



## THEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

*As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:16–18)*

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)*

**T**he call of Jesus for us today is the same as for those who first heard him: “Follow me.” Churches of Christ are a fellowship of Christian congregations devoted to intentional discipleship and to helping others follow Jesus.

**Churches of Christ worship the one, sovereign God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity).** The one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exists eternally in perfect community, and through Jesus and by the Spirit’s work humans are invited to share in the divine life and mission. By starting with the Trinity, Christians emphasize the priority of God’s action in our coming to know God, in our coming to salvation, and in our participating

in God's purposes in the world. God cooperates with humans, and humans have some measure of free will to allow for authentic participation in the divine life and mission, but discipleship begins and ends with God.

**Churches of Christ are committed to the story of God's work of creation and redemption as found in Scripture and affirmed in the rules of faith and ecumenical creeds of the early church.** The Triune God created all things out of God's desire to share the divine life and purpose with human beings, each of whom bear the image of God. Yet, instead of embracing fellowship with God and participating in God's mission, humans created rival stories with evil and self-centered agendas. Because of human sin against God, now individual lives, communities, and all of creation exist in a state of brokenness and alienation. Yet God did not abandon his good creation but instead began to redeem it, first through Israel and ultimately through his Son, Jesus.

In Jesus, the eternal Son of God became fully human and truly embodied God's intent for creation. Anointed and empowered by the Spirit, Jesus proclaimed the inbreaking reign of God in his teaching and actions. Humans, as agents of the evil powers in the world, rejected and crucified Jesus, but God accepted Jesus's obedient death as a sacrifice to redeem humanity from sin and evil. God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him to the Father's right hand, where Jesus lives and reigns today.

Through Jesus, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, the community of disciples. Anointed and empowered by the Spirit, the church participates in the ongoing ministry of Jesus in the world. Further, the church longs for the return of Christ, when God will raise the dead and judge evil, and God's people will enjoy eternal fellowship with him in a redeemed creation. It is this story, and this future hope, that has inspired Christian discipleship from the beginning of the church on Pentecost to the present day.

**Churches of Christ are committed to hearing and following God's voice through Scripture, the Spirit-breathed Word of God.** Through the reading and proclamation of Scripture and by the working of God's Spirit, humans encounter God, are transformed into God's image, and discern and participate in God's purposes in creation. Further, Christians are in a better position to encounter God through Scripture when they engage in practices like worship and spiritual disciplines, participation in God's mission, and communal discernment in a Spirit-filled church.

**Churches of Christ are committed to the unity, holiness, universality, and apostolicity of the church, the community of fellow-disciples.** The church includes all Christians who have confessed faith in Christ, been baptized, and pursue a life of discipleship. Further, the church community is essential for growth in discipleship through worship, spiritual formation, and participation in God's mission.

*The church is one.* Churches of Christ affirm the autonomy of the local congregation under Spirit-led leaders. Participation in religious organizations beyond the local church is encouraged but voluntary. The church maintains and experiences unity not through denominational structures but through its union with Christ, through a shared faith, and through shared practices like baptism and the Lord's Supper. Unity is the Spirit's gift, and the Spirit desires for all Christians to grow in a spirit of unity and love.

*The church is holy.* In Christ, the church is God's holy people who are called to be holy in the world. Christians follow Jesus by embodying his life and teachings in their own lives and unique callings. With the Spirit's help, Christians pursue moral principles and virtues grounded in Scripture and the Christian faith. The Christian life is one of ongoing transformation made possible by the Spirit's work, so that Christians grow to love and desire the things that God loves and desires.

*The church is universal.* God's kingdom is the ultimate allegiance of Christians. Citizenship in God's kingdom is open to all through faith and baptism, irrespective of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. God calls all Christians, as God's royal priesthood, to cultivate creation through their vocations and to participate in God's work of redemption.

*The church is apostolic.* Churches of Christ seek to follow the simple teachings and practices of the apostolic testimony found in the New Testament. With the Spirit's help, Churches of Christ also seek to embody the spirit and way of the life of the early church. The church is apostolic to the extent that it proclaims and embodies the apostolic witness to Christ, is led and empowered by God's Spirit, and participates in God's mission.

**Churches of Christ are committed to sacramental practices like baptism and the Lord's Supper, through which God communicates grace and humans pledge themselves to discipleship.** Through faith and by the Spirit's power, the church encounters God and is spiritually transformed through simple, material practices like baptism and the Lord's Supper. In baptism, believers participate in Christ's life, death, and resurrection; receive forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Spirit; and become part of the church, the body of Christ. In the Lord's Supper, the church enjoys table fellowship with God through the risen and present Lord, remembers and gives thanks for what God has done in Christ, and anticipates the feast to come in the new creation. Like the early church, Churches of Christ celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

**Churches of Christ are committed to participation in God's mission.** The Father is at work reconciling all things through Christ and bringing about new creation. Led and empowered by the Spirit, the church participates in Jesus's ongoing work in the world. Just as Jesus emptied himself in the incarnation and

crucifixion, so the church follows Jesus's path of love and humility to proclaim the gospel to all people—especially those at the margins of society. Churches of Christ pursue the missional restoration of the church, which includes proclaiming the gospel and demonstrating God's love to all people, listening ever anew to Scripture, discerning together the Spirit's guidance, and seeking to be faithful to God's purposes today just as the early church was in the past.

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