

Refuge Distinctives, Summer 2025

“So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”
– 2 Thessalonians 2:15

In addition to our confession of the ecumenical, historical creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian) and the EFCA Statement of Faith, Refuge Church possesses the following convictions regarding issues of doctrine and practice not directly addressed in those statements but still firmly grounded in biblical truth and important to our life as a body in these times (1 Tim 3:15). We also find much to commend to believers in the 1689 London Baptist Confession. The following distinctives are listed in no order of importance:

Life Together

Because the Church is a people and family, not an event, as members we desire to weave our lives together in fellowship, hospitality, and our shared vision to make loving disciples of Jesus throughout the week in SW Houston (Acts 2:42–47; Heb 10:24–25). Refuge does nonetheless follow the pattern of Christians throughout the ages in observing Sunday as the “Lord’s Day,” when the whole fellowship gathers to celebrate our life in Christ (Acts 20:7; Rev 1:10). Preaching, praise, prayer, fellowship, and the observance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the essential elements of this gathering (1 Tim 4:13; Col 3:16; Acts 2:42).

A Multi-Ethnic Family

Fellowship with the triune God is not a personal matter only, but by God’s design culminates in the creation of the family of God, who will together worship and enjoy Him forever (Eph 2:18–22; Rev 7:9–10). We believe the Gospel of our salvation breaks down the dividing walls between groups of people who may otherwise be in enmity with one another, whether they are based on ethnicity, class, or any other convention of human society (Eph 2:14–16; Gal 3:28). For this reason, Refuge pursues the lost from among all peoples far from God and passionately works for unity in the Gospel among all God calls together into His Church (Matt 28:19–20; John 17:20–23).

Creation and Humanity

As Creator, God manifests His authority over our world and displays divine beauty by creating everything good (Gen 1:1, 31; Ps 19:1). His Word has revealed His will for how we are to live and flourish as men and women who individually and collectively reflect His glorious image (Gen 1:26–28; Mic 6:8).

Men and women, though distinct, mutually share in a complete equality and dignity under God, enjoying full access to His grace through Jesus Christ (Gen 1:27; Gal 3:26–28). God has ordered the church such that men and women are together the recipients of spiritual gifts designed to empower them for ministry in the local church and the world (1 Cor 12:4–7; Rom 12:4–8). Therefore, men and women are to be

biblically equipped by leaders to utilize their gifting in ministry in service to the body of Christ (Eph 4:11–13; 1 Pet 4:10–11).

Refuge Church embraces the Biblical paradigm of male headship (1 Tim 2:12–14; 1 Cor 11:3). It reserves the office of elder or pastor to qualified men who will teach and exercise authority in the church (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). God has also appointed that in marriage, husbands exercise loving, sacrificial headship in service to their wives, whom God calls to respond in submission to their own husbands (Eph 5:22–25; Col 3:18–19). Operating in this way, husband and wife model and proclaim the relationship of Christ to His bride, the Church (Eph 5:31–32). We further embrace the Biblical paradigm of marriage as a God-ordained institution in which one woman and one man covenant together for life as the only, divinely blessed home for sexual activity (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6; Heb 13:4).

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

From all eternity, God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe, language, people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them (Eph 1:4–6; Rev 5:9). God justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies all those who by grace have faith in Jesus—all to the praise of his glorious grace (Rom 8:29–30; Eph 2:8–9). In love and mercy, God commands and implores all people to repent from sin and believe in Christ their Redeemer (Acts 17:30–31; 2 Pet 3:9).

Church Governance

Currently Refuge Church is led by the Planting Pastor, who is accountable to two bodies, the EFCA denomination appointed 3-member Partner Advisory Team and the elder board of our Sending Church, the Bridge HTX (Acts 14:23; Heb 13:17).

Once Refuge Church is established as a self-governed, self-funded autonomous church by our EFCA denomination, it will have adopted Elder-Led Congregationalism as its governance structure (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1–3). A plurality of elders will serve as under-shepherds of Christ Jesus, especially in modeling holiness, teaching the Word of God, praying, and exercising leadership and oversight of the church (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:9).

Both now and in the future the Congregation (the entirety of the church's covenant membership) assumes responsibility for disciplining one another to maturity in Jesus Christ, furthering the cause of the Gospel in and outside our local church, serving the needs of the body, and for holding one another accountable to live in accordance with God's Word (Heb 10:24–25; Matt 28:19–20; Acts 6:1–6; Gal 6:1–2).

The Ordinances

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded two ordinances for the Church to proclaim His Gospel until He returns, Baptism and the Lord's Table (also known as Communion or the Eucharist) (Matt 28:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Both ordinances nourish, strengthen and set-apart those who participate (Acts 2:42). In addition to a vital, public proclamation of faith in Christ, baptism by immersion in the Name of the Triune God serves to symbolize the believer's salvation through Christ: cleansing from

sin, complete identification with His life and work, and union with His family the Church (Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3–4; 1 Cor 12:13).

The Lord's Table likewise symbolizes Christ's body broken and blood shed for us at the Cross, inaugurating His New Covenant (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 10:16–17). We open this Table to all baptized believers, knowing that the elements are a grace to all who partake of them in renewed repentance and faith in Christ, and a curse to those who partake without repentance (1 Cor 11:27–30).

Faith, Blessing and Simplicity

We affirm that those who call on the Name of Jesus in faith are blessed by God's grace, in His way and timing (Rom 10:13; Ps 84:11). We affirm the Spirit's supernatural power and seek to lead others to exercise expectant faith (Eph 3:20–21; Jas 5:14–15). Yet Scripture teaches that blessings, including wholeness and healing, will only be fully realized when Christ returns (Rom 8:18–25; Rev 21:3–4). Jesus promised we would suffer for His Name, and we persevere in hope, knowing God grows our faith in Him as we wait for His salvation and final healing (John 16:33; Jas 1:2–4).

We rejoice in the biblical vision of human prospering that includes material welfare for God's people (Phil 4:19; Acts 4:34–35), but deny that faith is measured by material success, or that wealth always signals God's blessing (Luke 12:15; 1 Tim 6:6–10, 17–19). We also deny that God's blessings can be manipulated by human actions or rituals (Acts 8:18–20).

Jesus and His apostles taught us to live honest, simple lives, rejecting the idolatries of wealth and worldly success in order to sacrificially serve others for His Kingdom (Matt 6:19–21; Phil 2:3–4).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

At a person's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit baptizes, seals, and indwells all believers, applying to them all the blessings of knowing and being known by Christ Jesus forever (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13–14). This includes equipping and empowering them for ministry through the distribution of gifts given for building up the church (1 Cor 12:4–11; Rom 12:6–8). Refuge encourages and equips all members to be filled with the Spirit and pursue the greater gifts, love being chief among them (Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 13:1–3). We welcome the exercise of all gifts administered as the Spirit of God has ordered in the Word (1 Cor 14:26–33; 1 Pet 4:10–11).