

## **What kind of a church is the Sunbury Christian Church?**

*"There are so many churches. How can I know which one is the right one?"* This is a question asked by MANY people; and it's being asked by both those who have grown up in the church and those who have not. I find the question similar to asking, "Which kind of insurance company is the best?" When I compare the different options in the insurance world, my head begins to spin! There is so much out there! And it becomes so confusing that I am tempted to buy no insurance at all! But that's not wise; and so I waded through some things, understand some things, and make a choice.

**The primary purpose of this series of articles is to help you understand the church as revealed in the Bible.** The Sunbury Christian Church is trying to BE that church. And although you will find that we fall short of that perfect church, PLEASE DO NOT GIVE UP! Remember: the church is made up of imperfect people just like you and me who are trying to honor a perfect, loving, and forgiving God.

Several topics which will be approached in the coming pages include: the Bible, Jesus Christ, salvation, our purpose as individuals, our mission as a church, church government, the Holy Spirit, heaven & hell, the second coming, communion, baptism, and other religions.

Jesus said, "I will build MY church." It's His, not ours! And it becomes His vehicle to take the message of salvation to the lost and dying world in OUR generation. So, let's be the BEST church possible! What Jesus wants to do through His church is way too important to give up on! Let's look at the Bible. Let's look at how we're doing. And let's continue to strive to be more like Jesus as we mature through life.

After all, we ARE called the Bride of Christ, you know.

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that the Bible is the Word of God.**

Jesus said: "*You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" But like Pilate who was deciding the fate of Jesus, many ask: "***What is truth?***"

We believe that God has spoken the truth and He has preserved that truth for all to consider. The Bible becomes the standard by which all of mankind can weigh their thoughts and opinions. If there is no standard, then there is no way to know right from wrong. . . and there can be no accountability, no judgment. However, we believe that God has given us the truth and has preserved that truth throughout the ages!

Some men don't really want to know the truth. Paul says these men *suppress the truth*, and are *without excuse*. . . *they exchange the truth for a lie*. But Paul also makes it clear that they will still be held accountable to their Maker.

"Where the Bible speaks, we will speak. Where the Bible is silent, we will be silent." This is one of the principles upon which the Christian churches began, and it's still a good one!

Many topics are not found in the Bible. But you can be sure that if a matter is important, God has spoken to it. If it is critical to one's relationship with God Almighty, He has not withheld it. He has protected that truth for all generations.

"*God is willing that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" With this kind of heart, God has made it quite understandable for anyone to come to Him, to accept Jesus' death on the cross as the price for their own sin.

Want to know more? A pamphlet entitled, "Why I Believe the Bible Is God's Word" is also available. Pick one up. You will see why we believe along with Paul that: "***All Scripture is God-breathed.***" It's a sure foundation for God's truth.

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**

Believe it or not, the statement above means many different things to many different people. Entire religious movements repeat the same words, but mean completely different things when you get right down to it.

One example is the Mormon church (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints). From their own Pearl of Great Price Satan declares, "I also am a son of God." They believe that Jesus was chosen over Satan to become the sacrifice for our sins. . . "this *spirit-brother* of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind."

Another example is the Jehovah's Witnesses. From their own Let God Be True they declare, "This One was not Jehovah God." And from The Truth Shall Make You Free it is said that "he bore another name in heaven, which name is Michael"; and he was known as the Archangel.

We believe that Jesus Christ is more than a good teacher, more than a prophet, more than a son of God, and more than a created being. He is God, co-existent and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus claimed to be God, and for that claim He died! There was no mistake. Those who put him to death made the charge that, "*You, being a mere man, claim to be God.*" When seeing Jesus after the resurrection, Thomas exclaimed: "*My Lord and my God!*" We are baptized into the name of the "*Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*"

We believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead! Many people have died on crosses. The resurrection was necessary to prove the purpose for His death on the cross. **The Son of God died for our sins!** How do we know this? Because the resurrection and appearances of Jesus prove it! "We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Do you?

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that we are Saved By Grace, Through Faith.**

Ephesians 2:8 & 9 declares, *"For it is **by grace** you have been saved, **through faith** -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Most of the world believes in a vague concept which suggests that we can be "good enough" to get into heaven. But the Bible says otherwise! Scriptures such as *"The wages of sin is death," "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,"* and *"All our righteousness is as filthy rags"* let us know that **it is impossible to be good enough** to enter into God's holy heaven!

This is exactly why Jesus died. . . *"for our sins," "the righteous for the unrighteous."* This is where GRACE comes into play. An acrostic tells the story quite well:

**G**-od's **R**-iches **A**-t **C**-hrist's **E**-xpense  
God's riches speak of relationship with Him at HIS place, heaven! Christ's expense speaks of the price that Jesus paid on our behalf, the cross. Paul penned it like this: *"He (Jesus) Who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God."*

**FAITH** is believing with all our being in Who Jesus is and What He did to bring us to God. Faith is not just in the head; it's also in the heart and translates into our lives! Faith is not a one-time act; it is fully embracing God and His plan for our lives! **Grace** points to God's part; **faith** points to ours!

ANY love relationship involves the willingness of both persons. **Grace shows the love of God**, His offer, His willingness to forgive and take us to be His forever. **Faith shows the love of mankind** ~ our desire to have Him in our lives forever. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (grace) that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life"* (faith). Do you see it?

## **The Sunbury Christian Church believes that People Are Lost and Must Be Saved.**

The Question: "What must I do to be saved?" is the most important question one can ask. For that reason we desire to give the Bible answer and leave the rest up to God.

First of all, one must approach God with a genuine and a sincere heart. To "do" the right things does not mean that the heart is right, that the motives are pure. And since only God can judge the heart, we must leave that part up to Him.

Assuming that one is genuinely seeking after God, he will readily see that *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* God is holy; we are not. We realize that no matter how much good we do, it will never erase the bad. We NEED a Savior. . . One Who will pay the penalty for our sins.

*"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* We cannot earn a place in heaven. We MUST accept the offer of forgiveness! Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. . . *"He (Jesus) Who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God."*

With these things in place, now we can approach the question of "What must I do?" in order to receive this gift. Where do I meet Him? When and how can I know that I have this new relationship with Him?

Here is what the Bible says to do: *"If you **confess** with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Rom. 10.

*"**Repent** and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Acts 2.

This is God's Word, and so it is our answer to you, as well. It's too important to give you anything more, or anything less.

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that Heaven and Hell are Real.**

It is no small wonder that people are quick to believe in Heaven and slow to believe in Hell. Any survey will reveal only too quickly that mankind gives himself the benefit of the doubt every time. But what does the Bible say?

Jesus said, *"I go to prepare a place for you."* With this brief statement we notice a few things: Jesus is no normal man. He is God! And He is going to make preparations!

We also see that heaven is a place. . . the home of God and the place of enjoyment for those who are His.

When John wrote about his experience in the Book of Revelation, he described things in our terms: streets of gold, gates of pearl, and no need of a sun or moon. He also spoke of no more tears, or pain, or crying. He stated that nothing impure will ever enter it. What a place! I can't wait!

However, this same Jesus also spoke of hell. *"It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be cast into hell."* He also painted a horrible picture when He said: *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

Do you see God's original intent for hell? Hell was the place where the devil and his companions (fallen angels) would receive their due punishment. However, He also states that those in this life who follow the ways of Satan will regrettably receive that same punishment.

God's desire is that *"none should perish but that ALL should come to repentance."* But He knows that many will choose against Him. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* But there will be those who reject the offer of Jesus and the cross, and they will perish.

He wants us in Heaven with Him! Please, choose Jesus!

## **The Sunbury Christian Church believes that We are Not the Only Christians.**

The Sunbury Christian Church is part of a movement which began around 1800, right here in America. As people arrived in the New Country, they began to think of their religious affiliations in a new way. There were so many divisions in the Old Country. For instance, Thomas Campbell was a minister in the Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder, Scottish Presbyterian church. Each one of these names represented a split within the church "back home".

No longer having the same issues, Mr. Campbell wanted to simply be a Christian, nothing more and nothing less. Many others came to the same conclusion. Their desire was to **UNITE** all Christians based on the **authority of the WORD OF GOD** (not on the hierarchy of the past). This was their plea back then, and it is still our plea for today.

They did not wish to be governed by man-made rules or authorities. They did not wish to neglect the Word of God for the sake of unity. But neither did they wish to isolate themselves, believing that they were "the only true believers". And neither do we! Our intent is to give due respect to God's Word, allowing that to be the foundation for our unity in the churches of Jesus Christ.

This means: 1. We wear the name of Christ (Sunbury Christian Church) to honor Him. 2. We have no creed or rule book, except the Bible. 3. We know that membership in a church neither gets one into Heaven nor keeps one out.

*“Blessed are those who wash their robes,  
that they may have the right to the tree of life  
and may go through the gates into the city.” Rev. 22:14*

It has **never** been about which church one attends. It has **always** been about **one's personal relationship with Christ.**

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that Jesus Christ will Return and Reign Forever  
as King of kings and Lord of lords!**

There is one prophecy of Scripture which is yet to be fulfilled. Please, read what the Word of God says:

***"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*** John 14:3

***"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*** Acts 1:11

***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day ~ and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*** II Tim. 4:7, 8

***"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. . . keep this command without spot or blame **until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ**, which God will bring about in his own time ~ God, the blessed and only Ruler, the **King of kings and Lord of lords.**"***  
I Tim. 6:12 - 15

***"For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **Therefore, encourage each other with these words.**"*** I Thess. 4:16 - 18

**It IS encouraging to know that life is not lived in vain, that there IS life beyond the grave, and that no matter what happens on earth, **it only gets better for the people of God!****

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that the Holy Spirit is God.**

The topic of the Holy Spirit is so difficult to comprehend. When talking about God, Who He is and what He can do, we are so limited by our finiteness. **We are confined** by time, space, and ability. . . **God is not.** So, this is my disclaimer. Although the Bible is clear about some of these things, Isaiah 55:8, 9 emphatically states: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Nevertheless, there are a few things which we can declare with confidence because of Biblical revelation:

1. The Holy Spirit is a person, not just an energy force. One is baptized *"into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."* Matthew 28:19  
Jesus said that He would send *"another Comforter, the Holy Spirit."* John 16:7 (Jesus was the first Comforter.)  
In many passages like these the Holy Spirit is described as a person, just like God the Father and God the Son.
  
2. Part of His work is to *"testify about Jesus"* as well as to bring people under *"conviction of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come."* John 15:26; 16:8
  
3. Furthermore, He is the *"gift promised"* to everyone who has come to Jesus in *"repentance and baptism"*. Acts 2:38, 39
  
4. He is here to *"lead us"* and to help us become like Christ (*"the fruit of the Spirit"*). Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:22, 23

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5,  
*"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God  
unless he is born of water and the Spirit."*

**What about you? Have you truly been born again?**

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that Baptism is Part of God's Plan of Salvation.**

In pages of this series I have already explained the importance of being saved by Grace (which indicates God's part) through Faith (which indicates man's part). We MUST understand that God is the author of our salvation through His Son Jesus. Our good works will never get us to Heaven.

However, Jesus also said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* Our love for Jesus will be shown in the way we live our lives ~ in obedience, or in disobedience.

It's a shame that what **Jesus established to unite us** has become such a divisive issue. Some have taken the liberty of changing what the Bible has to say about baptism. But I fear they are on shaky ground. We need to honor God by keeping His commands; and to do this, we need to know what the Word of God says about baptism

1. It is a **commandment** by Jesus and Peter (not an option).  
Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38, 39
2. It is **only** to be received by one who has **faith** in Who Jesus is (the Son of God) and what He can do (save us).  
Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 16:29 - 34
3. It is for the **"forgiveness of sins"**.  
Acts 2:38; 22:16 (*"wash away your sins"*)
4. It is for the **"gift of the Holy Spirit"**.  
Acts 2:38; 19:1 - 5
5. It is to be performed by **immersion**. (The original Greek word for baptism **always** means to be "immersed".)
6. It does have an **effect on our salvation**.  
Acts 2:40, 41; I Peter 3:21
7. It is where we **"put on Christ"**. Galatians 3:26, 27
8. **It is when life is changed completely!** Romans 6:3 - 8

What a beautiful way to enter into the death, burial  
and resurrection of Jesus Christ! **Have you?**

**The Sunbury Christian Church believes  
that Communion is a Privilege for the Believer.**

The taking of communion is a wonderful privilege for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It serves as the centerpiece at each of our Worship Services.

Communion (also known as the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist) looks to the past, reminding us of the greatest gift of love that has ever been offered. It tells the story of the sacrifice of Christ; and Paul said that *"the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

Communion also helps us look at our present lives. Are we living for Him without reservation, or are we holding something back? Paul said that *"A man ought to **examine himself** before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."* This is the table of forgiveness. It is also the place for a fresh commitment to Jesus. Will you give Him your very best?

Communion also encourages us as we look to the future. Jesus said, *"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **until He comes**."* What a glorious reminder. . . His promise to return for us!

We offer the bread and the cup every Lord's Day because that is the example left for us in Scripture. And one does not need to be a member ~ neither to examine his life before God, nor to partake of this most wonderful memorial service.

However, the sacrifice of Jesus should never be taken lightly. Sin has been forgiven, and this was at the cost of His life. **When we died to sin** and were **buried in baptism**, we rose **to walk in the newness of life**. . . a holy life worthy of the cost to the Son of the Almighty God.

*See Acts 20:7; I Cor. 1:18; 11:23 - 32; Rom 6:1 - 8*

## **The Sunbury Christian Church is an Independent Congregation Led by Elders.**

What does it mean to be "independent"? When the word was associated with our nation, it spoke of freedom from the rule of England or any other outside force. We became free to establish our own laws and govern our own people.

The same concept applies to our congregation. There is no outside agency which governs our church. We use the Bible as our "rule of faith and practice". And "where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." These two principles were part of the original movement of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ back in the early 1800's, and they still hold true for today.

We are free to make all of our own decisions in regard to church staff, doctrine, missions, programs, and everything else which is related to the Sunbury Christian Church.

We have chosen to keep things closely aligned to the way the church began in the first century. Elders, Deacons, and Ministers on Staff are presented to the congregation and are voted upon by the members. The paid Staff works closely with the Elders, Deacons, and many other volunteers in the church. But they are responsible to the overseeing Elders for their teaching and the direction of each of their areas of ministry.

Our congregation often chooses to work in connection with other independent churches, such as providing camp for our youth and supporting missionaries throughout the world.

Membership ~ If one has accepted the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, repented of sin, confessed Him before men, been immersed into Him, and desires to live a faithful and holy life before God. . . then it is enough for us.

**The Sunbury Christian Church  
believes that God Has Made Us for a Purpose.**

I cannot tell you why, but **God made us so that we can have fellowship with Him!** God does not NEED anything. That would violate everything I know about God. And so He does not really need us. **But He absolutely does WANT us! GOD LOVES US!** Have you ever thought about the many different ways that God tries to send this message to us?

God is called our "*Father*" (Mat. 6:9), loves us like a "*Mother*" (Is. 66:13), and wants to be our "*Friend*" (James 2:23). Each of these descriptions (and more) shows God's desire to have a close, loving relationship with us!

Sin has gotten in the way. Our own desire to do our own thing and go our own way has separated each of us from the love of God. But God so loved the world (each one of us) that He made provision for our return to Him (through Jesus Christ on the cross). The cross was the method. But the reason was so our relationship with Him could be restored!

Love involves a choice. And so God gave that choice to Adam and Eve, to love Him or reject Him. God also gave us the same choice. And we chose to sin, as well. But God's love went beyond our failures and provided a way back home. When we accept His gift of Jesus Christ, we are adopted into the family of God. . . sins forgiven, made pure in His sight, and in good fellowship with Him. . . **forever!**

No wonder the first and greatest commandment is to "*love the Lord your God*". **That is our purpose!** And the second, to "*love your neighbor as yourself*" is just being like God. Life is NOT an accident. Life is to be lived, knowing that we have both **value and direction**. But only with God will the hole in our hearts be filled! Only with God will we truly understand.

**What a wonderful God! What a wonderful Savior!**

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