” Our Session, or ruling elders, represent the community, work with the pastors, and make decisions that affect the church as a whole.

Presbyterians, then, are governed by elected leaders, and since we believe that God alone is Lord of the conscience, there is considerable diversity within the PCUSA. Indeed, we see healthy debate as a sign of strength and we are aware that our God is often “doing a new thing,” as the prophet Isaiah said long ago. However, we do not take our historical roots lightly, and we are united – as Presbyterians – around a unifying core of beliefs, including:

- Our trust in the one triune God, whom alone we worship and serve
- Our belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died for our sins in accordance with prophecy, and that He was raised from the dead, thereby breaking the power of sin and delivering us to life eternal
- Our commitment to God’s call in our lives (our vocations), our individual gifts in Christ, and the fact that we are saved to serve
- Our reliance on the Holy Spirit for direction, grace, and for the courage to pray without ceasing, witness to Christ as Lord and Saviour, unmask idolatries wherever they exist, and to serve Christ in all that we do
- Our conviction that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God
- Our insistence that every member is a “minister,” and that our pastors are uniquely called to equip the laity for ministry
- Our assurance in God’s Sovereignty and our need to honor God’s ownership in our stewardship and giving patterns
- Our belief that there are two sacraments, specifically set aside by Christ Himself, those being the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of Communion (the Lord’s Supper)

These beliefs and others captured in our Creeds and Confessions give us a sense of identity as Christians and as Presbyterians, and they are central to our ministry at Derry Presbyterian Church. We have 11 statements of faith in our *Book of Confessions* that reflect what we believe and how God has been at work in the church in particular times and places.

Our most recent confession, *A Brief Statement of Faith*, gives a good summary of what Presbyterians believe. Read it online at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/brief-statement-of-faith>.

All that we do is Christ-centered and Biblically-based, and we are determined to welcome and include all people whom God sends our way.