

# THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF PARK STREET CHURCH

*Dr. Gordon Hugenberg*  
SENIOR MINISTER

## Park Street Church is a Christian Church

Being Christian means that we belong, body and soul, in life and in death, not to ourselves, but to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> More particularly, we accept the Trinitarian faith of the historic Christian Church, as this has come to expression in the great Ecumenical creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

## Park Street Church is a Protestant Church

English speakers sometimes imagine that Protestants were called "Protestants" because they were protesting something. When the term "Protestant" was first used at the Diet of Speyer in 1529, however, it clearly meant "to witness forth" or "to confess." The term comes directly from the Latin, *protestari*, which literally means "to witness [*testari*] forth [*pro*]." The earliest Protestants, were so-called because they sought to recover and "confess" the primitive faith of the early church, based on the authoritative evidence of the New Testament.

Although we welcome into our fellowship many devout Roman Catholic believers and recognize them as dear brothers and sisters in Christ, nevertheless we are Protestants in this historic sense. In other words, we affirm the five crucial "sola" principles of the early Protestant reformers: based on the authority of Scripture alone (in Latin, *sola Scriptura*), we believe in justification by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*).

## Park Street Church is an Evangelical Church

Park Street Church is an *Evangelical* church, which means that we have three additional convictions in particular:

1. We are convinced of the centrality and exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate. Accordingly, we believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and that he rose from the

dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). Furthermore, we believe that these benefits are for anyone who has been spiritually reborn and so has put his or her faith in Christ (John 3:5).

Although some modern Christians take offense at the exclusive character of this gospel, we accept that it is taught by Christ when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12). Moreover, the New Testament supports this claim for the substitutionary work of Christ as the only way of salvation by pointing to the inability of sinful persons to measure up to God's perfect standard of holiness or to offset by any good works the infinite demerit of even one sin against our infinite God (Romans 2:12-16; 3:20-23; James 2:10f.).

In answer to those who are willing to accept Christ as one way to the Father, but not necessarily the only way, the Apostle Paul reminds us that if Christ is one way, he must be the only way (Galatians 2:21). If there were any other way for a person to be saved (whether by good works, sincerity, Hinduism, etc.), God could not be a God of love and still have allowed his only begotten Son to suffer the agony and dereliction of the Cross. Any other way to the Father would have been less costly (Matthew 26:39).

2. We believe that the 66 books of the Bible, as originally written, are the inerrant Word of God.

While a great deal could be added to this statement by way of clarification, here we mention only a couple of matters. First, it is crucial to affirm that the Bible's inerrancy is not limited to matters of faith and practice, although these are the truths by which we live, and so they merit the greatest emphasis (Matthew 4:4). Second, one must differentiate the absolute truthfulness of the Word of God as originally written from our own imperfect ability to interpret that Word as it has come down to us in copies which may, at times, have suffered a degree of corruption.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, while not enjoying the absolute perfection of the original manuscripts, any competent modern translation, such as the ESV, NASB, or NIV, will be found to be substantially free from error and entirely adequate for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly

1) Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Question #1: What is your only comfort, in life and in death? Answer: That I belong -- body and soul, in life and in death -- not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the Devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Question #2: How many things must you know that you may live and die in the happiness of this comfort? Answer: Three. First, the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption.

2) So, for example, although it involves just a minor historical detail, many believers have been disturbed by the apparent contradiction between 1 Samuel 17, which reports how David killed Goliath, and 2 Samuel 21:19, which claims that it was Elhanan who killed Goliath. It is possible that this discrepancy is merely a result of our ignorance. Perhaps "David" is simply the better known throne name for an individual who was originally called "Elhanan." Or, as seems more likely to me, it is possible that the Hebrew text in 2 Samuel 21:19 has suffered a small but important corruption which can be corrected by comparing 1 Chronicles 20:5. In that passage we discover that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath, not Goliath himself. In other words, at some early point in the many centuries during which this text had to be copied by hand, a slight corruption took place. It is easy to imagine how this may have happened since in Hebrew this represents a change from ja, "the brother of," which is found in 1 Chronicles 20:5, to ta, an untranslated particle which marks a direct object, which is found in 2 Samuel 21:19.

# THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF PARK STREET CHURCH

Page 2

equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

3. We identify with a modern movement of Protestants, represented by individuals such as our former pastor, Harold J. Ockenga, Carl F.H. Henry, Edward J. Carnell, and Billy Graham. This movement resembles Fundamentalism in sharing the two convictions mentioned above, but it may be distinguished from Fundamentalism by four additional characteristics:

- a. a concern to do greater justice to the social implications of the Gospel without compromising the priority of the message of eternal salvation (Micah 6:8; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 John 3:17);
- b. a concern to avoid moralistic legalism (extra-biblical lists of do’s and don’ts), while promoting true holiness and Christ-like wholeness of character in the life of the believer (Galatians 2:4; 5:1-26; Colossians 2:16-23);
- c. a concern to avoid anti-intellectualism or hostility to modern science (Matthew 22:37; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Peter 3:15); and finally
- d. a concern to “major on majors” and so not isolate ourselves from fellow Christians with whom we may not entirely agree. Indeed, if we love Christ, we have no option but to love fellow believers as brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:19). This commitment reflects the Savior’s own prayer for us that, far from achieving unity at the expense of the truth, our unity would be its most compelling evidence (John 17:20ff., cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:23).

In practice, this last commitment to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) means that we refuse to divide over such important, but nevertheless secondary issues as church polity, baptism, style of worship or music, eschatology, the gifts of the Spirit, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, the ordination of women, etc.<sup>3</sup>

## **Other doctrinal commitments (held with conviction, but also with charity towards those who differ):**

### **1. We are Reformed**

Park Street Church is also historically and predominantly Reformed in our theology. This is noticeable in our statement of faith and it reflects the views especially among our preaching pastors with respect to:

- a. the doctrines of grace
- b. our understanding of the Christian life (including the

relationship between the law and gospel and between the Old Testament and the New Testament), and

- c. our convictions concerning the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

- a. Specifically, with respect to what are called “the doctrines of grace,” we believe that grace is indispensable because of man’s radically sinful nature, that God is sovereign in every aspect of the salvation of his elect, and that those who are genuinely saved will also be kept by the power of God. In other words, we heartily accept all five points of Calvinism, although we have found in our ministry that the traditional vocabulary of “TULIP” tends to be misleading: Total depravity; Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. We prefer the acronym of “GOSPEL”: Grace is Obligatory, Sovereign, Provision-making, Efficacious, and Lasting!
- b. Furthermore, we believe that while our good works are not meritorious for salvation, they are a mandatory response to the grace of God (Romans 6:1ff.; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 5:15). The law is our “schoolmaster to Christ,” but it remains no less a holy guide for the life of obedience and faith for those who belong to Christ (2 Timothy 3:16f.). Indeed, Jesus could not have been more insistent that he did not come to abolish “the Law or the Prophets,” nor more severe in warning against “anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same” (Matthew 5:19). So, for example, the miracle of the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah is not that God would one day lower his holy standards for our lives, so that we will seem to do better, but that at last his Spirit would write his law upon our hearts, rather than upon tablets of stone, so that we will love and obey him (Jeremiah 31:33; cf. Deuteronomy 30:6-8; Ezekiel 36:26f.). Accordingly, Paul does not hesitate to quote from the ten commandments or to cite other moral precepts from the Old Testament law, with the clear implication that these are still obligatory (Ephesians 6:2f.; Galatians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 9:9; 10:6, 11; etc.).

One of the most visible evidences that our preaching ministers share this perspective of historic Reformed theology is seen in their understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In keeping with Reformed theology, we view the Abrahamic covenant as the over-arching covenant of redemptive history. Accordingly, New Testament believers in Christ, including those who are biologically Gentiles, are in reality the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9; Romans 2:28-29). We are no longer foreigners or aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and true Israelites (Ephesians 2:11,19; 3:6; Galatians 6:16), who are the rightful heirs of all of the promises of God, which have their yes and amen in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). As a result, our preachers often preach

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the Bible’s view of women in church leadership, see G.P. Hugenberger, “Women in Leadership” (2008), available at <[www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all](http://www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all)>. See also G.P. Hugenberger, “Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Tim 2:8-15,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35:3 (1992) 341-360.

# THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF PARK STREET CHURCH

Page 3

from the Old Testament, and not just the New, because “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17; see John 17:17). They understand that the progression of biblical revelation is a progression not from error to truth, nor sub-Christian to Christian, but from promise to fulfillment, shadow to reality, and from truth to greater truth (Luke 24:27; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

- c. With respect to baptism, we do not consider its particular mode, whether pouring, sprinkling, or immersion, to be important. All three modes are rich in their symbolic significance and, based on the evidence of the practice of the early church (see the *Didache*, for example), equally valid. Nevertheless, for convenience our normal practice is to use the mode of pouring, although on occasion, when it is strongly preferred by the recipient, we use immersion.

As for the proper subjects of baptism, we are persuaded that new converts ought to be baptized at the earliest possible moment following a credible confession of faith. Consistent with the practice of historic congregationalism, our preferred view is that the children of believers likewise ought to be baptized, but if parents prefer their children to be dedicated instead of being baptized, we happily accommodate this preference. Our own preference to baptize the children of believers reflects our conviction that the practice of paedobaptism is most consistent with the witness of Scripture (five out of the nine explicit accounts of baptism in the New Testament describe a parent and his or her “household” being baptized at the same time) and the nature of God’s covenant administration. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, we see no reason for believers to divide over this issue. Happily, Evangelical paedobaptists and baptists are in 100% agreement in their earnest desire for Christ’s lordship over their households. As such, these persons can easily affirm each other and function within the same church body.

## 2. We are a congregational church

With respect to ecclesiology, we are a congregational church. As such we believe that Christ has vested the authority of his Church not in a hierarchy of professionals or bishops, who may live at some remove, or even in one or two local clergy, but in the members of the local congregation itself, especially as they are represented in a local body of elders whom they appoint.

For this reason, most of the exhortations of the New Testament regarding the life of the church are directed to the entire membership. In Matthew 18:17, for example, it is to the church as a whole that Christ entrusts the ultimate responsibility for church discipline, rather than to any subgroup.

Against the tendency of many modern churches to be pastor-centered, as congregationalists we are also convinced that the New Testament requires

a plurality of leaders within the local church to shepherd the flock, that is, to serve, to teach, to direct, and to be examples of godly living for the benefit of the church (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1ff; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5ff.; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 1:5ff.). In practice, at Park Street Church this commitment to shared leadership means that, while the final human authority for decisions rests with the congregation as whole (which makes decisions at an Annual Meeting or in Special meetings called for the purpose), the Board of Elders, as representatives of the congregation, is empowered when acting in concert to provide all major oversight and leadership, as may be needed, for the operation and life of the church.

Finally, as congregationalists we disagree with those who interpret Acts 15 to imply that elders in a local church can have standing authority over the members of a different congregation. Nevertheless, following the example of Acts 15 and the wise counsel of historic Reformed Congregationalism (as set forth in “The Cambridge Platform of 1648”), we believe that local congregations are not independent, but are responsible out of love to maintain fraternal relationships with each other, to be submissive to each other, and to seek each other’s counsel over important matters (in vicinage councils or synods) for the strengthening of the Church of Christ.

## 3. Our view regarding some of the emphases of the Charismatic movement

Although we would not be considered entirely “Charismatic” in our views regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are very appreciative of some emphases of the modern Charismatic movement. In particular, we welcome their stress on exuberant worship, although we are concerned that worship not degenerate into mere emotionalism. We also share their conviction that it is not enough to have merely one or two “ministers” in a church, but that God intends every one of the members of Christ’s body to be a “minister” in the sense that every Christian is spiritually gifted and responsible for ministry. Finally, we accept that God, in his sovereign omnipotence, at times suspends the “normal” course of his providential rule of nature. We believe, for example, that at times God does directly heal the sick apart from his more customary use of medical or other “natural” intermediate causes. We do not agree, however, with the claim of some in the Charismatic movement that God has in any way obligated Himself to heal in this fashion in each case. Nor do we agree that God’s direct healing is in any way superior to the less direct healing accomplished by God that comes through the use of doctors, medicine, or the body’s normal mechanisms for self-repair. Nor do we agree that the faith required to ask for such a healing need be anything more than the simple believer’s conviction that God is able to heal (cf. Matthew 9:28f.).

We are wary, however, of certain aspects of the theology of the modern Charismatic movement with its implied two-stage view of the Christian life and its excessive preoccupation with present-day supernaturalism. We also disagree somewhat with the Charismatic understanding of certain gifts (particularly tongues and prophecy), and reject the frequent

# THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF PARK STREET CHURCH

Page 4

implication that tongues are a necessary or expected initial evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we feel that there is some appropriate distinction between the genuine, but still modest supernaturalism of our post-Apostolic age and the striking supernaturalism of the period surrounding the earthly ministry of our Lord (cf. Hebrews 2:4; 2 Corinthians 12:12), as well as the anticipated supernaturalism that will accompany his glorious return.

## 4. Our practice regarding women in leadership<sup>4</sup>

Within some Evangelical churches today, the issue of women in church leadership has seemingly become a litmus test for one's fidelity to Scripture. As important as it is and worthy of debate, we believe it is a secondary issue that should not divide believers. When it comes to issues of women in ministry, there is far more that unites us than divides us. Both complementarians and egalitarians acknowledge the inherent value of women as created by God and as those who share equally with men the supreme status of bearing God's image and likeness. Both complementarians and egalitarians likewise acknowledge that women who put their faith in Christ are joint heirs with Him, just as men are. Both complementarians and egalitarians believe that the Holy Spirit has been given equally to women as to men and has equipped both for the ministry of building up the body of Christ through the exercise of their spiritual gifts. Both complementarians and egalitarians acknowledge the value of the godly counsel of women as recorded in Scripture such as Abigail's public admonishment of David, Esther's plea to King Xerxes, Priscilla's instruction to Apollos, and Lois and Eunice's discipleship of Timothy. Interestingly, both complementarians and egalitarians accept the fact that women are allowed to teach with divinely inspired authority, as when God uses them to author portions of Scripture, such as Deborah's first person account in Judges 5, Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2, and the Song of Mary in Luke 1, or when they are empowered to serve as prophets, as in the case of Miriam in Exodus 15:20, Deborah in Judges 4-5, Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14, Anna in Luke 2:36, the daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9, or the female prophets mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:5. The only matter at issue is whether women are permitted to exercise the lesser degree of authority required for teaching or leading as an Elder or pastor in a local church.

We value the viewpoint of brothers and sisters who, upon examination of passages such as 1 Timothy 2:8-15, believe that women, regardless of their spiritual gifts, are disallowed from serving in offices of teaching or leading in a local church. This is an issue over which well informed Evangelical Christians disagree. Not surprisingly, we have a number of church leaders and many members who hold this view. For this reason our church Bylaws neither authorize, nor prohibit women from serving in these roles.

Nevertheless, based on the fact that women have been hired to serve as Ministers in this church and voted by the congregation to serve as Elders, it appears that a sizeable majority in this church believe that women are, in fact, allowed to serve in pastoral, teaching, and Elder roles, and that they have been called and equipped by the Spirit of God to do so. Those who disagree with this viewpoint recognize that, while they are unable to vote in support of these women, and while they remain convinced that Bible does not authorize women to serve in these capacities, the Bible nowhere prohibits men from learning from women or anyone else, so long as whatever those women teach or whatever leadership they offer is entirely in accord with Scripture.

Finally, it should be stressed that those who support the right of women to serve in church leadership do so because they are convinced that the Scriptures actually do allow this, and their view is not one based on mere cultural relativity, poor exegesis, or wishful thinking. For one responsible approach to these questions and the relevant Biblical texts, see G.P. Hugenberg, "Women in Leadership" (2008), available at <[www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all](http://www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all)>.

## 5. Marriage<sup>5</sup>

We hold that a scriptural understanding of marriage only affirms a covenanted relationship between a man and a woman.<sup>6</sup> Because sexual intimacy is the initiatory and renewing oath-sign of the marriage covenant, as established by God in creation, and because it constitutes a vowed commitment to love each other as one flesh, any sexual act committed outside the context of marriage is sinful, whether it is consensual or not. Homosexual acts constitute just one category of sexual sin, a category which is invariably listed in Scripture alongside many other categories of sexual sin and a wide variety of other sinful behaviors and dispositions, such as ingratitude, covetousness, slander, gossip, anger, greed, slothfulness, idolatry, etc.<sup>7</sup> These lists leave no room for finger pointing, judgmentalism, or spiritual pride. They place every one of us in equal desperate need of the grace and mercy of God, the forgiveness of sin achieved by Christ's death and resurrection, and the indispensable help of the Holy Spirit to receive that forgiveness and to walk in newness of life.<sup>8</sup> With this conviction in mind, our worship services and the ministries of this church are open to one and all who long to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and to receive the unqualified welcome and support of brothers and sisters in Christ who are eager to learn from each other how to follow Him more closely.

G. Hugenberg  
2016

4) Written with the help of Kris Perkins

5) Written with the help of Kris Perkins. For more on the topic of homosexuality, see G.P. Hugenberg, "Homosexuality" (2004) available at <[www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all](http://www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/all)>.

6) Genesis 2:23-24

7) 1 Corinthians 6:9, Romans 1:18-32

8) Romans 3:10-18, 23