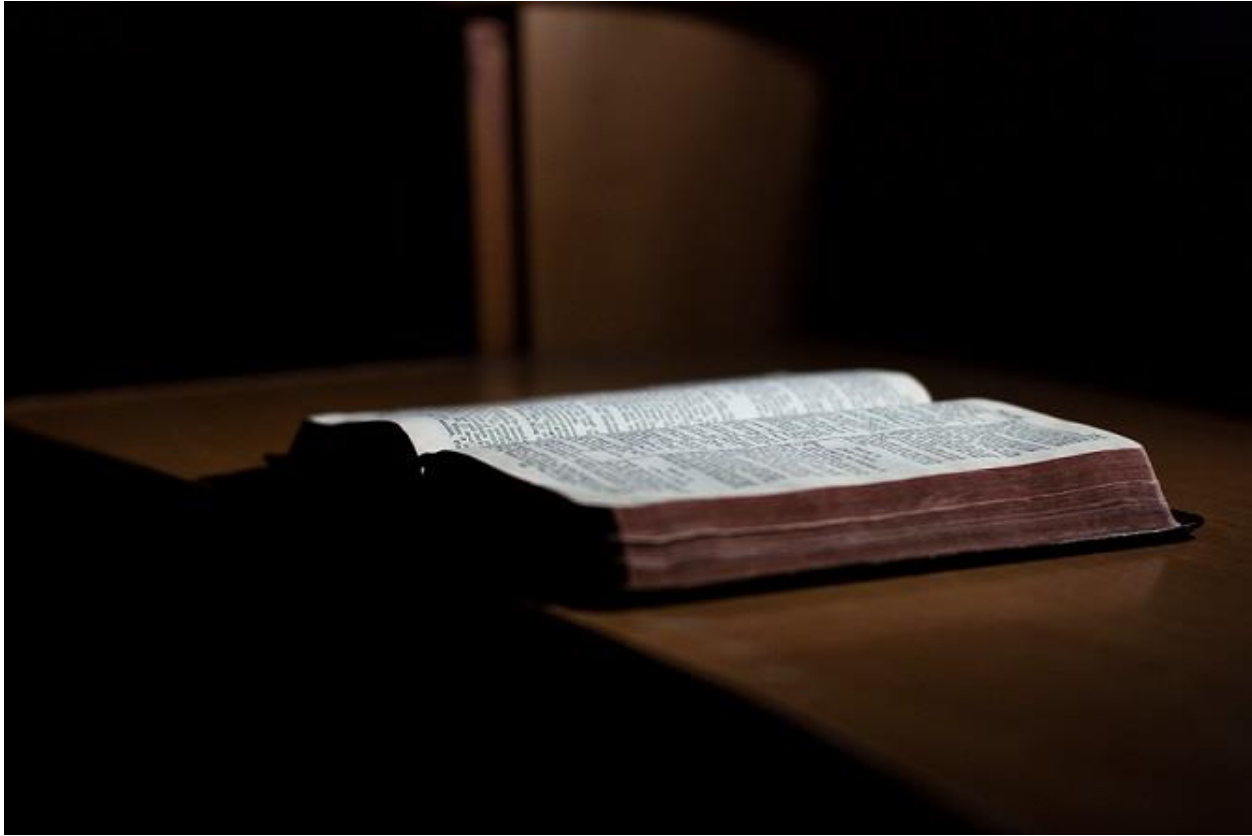


What We Believe

Refuge Essentials



Objectives:

1. Understand our cultural perspectives on truth
2. Identify the source of Christian truth
3. Know the basic beliefs that Refuge holds

What is Truth?

When Jesus stood before the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, he claimed to bear witness to the truth. Pilate's simple question in response reveals a question that all people must wrestle with: "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

There is no lack of truth claims in our society. All you have to do is jump onto Facebook and you will be bombarded with political truth claims, cultural truth claims, economic truth claims, and religious truth claims. Sifting through the myriad of opinions and facts can be daunting in our media-laden, information-saturated culture. How do we, as Christians, sift through all of the facts, opinions, and figures to arrive at what we believe? Perhaps the more relevant question in our society is: how can we as Christians claim that we know the truth?

Claims of Truth in Society

We live in a radically postmodern society where the prevailing motto is "true for you but not for me." Postmodern thought flatly rejects any belief system that defines truth outside of our own desires, wants, beliefs, and experiences. In essence, it sets you and me in the role of God: we choose what is right and what is wrong based on whatever we decide is true.

You can imagine the postmodern worldview as a huge supermarket of beliefs in which you walk down the aisles and grab whatever portions of various belief systems you want. Postmodern belief would say something like, "If you want to keep Jesus' love-your-neighbor beliefs, go for it. Want to leave behind the Christian sexual ethic? Feel free. Why not pick up some karma while you are at it? That way, when you help at the homeless shelter, you know your 'good deeds' will outweigh your 'bad deeds' in the cosmic scales of justice."

In contrast, Christianity defines truth outside of us. Instead of telling us that WE can define what is a true or false, our faith compels us to turn to a source outside of our finite, limited selves to understand truth. What, or better yet who, is this source of truth?

God as the Source of Truth

As Christians, we affirm that our personal, loving, triune God is the source of all truth. Instead of seeing ourselves as the final verdict in whether things are true or not – in essence acting as God in declaring what is good and bad – we allow him to define truth. God's definition of cosmic truth encompasses who

we are, what we were made for, how we are called to live, why the world works as it does, what the problems with the world are, and, ultimately, what the solution is to the problems that we see. God can rightly help us see what is true because, in his wisdom and love, he created all things for a good purpose and role (Gen 1).

When things are created, they are made with an intent and purpose. Consider a hammer. The designer and maker of the hammer has a specific intent and purpose for creating a hammer: to pound in nails or yank nails out of some material. If you started using a hammer to screw in screws, it does not change the design and intent for the hammer. It will likely take you a long time and cause a lot of frustration because a hammer is not designed to work with screws.

Likewise, in the creation account, God affirmed that all of his creation was “very good” because it was functioning as it was created and intended to function (Gen 1:31). Since God is the maker and creator, we must turn to his revelation to understand how he created the world to work and operate, and how we are called to live in it.

God’s Revelation

Our God desires for us to know him and communicates with us in multiple ways. To help us understand how God communicates, we often refer to two modes of God’s communication: general revelation and special revelation.

General revelation is how God communicates his attributes to us implicitly through the world around us. When we see the order, intricacy and wonder of creation, we see God communicate his existence as the powerful and glorious creator.

Special revelation, on the other hand, is how God has communicated to us explicitly through miraculous means such as physical appearances of God, dreams, visions, the written Word of God, and the Word of God in flesh: Jesus Christ.

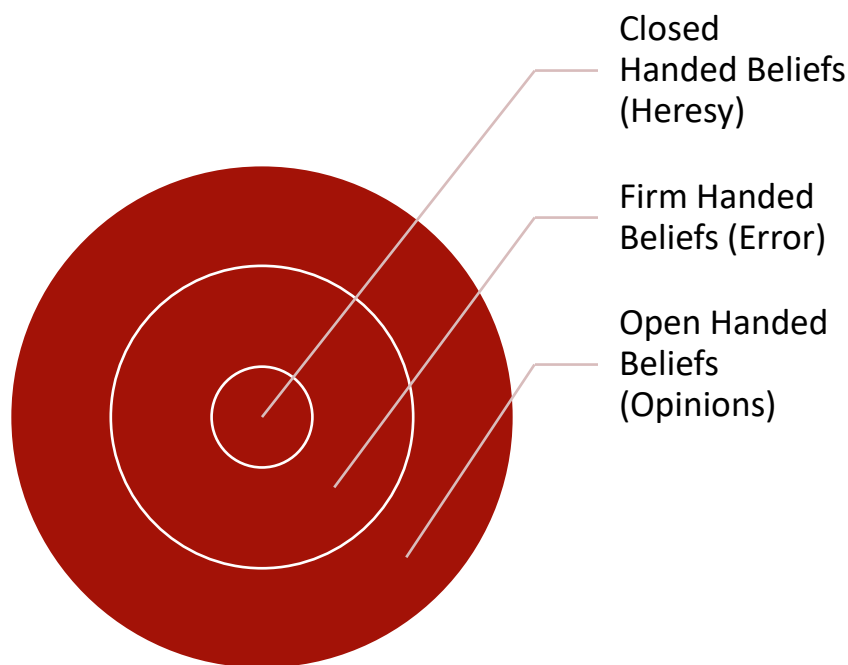
At Refuge, we affirm that the Bible is our guide and source of truth in understanding God’s revealed nature: his love, mercy, grace, justice, wrath, compassion, and saving work. It is through the Bible, and God’s people being sent forth on mission to communicate God’s revelation, that we come face to face with God’s gospel and hear the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection on our behalf.

How We Hold Our Beliefs

As Christians, God calls us to love and care for those around us with the same love and care that he has shown us. As saved and redeemed sinners, we understand that our position before God as his beloved sons and daughters is due to his merciful and gracious work in Christ. As such, we are called to hold our beliefs with confidence, knowing who has given us these truths, but with humility since we are finite and can be wrong.

When we talk of our beliefs, we generally speak of four sets of beliefs:

- Closed Handed Beliefs – Core doctrines that have historically been affirmed by the church as truths that must be affirmed to be considered a Christian. These beliefs must be affirmed for membership at Refuge.
- Firm Handed Beliefs – Important doctrines that undergird much of what we believe. These beliefs must be affirmed for certain leadership and teaching positions at Refuge.
- Open Handed Beliefs – These range from opinions to issues that Christian brothers and sisters have genuinely, but lovingly disagreed on (and may not have consensus among the elders).



Refuge's Statements of Truth

At Refuge, we believe that the Bible is how God shares his truth with us. To this end, we encourage the entire congregation to be actively engaged in the

personal discipline of study. In studying God's Word, we actively begin to understand what God has done and what he is doing in our lives.

The elders also desire to help our congregation understand God's truth through simple summaries of our faith and the truths that we hold.

Appendix A holds the historic Apostle's Creed that Refuge holds as a succinct summary of our faith, as the Church throughout her history has affirmed. The Apostle's Creed was originally recited by those being baptized as an affirmation of what they now believed to be true. As such, Refuge believes that all members should likewise, alongside all the saints that have gone before us, affirm the Apostle's Creed.

The Nicene Creed, a version of which is found in appendix B, is regarded as "the symbol of the faith" within Christian churches. This statement of faith has been affirmed by all orthodox Christian churches since its inception in 325 A.D. and revision in 381 A.D. We affirm, along with the Church throughout the world, that it is a valid and helpful summary the truth that God has revealed.

Lastly, Appendix C holds Refuge's Statement of Fundamental Beliefs that encompass the core of what we believe as a local church. These beliefs are tied directly to God's Word and encompass what we must believe to be followers of Christ.

Refuge and God's Truth

As a local church sitting in the wide river of historical Christianity, Refuge seeks to preach, teach, meditate on, and trust in God's revealed truth as found in the Bible and passed down by successive generations. Yet our confidence in God's revelation should never lead us to arrogance and pride. Instead, the elders seek to create a culture of humility and learning at Refuge where we can contemplate and seek deep, rich theology but hold it graciously when interacting with those who do not believe like we do.

Refuge also affirms that we are all a work-in-progress. God is continuously reshaping, reforming, and resetting our understanding of him and the world around us. To that end, we desire to be warm, sincere, and loving towards those whose convictions differ from our own. Our understanding of God's truth should never be used as a weapon against others. Instead we seek to share God's gospel with all people and invite them into God's family through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Appendix A – The Apostle’s Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

Appendix B – The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Appendix C – Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

This statement represents the biblical and historic Christian faith. These beliefs are the glory and joy of Christ's Church. They form the foundation for the life and hope we have. Any person not in submission to biblical Christianity has departed from the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints and is not yet a part of the family of God.

We believe biblical Christianity includes the following affirmations:

- The Scriptures are inspired by God and are therefore authoritative in all matters pertaining to right living and right belief. They are necessary and sufficient for the believer to know God, understand the gospel, and live a life of obedient faith. (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Ptr 1:20-21)
- There is only one true God - Holy and Righteous, Creator of heaven and earth - who eternally exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is to be equally loved, feared, and worshiped. (Matt 28:19; Deut 6:4; Is 45:5-6; 46:9-10; Jn 17:3; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 1 Tim 2:5; Gen1:26; Ps 45:6-7; 110:1; Matt 3:13-17; Matt 28:17-20; 1 Cor 12:4-6)
- All things exist for the glory of God. (Ps 148; Prov 16:4; Is 61:3; Rom 11:33-36; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 5:15; Eph 1:3-14)
- With the exception of Christ, all humanity is sinful by both birth and action because of Adam's sin. (Gen 6:5; Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:23; 5:8, 12-21; 7:18; Eph 2:1-3)
- The deserved penalty for sin is physical and spiritual death. (Gen 2:15-17; 3:19; Rom 5:12; 6:23; Jas 1:14-15)
- Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin and is both fully God and fully human. This makes him the sole Mediator between God and people, the only one able to restore the broken relationship and resulting alienation sin brought. (Matt 1:20; Lk 2:52; Jn 1:1-4, 14; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-3).

- Jesus Christ died as the sacrificial substitute to pay the penalty for sin. (Jn 1:29; 10:1-18; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:14; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Ptr 3:18)
- Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and will one day physically return. (Matt 28:1-20; Mrk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-53; Jn 20:1-21:25; 1 Cor 15:12-34; Jn 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 9:28; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 1:7)
- There will be a future physical resurrection of the dead. Only those who turn from sin and to Jesus in faith and repentance will be raised to eternal reward. Those who do not turn from sin and to Jesus will be raised to eternal punishment. (Matt 25:31-46; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)
- Only through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and repentance from sin can one be reconciled to God and experience the joy of being in relationship with Him. (Jn 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:21-26; 1 Tim 2:5-6)
- Genuine spiritual life is evidenced by the presence of the fruits of the Spirit, a posture of life-long repentance, and a zeal for godliness. (Lk 3:8-9; Jn 3:6; Gal 5:22-23; Rom 8:9; Acts 26:20)