

HPBC Pastoral Statement on Christian Liberty

updated Fall of 2016

In the last hours before His crucifixion, our Lord prayed that His followers, “may be one even as we are one . . . so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (Jn. 17:22b-23). Years later, Paul echoed our Lord’s words when he prayed that the members of the Roman church would “live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together” they might “with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6). These words tell us that the mission of our church is inseparably tied to our unity.

In recognition, then, of the vital importance of unity for the fulfillment our mission and in recognition also of the painful fact that church unity is often disrupted by believers who insist that fellow church members adopt practices and positions not addressed in or specifically prohibited in the Word of God, we at Hampton Park Baptist Church agree to joyfully submit to the following principles from Scripture concerning Christian liberty.

1. We must, without contention, receive into our fellowship believers whose conscience standards differ from ours in areas in which the Word of God does not directly address or expressly prohibit.

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. – Rom. 14:1-2

2. Those who conscientiously exercise freedom in matters not expressly prohibited in Scripture (strong conscience) must not look down on (despise) those who conscientiously abstain from such (weak conscience).

Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains – Rom. 14:3a (Cf. 1 Cor. 8:10-12).

3. Those who have more restrictive standards in matters not addressed in Scripture must not be judgmental toward those who do not have restrictive standards in such matters.

...and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. – Rom. 14:3b-4 (Cf. Col. 2:16).

4. Each believer must be fully convinced of his own position in his own conscience.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. – Rom. 14:5 (Cf. Rom. 14:23; 1 Jn. 3:21)

5. We must assume that other believers are partaking or abstaining for the glory of God. So, receive (embrace) one another as those who are living to honor God by what they do and do not do.

The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. – Rom. 14:6

6. We must not judge or belittle each other in these matters because we will all someday stand

before the judgment seat of God and give account for our actions.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. – Rom. 14:10-12

7. Even when a believer has Scriptural justification for freedom in certain matters, he must not allow his freedom to be a means of destroying the faith of a weak brother, be used as an opportunity for the flesh, or become an obstacle to the furtherance of the gospel.

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. . . . For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. . . . If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. – Rom. 5:13; Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 9:12

8. Convictions about such things as eating and drinking are not essential to our ministry in the kingdom of God; building each other up in righteousness, peace, and spiritual joy is essential.

So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. – Rom. 14:16-21

9. A believer who is fully convinced his Christian liberty convictions are scriptural should simply enjoy his faith in fellowship with God. He has no compelling reason to persuade others to adopt his convictions.

The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. – Rom. 14:22a

10. A person who lives according to his conscience is blessed. Therefore, do not violate your own conscience in what you allow for yourself.

Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. – Rom. 14:22b-23

11. The spiritually strong in matters of Christian liberty are those who follow the example of Christ, who put others first.

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." . . . May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. – Rom. 15:1-3,5-6

12. We bring glory to God when we receive one another in believer's fellowship as Christ received us into His family.

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. – Rom. 15:7

The above principles can be summarized in the following two commitments. On the basis of our love for God and others:

1. We will receive into our fellowship those with differing standards in areas that God's Word does not address or expressly prohibit, believing that they are endeavoring to glorify God with their actions.
2. When concerned, we will pursue humble, loving dialogue with one another about areas of conscience while not forcing our own conscience on someone else in areas that God's Word does not address or expressly prohibit.