

## APPENDIX

Worship, Connect, Serve Next Steps

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# WORSHIP, CONNECT, SERVE NEXT STEPS

## STEP 1: WORSHIP

### ***Practice 1: Be fully present with the church every single Sunday.***

Choose your worship service and enthusiastically commit to it weekly. Order your life around worship with the church like you do other healthy, life-giving endeavors. Approach Sunday worship as you would showing up to work on Monday morning, watching every episode of your favorite TV series, or prioritizing a weekly date night. We show up weekly together not because we *have to*, but because it represents something (and Someone) that we *treasure*. We will naturally, and always, dedicate our best and most focused time, energy, and resources to the things we treasure most.

Part of being “fully present” with the church includes being fully committed to contribute to the worship and work of the church through planned, regular, and sustained giving of our financial resources to the church. For some, faithful giving will be a relatively small amount (like the widow’s mite). For others, faithful giving will be in the thousands, tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands. Generosity is not only part of how the mission of the church is accomplished. It is also essential for our own health and flourishing. God, *who needs nothing from us*, tells us to cultivate regular patterns of generosity because he *loves us* and wants what is best for us.

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:8-10)

Now concerning the collection for the saints...on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

### ***Practice 2: Be fully present with Jesus every single day.***

Find an ideal time that works for you to spend time in Scripture and prayer each day. If you miss a day here and there, don’t let it turn into a reason for guilt. Just treat it like you would treat eating dinner with family, or a regular appointment with a close friend, by simply getting back on track the next day. Remember, God wants to be with you, build you up, and form you into his likeness through these daily means of grace.

In the CPC101 book, several options were offered to help you get started with regular Bible reading. Regarding prayer, we recommend starting with a good “how to” book like *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller or *Prayer* by Timothy Keller.

## STEP 2: CONNECT

### ***Practice 3: Take every opportunity to gather with your group.***

In Acts 2:42, we read about the formation of the first Christian church two things are specifically mentioned which form the foundation of the “Connect” portion of our membership pathway—those two things are fellowship and teaching.

At Christ Presbyterian, you can participate in Christian community by joining a Connect Group, a Learning Group, or both. Connect Groups tend to major in fellowship and minor in teaching, whereas Learning Groups tend to major in teaching and minor in fellowship.

**Connect Groups:** There are numerous types of Connect Groups composed of all kinds of people. Most are smaller gatherings of 8 to 16 people who meet in homes, restaurants, at the church, or other accessible locations. Some are organized by neighborhood, others by life stage, and others by shared interest. Connect Groups are encouraged to meet weekly or *at least* twice a month and engage in a church-produced small group curriculum or sermon-based discussion during the gathering. In addition to these materials, Connect Groups engage with and share life together (Acts 2:42).

To obtain more information about connect groups, email [\*\*connect@christpres.org\*\*](mailto:connect@christpres.org).

**Learning Groups:** There are numerous Learning Groups at the various Christ Presbyterian Church campuses, all of which are designed to aid in increasing biblical literacy or aid in the understanding of everything through a biblical mindset. Subjects range from Bible basics to more in-depth studies of different books of the Bible. All Learning Groups allow people to share in their learnings, spurring one another along in the flourishing of their faith.

To obtain information about Learning Groups, email [\*\*connect@christpres.org\*\*](mailto:connect@christpres.org).

#### ***Practice 4: Befriend and bring in people who don't have a church.***

As you *invest in* your church, we also encourage you to invite your friends and neighbors to church. As we've already seen, we will invest in what we most care about, and we will order our lives around what brings us joy. When we experience this joy, we naturally want others to experience it as well. Just like our favorite restaurants and music, we want others to take up what we invest in. Whether we bring them to a Sunday service or Connect, Learning, or City Group, we want people to love what we love.

Inviting people to church should be a natural byproduct of having a meaningful relationship with them. And as we invite, we need to remember we are inviting them before we are asking them to invest. We want to demonstrate care for our friends by welcoming their questions and giving them freedom to go at their own pace. Invite your friends to explore our church in both their relationship to their Lord and others. Any invitation should be a natural extension of your relationship to them and the church, rather than pressure or an obligation.

### **STEP 3: SERVE**

#### ***Practice 5: Strengthen the church by serving and giving.***

**Serving the Church:** The apostle Paul tells us "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, we are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12). How does the Church work? It functions as a body which means there are many opportunities to serve as a part of the whole. No matter what type of person you are, no matter your background or current place in life, there is a place for you to serve at Christ Presbyterian.

If you're interested in joining a Service Group at Christ Presbyterian Church, email [\*\*serve@christpres.org\*\*](mailto:serve@christpres.org).

**Giving to the Church:** Give in a way that is in proportion with your income, intentional, consistent, joyful, and in response to what Christ has given you.

#### ***Practice 6: Enhance flourishing by serving your work, your world, and people in need.***

**Serving your Work:** (see [\*\*nifw.org\*\*](http://nifw.org) for more).

“What is the Christian understanding of work? . . . [It] is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker’s faculties . . . the medium in which he offers himself to God.”

—Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

When we hear the word “serve,” we immediately think of serving at church or serving those in need. But have you considered that your work can be the primary place you can serve God and neighbor on a daily, if not hourly basis? Whether you are a banker, a janitor, a songwriter, a community volunteer, or a parent, all work is a way to worship God and through that, love people, places and things to life.

What does serving your work look like?

“Work is as much a human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine, but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness.”

—Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

Serving your work means understanding work as part of God’s plan to redeem the world. Many in the Western world see work as a necessary means to the perceived greater good of leisure. We see this view on retirement brochures, in songs like “Everybody’s Working for the Weekend,” and in sayings like “TGIF.”

But God created work before the fall, which means that work is not a necessary evil, but a necessary good. Work is a part of life that God created for our flourishing, and for service to the community around us.

All good work becomes a way to take chaos and bring structure, just like God in the creation account in Genesis. Unloading a dishwasher, writing a melody, negotiating a contract, running financial models, serving on a manufacturing line—all bring structure out of chaos and in all we can aim for God to declare it good. Each and every industry has some element of God’s goodness reflected in it. Art shows his creativity, business shows his ingenuity, education shows his wisdom, finance shows his desire to re-allocate resources, etc.

Yet, work is also impacted by the fall. We all feel it. People are broken, systems are broken, the whole world is broken. And thus, work is broken. Being broken, the workplace can function as a factory for our false idols. Long for appreciation? Where better than at work? Long for security? What more than a paycheck?

Work also cultivates broken systems. We see systems go awry when greed distorts capitalism, turning it into an avenue to feed our own selfishness, versus using it as an avenue for loving our neighbor as ourselves.

But believers have the opportunity to work in concert with God in any vocation to bring flourishing to our world. No matter what our work is, there are opportunities to not only enhance God’s imprint on the industry, but also to love people, places, and things to life right where we are. How are you loving people, places and things to life in your work?

CPC has developed an entire organization, The Nashville Institute for Faith and Work, to help you learn more about how your work and faith can support each other. Subscribe to the NIFW mailing list at [NIFW.org](http://NIFW.org) and engage their social media @nashfaithwork.

“The Gospel frees us from the relentless pressure of having to prove ourselves and secure our identity through work, for we are already proven and secure. It also frees us from a condescending attitude toward less sophisticated labor and from envy over more exalted work. All work now becomes a way to love the God who saved us freely; and by extension, a way to love our neighbor.”

—Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

**Serving your World:** This is another way of encouraging us to commit ourselves to “good neighboring.”

Life in the world Monday through Saturday should reflect the aroma of our Sunday worship. As carriers of heaven’s DNA and the scent of Jesus in his world, we want to reflect his grace, truth, and beauty in all of the places where we live, work, and play. Two very practical ways this can be done include:

1. **Opening our homes.** The biblical practice of hospitality has the effect of turning strangers into friends, and friends into family. Because feasting is such a dominant theme in the Bible, because Jesus’ first miracle was providing a “second round” of wine at a wedding feast, and because Jesus is constantly showing up at parties and dinners in the Gospels (Matthew’s house, Simon’s house, etc.), and because history will end with a grand wedding feast, our homes and lives should seek to communicate to others, “Welcome.”
2. **Surprising our neighbors with unexpected gestures of love.** We want to be intentional and creative, looking for opportunities to be the “first responders” wherever opportunities exist to extend the kindness, love, support, and hope of Jesus to people who are hurting, lonely and alone, and feeling ashamed. As your church family, please let us know how we can partner with you to love those with whom you live, work and play.

**Serving people in need:** (for more information, see “City Groups” at [christpres.org](http://christpres.org)).

While service encompasses a wide spectrum of opportunity, it’s important to remember that a disciple of Christ not only serves the people gathered within the walls of the church, but is also called to function as a people who are scattered about the world, loving people, places and things to life.

In other words, it’s our job as disciples of Christ to love our neighbors to the exclusion of no one. We should love and serve the world around us.

If you have interest in joining one of our City Groups, send an email to [serve@christpres.org](mailto:serve@christpres.org) and we’ll find a service opportunity for you to join today.

# THREE VITAL TRUTHS GOSPEL

BY SCOTT SAULS

## THE GOSPEL DEFINED

The Gospel contains a “bad news” element as well as a “good news” element. The bad news is that the universe and everything in it is wearing down all the time, and people are more sinful, corrupt, and damaged—spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally, and vocationally—than we even realize. The good news is that God, through the person and work of Jesus, intends to restore both the universe and his people to the original beauty and glory for which he created both.

Following are three truths that flow from the Gospel. Each one is foundational for all other teaching about faith and life.

### THE FIRST GOSPEL TRUTH:

***God is actively at work to restore and renew broken people, places, and things.***

Through Jesus, the love and power of God have entered history to make all things new. This renewal includes people, plus much more. God will also renew the entire universe—people, places, and things! Scripture teaches that things like sin and sorrow and decay have tainted every aspect of God’s creation. As a result of this, both people and creation groan in anticipation of all things being made new again—restored to their original beauty before sin entered the world (Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21:1-5).

There are already signs breaking in of this future reality. Though the world is fallen, it also includes occasions for joy and splendor and thankfulness.

Thoughtful people also recognize and lament that so much is also fractured, tattered, and falling apart.

Despite all things eventually breaking down, believers in the Gospel, even in dire circumstances, can live with hope (2 Corinthians 4:7-18, 12:7-10). Though things aren’t perfect now, it will all be made right when God renews all things (Revelation 21:1-5).

### THE SECOND GOSPEL TRUTH:

***God is rescuing a people for himself—by grace and through faith.***

The central teaching or “crux” of the Gospel surrounds not a list of ideas, rules, or propositions, but a Person. That Person is Jesus Christ, who, being fully God (Philippians 2:6; 1 John 5:20), took on human flesh to mediate the insurmountable gap between a holy God and a sinful, wounded humanity (Isaiah 6:1-7).

The falsehood of religious moralism amplifies the demand for virtuous behavior—“You can’t be acceptable unless you perform and keep rules!”

The falsehood of expressive individualism amplifies the demand for personal autonomy—“Happiness not found by drawing near to God, but by getting away from God and being the lord of your own life.”

The Gospel is altogether different than both religious moralism and expressive individualism. Contrary to both, the Gospel emphasizes personal trust in God’s heroic rescue through Jesus. The average person believes that a Christian is someone who follows Christ’s teaching. Scripture says this is impossible. You don’t rescue people unless they are in a perishing condition and incapable of rescuing themselves.

The Gospel's core message is that Jesus, who experienced and therefore sympathizes with the helplessness of the human condition (Genesis 6:5; Ephesians 2:1-10), gave himself as a voluntary sacrifice for all who place their trust in his gracious gift. He gave himself—not to buy us some sort of second chance, but to be our substitute and advocate before God. Everything we must do to satisfy God, Jesus has already done for us.

Jesus endured the death we should have died—which included being separated utterly from the loving presence of God—to ensure that we would never be condemned (Romans 3:23-26). Likewise, he lived the life that we should have lived, so that God would treat us as blameless in his own sight. God is so intensely pleased with us that he actually enjoys us! (Zephaniah 3:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Because Jesus gave himself as our substitute, all who believe in him can confidently say:

*“As far as God is concerned, everything that’s true about Jesus is true about me. Through Jesus, God regards me as blameless and beautiful. He loves me as much as he loves Jesus. He credits me for all the good that Jesus did, and he puts all the responsibility on Jesus for all that was, is, and will be wrong about me.”*

In summary, the Gospel assures us that the pressure is off. Christianity is not something that we do as much as it is a Savior whom we trust. Our “doing” merely flows out of the trust, like fruit from a well-rooted tree. The more awakened we become to the “roots” that the Gospel gives us in Jesus, the more naturally we will respond in surrendered, obedient love toward God and other people, because if anyone is in Christ, s/he is a new creation. The old has gone, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

### **THE THIRD GOSPEL TRUTH:**

***God has already begun the process of recreating his people toward becoming the very best, and eventually most perfected version of themselves. As Scripture says, “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).***

This is something about which we can be confident. It is a gradual process that the Bible calls “sanctification.” In addition to saving his people from sin, God also intends to transform them, bit by bit and over time, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As this happens, they will find themselves—more and more over time—loving the things Jesus loves, hate the things Jesus hates, and walking the path that Jesus walked. Finally, and in the life to come, they will actually be like God in their character, behavior, and desires (1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 4:24). While we are never complete in this lifetime, and while we never grow past our need for Jesus, each advance in sanctification gets us an inch or two nearer to our ultimate destination, which is to be like him.

### **TWO ERRONEOUS, DAMAGING ALTERNATIVES TO THE GOSPEL**

Martin Luther said that a sinner trying to believe the Gospel was like a drunk man trying to ride a horse—he will always struggle with a tendency to fall off on one side or the other. These two errors that the sides of the horse represent are...

***The First Error:*** Legalism or “truth” at the expense of grace, which is actually untruthful.

Legalism feels a lot more like pressure and a lot less like freedom. It thinks, prays, relates, and behaves as if there is something to prove to God, other people, and/or oneself. Legalism feels overly stiff and serious, and leads to anxiety and tiresome striving. Practitioners of legalism either feel:

- self-righteous when they think they are succeeding,
- self-loathing when they think they are failing, or
- a deep-seeded resentment toward God when they feel he isn’t treating them in the way that they think they deserve.

Other symptoms of legalism include a hyper self-awareness or narcissism, a judgmental spirit toward people who don't measure up, a lack of prayer (especially intimate prayer), and disproportionate amounts of anger.

**The Second Error:** Relativism or “grace” at the expense of truth, which is actually ungracious.

Relativists are on the opposite side of the pendulum from legalism. On the surface, relativism adopts a “live and let live” approach to life, relationships, and faith. If God is in the equation, it is only a kind of god who affirms everyone just as they are—regardless of how they live, how they treat others, or what they believe.

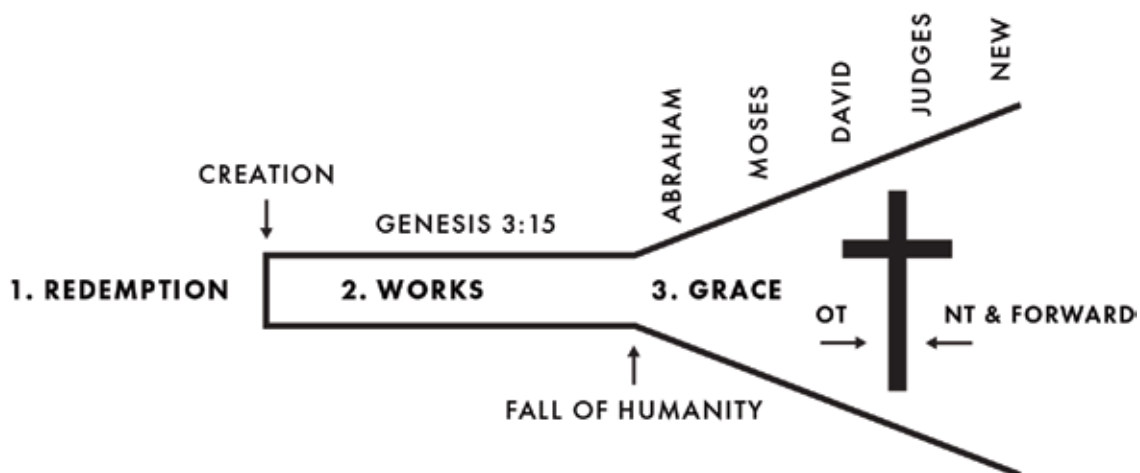
Relativists will talk about God's love, but since they do not see themselves as deeply sinful people who are deeply in need of God's grace and rescue, God's love for them ends up costing him little or nothing. For relativists, the cross of Christ is neither valued nor needed—because deep down, we are all basically good people who don't need to be forgiven.

## SUMMARY AND THE HISTORICAL PICTURE

Christians and non-Christians both stumble over the two counterfeits of the Gospel. Many Churches are deeply legalistic or deeply relativistic. Christians who understand the Gospel very clearly still look like the drunk man on the horse, as the desire to justify ourselves and trust in our own performance continually reappears. The Gospel tells the pragmatist that he is more flawed and sinful than he ever dared believe. The Gospel tells the legalist that he is more loved and accepted than he ever dared hope. In summary:

- God alone saves us; we do not save ourselves. Even if we wanted to save ourselves, we couldn't.
- God creates good in us and through us; but we cannot be good by ourselves.
- God keep us in his love; we are not under pressure to earn or keep his approval. It is not the strength of our faith that causes God to love us, but rather the strength of Jesus and his finished work on our behalf.
- God's salvation has always been through Jesus, even in Old Testament times before Jesus was born (see the diagram below called “The ‘Big Picture’ of Redemptive History.”
- God's salvation always leads, over time, to new and better, more life-giving ways of thinking, believing, and living.

The diagram below explains that God's “covenant of grace” (salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone) with Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. all pointed to the same promise to bring salvation through a coming Messiah—which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.





# THREE KINDS OF CHURCHES

<b>LEGALISTIC CHURCHES</b> (truth without grace)	Measure up to our laws! Embrace our political agenda, the finer points of our doctrine, our customs, our dress code, our worship style, and everything else we regard as sacred!	We will accept you and embrace you...if you can get past the first hurdle! (We embrace everyone except those who disagree with us about anything.)	Performing to gain acceptance with the church, God, and/or yourself.	The bully church. Controlling, hurtful, coercive, manipulative, prone to police and condemn the sins of others while turning a blind eye to our own.
<b>LICENTITIOUS CHURCHES</b> (grace without truth)	Measure up to our laws! Embrace our agenda of complete tolerance!	We will accept you and embrace you...if you can get past the first hurdle! (We are tolerant of everyone except those who aren't as tolerant as we are!)	Performing to gain acceptance with the church, God, and/or yourself.	The enabling church. Sappy, sentimental, sinful. Permissive in the name of "tolerance," yet strangely embittered and bullying toward those who aren't tolerant like we are.
<b>HOSPITABLE CHURCHES</b> (grace and truth)	See how loved you are! We accept you and embrace you...because you are a person of great value...you are the image of God and God values you enough to die for you!	Receive the love of God and, in response to His love, live a life of love and obedience to His commands (not the quirky laws of particular tribe, but God's loving, life-giving laws!)	Loving God and other people, because you know you are loved by God and by our community. Even those who don't believe as we do feel strangely, yet warmly, at home and embraced.	The grace and truth church. Whatever you believe, we celebrate your value as the image of God. We invite you to consider faith and repentance in the Gospel. We want you to walk alongside you in your journey toward and with Jesus.

# CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

BY RUSS RAMSEY

## DETASSELING

Growing up in the farmland of Indiana, there was one summer job kids could count on—a job which paid an outrageous wage to a 13-year-old—eight dollars per hour. Though the work was hard, the job was simple. You’d show up at 6:00am with a sack lunch and a gallon of water. Then you and a dozen other bleary-eyed kids dreaming of new drum-sets, dirt bikes, or stereos would climb up into the baskets of this spider-like tractor that would take you through miles of cornfields. Your job was to pull the top, the tassel, off each stalk in your row.

It was called detasseling, and apparently it was important. Almost every kid I knew growing up held this summer job at least once. And almost every kid I knew had no idea why they were pulling those tassels off. To this day I’m still not altogether sure—something to do with there being boy corn and girl corn.

There are many things we do in life which we would be hard pressed to explain—like why we set out cranberry sauce on Thanksgiving or shake hands with our right hand and not the left. Likewise, there are also many things we **don’t** do even though we should because we don’t really understand why they are important. Over the course of my time in ministry, joining the membership roll of a local church appears to be one of these things. Why do churches like our have a formal membership process and membership vows? It is a fair question.

Let’s take a few moments to address the question of church membership. My objective is to present a **Biblical rationale** for the importance of membership in the local church while contending for the **Biblical purpose** of living as publicly identified members of a local body of believers—considering this an **act of worship** before God.

The goal here is certainly not to shame anyone who is not on the membership roll of this or any other Bible-believing local congregation. Many churches these days don’t have a formal membership process. My hope is that the Lord would use his Word to challenge us all, members or not, to better understand the life of intentional, committed fellowship God calls every believer to in his Word. To get at this discussion, we turn to what I suspect is a familiar verse to many, and one that not only encourages ongoing, committed fellowship, but sheds valuable light on the wisdom of knowing and being known by one another over the course of your life as a follower of Christ.

*“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

*Hebrews 10:24-25*

## LET US CONSIDER

Meeting together and church membership are not necessarily the same thing. So I do not think this text gives us a “chapter and verse” command requiring membership in the local church. In fact, I’ll even go so far as to say I have not found a chapter and verse in the Bible commanding Christians to include their names on the membership roll of a local church. So why are we looking to today’s text to build a case for church membership? Because of what it does command—that we would **consider** how to stir one another up toward love and good works.

What does it mean to consider? It means to think something through, to study, to understand, and to come up with ideas. Our text tells us to consider how to help each other remain intentionally faithful to Christ, spurring one another on in service to the Lord.

A key principle for the church in this text is that Christians are not here on this earth simply to whittle away the years keeping our noses clean until Christ comes back. We have an ongoing call to love well and serve the Lord with all we have and are. Included in this is the call to consider how we might help our brothers and sisters in Christ do this too.

One of the ways I believe we can do this is by being as intentionally and publicly committed to a local congregation of believers as possible. And one way congregations in the Presbyterian Church in America do this is through formal church membership. Now, I would not insist that the PCA's process for church membership is the only valid way to join a church. We do not believe that unless you are a member of a PCA church, your faith is suspect. Nor do we believe church membership vows are required for entry into God's Kingdom.

So why do we have them at our church? Because we, along with many other faithful leaders in the church who have gathered regularly over the years to consider how to stir one another on toward love and good works, believe church membership is a wise application of Scripture's call to committed, accountable fellowship as members of the church of Jesus Christ. Church membership is the application of a series of Biblical principles—an application arrived at through prayerful, careful consideration of how we might live as faithful followers of Christ. Let's see it.

## **A BIBLICAL RATIONALE**

Our text presumes meeting together is important—so much so that not meeting together is a form of neglect. To neglect is to not give to something or someone the attention they need. I point this out to establish that the author of Hebrews bases his call to meet together on the presumption that meeting together is normal and not meeting together is abnormal—even neglect.

Still, that doesn't prove the case for church membership, does it? We can meet together as brothers and sisters in the Lord without having to fill out a membership card, right? And the answer is, of course that's right. The fellowship of the saints is a wonderful thing. When we hear of someone in, say, China, coming to Christ, it is right for our hearts to swell with joy as we consider them nothing less than our brother or sister in Christ, though we'll likely never meet them this side of heaven.

Together we're part of the Church Universal—all God's children from every tongue, tribe, and people across the span of every generation. If you are a Christian, your name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life (Phil 4:3)—the membership roll of Heaven. And we're wrong to regard the "Book of Life" as a euphemism for some generic mass of believers because the Gospel impact of the "Book of Life" is the reminder that God has no generic followers. He knows each of our names, (Isa 43:1) the number of our days, (Ps 139:16) even the hairs on our heads. (Mt 10:30) Heaven has no social security numbers, only names.

Still, the Christian life is not one of simply waiting idly for heaven when we will join that great cloud of witnesses. Under the umbrella of the Church Universal, we also have the Church Local—particular congregations of believers meeting together for worship. In our text, that author of Hebrews challenges his readers to recognize that we have misunderstood the Church Universal if we have rejected the Church Local. We are called to be meeting together even now, encouraging one another.

I know there are many Christians who, for a variety of reasons, have struggled to commit to a particular local church. I understand this can be a lengthy process. But it still should be a process that sooner rather than later leads you to connect and commit to a local congregation.

Some, like us kids up in the detasseling machine, would benefit from a better understanding of why we do what we do. So let's look at church membership through the testimony of Scripture. Consider the following five arguments for church membership today from God's Word.

1. **Believers in the Old Testament were divided and counted according to their clans.** From the establishment of Israel, God's people were children of Abraham, but also members of one of the twelve tribes. No believer in the Old Testament was without specific local accountability, leadership, and opportunity to serve. Local churches function like clans.
2. **Believers are called by Scripture to meet together, (Heb 10: 24-25) and they are told they belong to each other.** "As each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and **each member belongs to all the others.** <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor each other above yourselves." (Rom 12:4-10) If we're commanded to meet together and serve one another in devoted love, membership is an articulation of service and devotion to a particular body.
3. **Jesus designed the church to serve as a "spiritual court" of accountability in the lives of believers.** Talking about believers confronting each other's sins, Jesus says, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector." (Mt 18:15-17) Jesus intends for the church to function as a court of authority, so, by definition, the members of the church are under that authority. Jesus doesn't suggest the church should hold authority over her members, he presumes it does. Membership is a believers' way of publicly yielding to the Church as a Spiritual court over them, as Jesus describes.
4. **Christians have a responsibility to be under the authority of overseers, willfully submitted to spiritual oversight, care and, when necessary, discipline.** To leaders, Scripture says, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers." (1 Pet 5:2, 1 Tim 3:1-6) To congregations, Scripture says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Heb 13:17) God formally calls particular people to serve as overseers of particular churches. If God calls particular people to oversee particular churches, and if he also calls believers to submit to such leaders, then God calls believers to formally associate with particular churches.
5. **Accountability and oversight are for our good, and we shouldn't wait until we're in need of correction or rebuke to publicly invite it.** As sinful people, we are all prone to wander. The problem is that often when we are in the most need of rescue, that is the time we are least likely to want it. With church membership, people call the church to be a spiritual court over them while they are thinking rationally, not while they are blinded by sin. The church member says, in their membership vows, "I need my church to hold me accountable. Please don't let me get away with profaning the name of my God or hurting his church to which I belong. Come after me." Our church will pursue church discipline when needed, but only with those who have, by their vows, asked us to.

Any time someone takes a vow, they relinquish a part of their autonomy, saying "My life is not my own. Others can depend on me to keep my vow or challenge me if I fail." With church membership, we pledge our lives to fidelity to God's Word while at the same time asking those around us to help, correct, encourage, and stir us up—which is what our text today calls us to. Consider then that church membership is a way to spur one another on toward love and good works. And if it is, then consider also that church membership is very much an act of worship.

# MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

BY SCOTT SAULS

"The justice behind God's creation of male and female and his arrangement of the different roles he chose for them may not always be apparent to us. Why one and not the other? But should we expect in our finitude to understand the infinite, omnipotent, wise, good, lovely, gracious justice of God? Perhaps some inkling resides in the dance of the sexes, by which we reveal truth about the inner life of the triune God. The rest is clothed in mystery, to which we yield, with full confidence that it is meant for our good."

—Kathy Keller

"Dad, why do only men get to be pastors and elders in our church?"

Our oldest daughter was about ten years old when she raised this question at our dinner table. As you might imagine, she caught me off guard. During her lifetime (and also, to this day, during mine), I have served as pastor in churches where only men can be preachers, pastors, and elders. So, you can imagine the challenging—not to mention delicate—discussion that followed as we informed our inquisitive daughter that in fact, many Christian traditions and denominations do have men and women who serve as their pastors and elders...but ours was not one of them. Furthermore, many of our own Christian friends are women who, at least upon occasion, preach sermons and serve as elders in local churches...but ours was not one of them. Her initial response to these realities was one of dismay.

"So," she responded, "you're saying that if someday I decide that I want to be a pastor or a preacher, in our church the answer would be no? You're saying that I would have to go somewhere else—to a different kind of church than the one I grew up in—to be accepted in this role?"

"Well, I suppose the answer would be yes," I sheepishly replied. Then, I attempted to explain to her the differences between churches and traditions on this particular subject. As I did so, I also explained that good-hearted, biblically serious Christians can have differing viewpoints on certain things...and that women's roles in the church have historically been among them.

Some years later in a similar conversation, I also explained to her how our church seeks to encourage and empower women to exercise their gifts for leading and serving fully, and in multiple ways.

Approximately half of the senior directors on our church staff are women—including the women who serve as our directors of faith and work integration, mercy and justice initiatives, music and worship, pastoral care, children's ministries, hospitality, and more. Several of our women serve the church as commissioned deaconesses, alongside and in partnership with our ordained deacons. Many of the advisers to the senior pastor are women. Women lead in our worship services by reading Scripture, leading in the prayers of the people, giving testimonies of God's grace in their lives, collecting the offering, and speaking words of encouragement to fellow believers around the communion tables.

Most of our elder meetings include women who, though not elders themselves, offer their wisdom and counsel on matters being discussed. The committees of our church, including several chairpersons, are robustly populated with women as well as men. "These are just a few things," I offered to our daughter, "that we do in our effort to follow what we believe is one of God's priorities for his church—that every member, not just the men, exercise her or his spiritual gifts and abilities to the utmost."

"Hmmm...okay," she replied in a partially convinced, yet still uncertain tone. "I'll have to think about that."

On a personal note, I would add that I love and wish to honor the inquisitive spirit our daughter brought to the table on this, as well as many other important subjects during her childhood. I want also to add that when I get to heaven, I could discover that I and those who believe as I do on these matters got some things wrong. As I hope the rest of this chapter will support, I have come to believe that there are good points to be made from Scripture on all sides of the issue. This is another place where Christians ought to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and ever so careful not to pass judgment on others who have drawn different conclusions from their careful study of the Scriptures.

## A REAL-TIME DEBATE AMONG BELIEVERS

This same conversation is not limited to family dinner tables, but is also alive in churches, the blogosphere, and on social media feeds everywhere. The debate over gender roles in church, and also home, has become very personal for many believers. Though differences between churches and denominations have existed for quite some time, the debate around gender roles has been highlighted anew—especially in recent years through the publishing of egalitarian books such as *Junia is Not Alone* by Scot McKnight and *A Woman's Place* by Katelyn Beaty, along with their complementarian counterparts such as *Jesus, Justice, & Gender Roles* by Kathy Keller and *Redeeming the Feminine Soul* by Julie Roys. These and many other books—ones which I, in seeking to learn from perspectives similar to and different than my own, have benefitted from greatly because of their serious-minded engagement with the biblical text (On a related note, I wrote personal endorsements for both books by Katelyn Beaty and Julie Roys).

On one side of the debate is the *egalitarian* view, which promotes the idea that both men and women can (and should) exercise their gifts equally in the church and at home. This includes preaching and formal leadership roles such as pastor, elder, deacon, and co-head of household. On the other side of the debate is the *complementarian* view—which promotes the idea that while men and women are equals in dignity and gifting, God has assigned to men and women different, and in some cases gender-specific, roles.

Whether we land on the side of the egalitarian or the complementarian view, the types of questions being asked by our daughter and millions of others are important ones that require thoughtful, satisfying—and above all, biblically balanced—answers. On this subject as well as every other, Scripture's relevance is derived neither from traditional nor progressive assumptions and norms, but rather from its ultimate and infallible Source, which is the breath of God's Spirit himself:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," says the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Scripture's relevance rests in its ability, as the inspired Word of God, to stand above our different cultures and experiences and personal feelings about this subject or that subject, in such a way as to *affirm* in us that which is right, good, and lovely, and to *correct* in us that which is not.

In many people's eyes, neither churches nor pastors nor parents have done a great job providing the needed thoughtful, satisfying answers to important and potentially life-altering questions around gender roles and differences. Instead, complementarians are often accused of giving answers that feel, especially to women and girls, insensitive and dismissive to legitimate female concerns, as well as to solid scholarship that has yielded more egalitarian conclusions. Likewise, egalitarians are often accused of giving answers that diminish the authority (and therefore the functional relevance) of Scripture in favor of the whims of popular culture and personal experience and feelings.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

While in most cases these sorts of accusations are neither accurate nor fair, the questions keep coming nonetheless. Perhaps more than ever, we need clarity about where *he* and *she* fit in God's picture of church and God's picture of home—for it still stands that "in the beginning, God made them male and female."<sup>2</sup> And as with all contested subject matter, the way that we handle these specific issues will, for good or for ill, have bearing upon the witness of Jesus both inside *and* outside the church. Therefore, the egalitarian versus complementarian discussion merits serious reflection, a humble demeanor, and a charitable spirit from all sides.

For some, especially women who believe they have been gifted and called to preach and lead in the church, the questions are not merely theological, but also deeply personal. For such women, this is not just an interesting armchair discussion, but a question of life trajectory and calling and—just like their complementarian sisters and brothers—of an eagerness to follow what they believe to be the teaching of Scripture. Furthermore, the concerns of women and girls who have been afflicted by abusive or absentee men in the home must be carefully and lovingly and satisfactorily considered. For example, if a man has abdicated his so-called "headship" role by acting as a bully or a deadbeat in his home, if he has in effect disqualified himself from leading, what should be done in his case and in the case of those affected by his behavior?

These and other pressing questions are valid and must be handled, and wherever possible resolved by both complementarians and egalitarians, with a shared commitment to biblical tenacity, sincere efforts to understand each other's perspectives, a deep reluctance to judge or to become self-righteous about the issue, and above all, to put on love, which binds God's people—even across the lines of difference—in unity and peace. The questions that must be contended with by complementarians and egalitarians alike, are as follows:

Regarding leadership in the church: *If men and women are created as equals in the image of God as Scripture attests,<sup>3</sup> and if all believers have been endowed with the Spirit's gifts to be exercised for the good of all as Scripture also attests,<sup>4</sup> then should women be held back from preaching and formal leading roles in the church?*

Regarding leadership in marriage and family: *If men and women are equals in the sight of God, and if in Christ there "is no male and female...in Christ Jesus,"<sup>5</sup> should wives be expected to submit to their husbands in everything? Or should husbands and wives be seen as co-heads of household?<sup>6</sup>*

## **AS EGALITARIANS SEE IT...**

According to increasing numbers of women and men—especially those who lean toward an egalitarian viewpoint—complementarian role restrictions appear to diminish the place of women in both church and home. Furthermore, many egalitarians believe that complementarian views represent reductionist misinterpretations of Scriptures that say things like, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" and "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church."<sup>7</sup> Egalitarians contend that while such statements seem clear when presented apart from their fuller contexts, when presented from within their contexts they seem to tell a different story.

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 5:2; Mark 10:6.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:7.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:22-33.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12; Ephesians 5:22-23.

The context assumed by egalitarians is essentially two-fold. First, these Scriptures and others like them were written from a unique, culturally-bound, and therefore temporary context in the same way that the Old Testament ceremonial laws about washing hands and eating shellfish were. "In Paul's day," thoughtful egalitarians might say, "women in subservient roles was standard practice just as slavery was standard practice in first-century, Middle Eastern culture. So, if women are to remain subservient in every time and culture, then we would also have to say the same about slavery."

Second, egalitarians contend that Scripture represents progress *toward* an even greater, more just, and more emancipated ideal that would unfold over time, after the canon of Scripture was completed. "By the time we reach the end of the New Testament," egalitarians might say, "slavery is still a standard, and yet waning, practice. But since that time—and not in spite of Scripture but because of Scripture—greater freedoms have been accomplished in societies, churches, and households by virtue of the fact that in those societies, churches, and households, there are no longer slaves." In other words, according to egalitarians, Scriptural teaching around slavery was intended to begin or trigger a process that would be completed through the work of Christ in later generations, namely, emancipation and civil rights. *Slaves set free.*

On a similar note, egalitarians would say that the same trajectory was established in Scripture for women in the church and home. Written from within a male-dominated, patriarchal, and sometimes misogynistic culture (for example, in those days a woman's testimony in court was not considered valid), the Scripture also envisioned an unfolding process over time, in which women would be elevated to equal status and also to equal roles as men. While the Scriptures don't "finish the job" of empowering women to serve and lead in every way that a man can, the Scriptures nonetheless "start the job" that we, in the name of Christ and by the love of Christ working in and through us, are meant to "finish the job."

## CONFRONTING MISOGYNY?

Hopefully, these and other egalitarian tenets can provide us with some background as to why certain forms of complementarianism create angst for egalitarians. Especially when taught in an unfeeling or unthoughtful way, restrictions on women serving in certain roles can have an added, damaging effect of being stifling, dismissive, and even demeaning toward women. Likewise, if presented in a domineering or overreaching way, complementarian teachings can risk diminishing the very important truth that the most *complete* expression of God's image is one that embodies attributes of male and female together. Just as God presents himself to us as "Our Father" and "like a mother"—and just as Jesus comes to us as an "elder brother" who longs to gather us beneath his wings "like a mother hen"<sup>8</sup>—men need their female counterparts to rub off on them, and vice versa.

Also, and in more extreme cases, some egalitarians would suggest that the very existence of the conversation is both strange and offensive in our late-modern times. Concerning complementarian beliefs about male and female in the church, one contemporary author has written:

I've watched congregations devote years and years to heated arguments about whether a female missionary should be allowed to share about her ministry on a Sunday morning, whether students older than ten should have female Sunday school teachers, whether girls should be encouraged to attend seminary, whether women should be permitted to collect the offering or write the church newsletter or make an announcement...all while thirty thousand children die every day from preventable disease. If that's not an adventure in missing the point, I don't know what is.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:15; Isaiah 66:13; Hebrews 2:11; Luke 13:34.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Held Evans, *A Year in Biblical Womanhood* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 255.



Concerning complementarian views in relation to the home and marriage, the same author has written, “[The] premise—that wives must be subordinate to their husbands—is faulty, and...that premise can actually damage marital relationships by, among other things, impeding honest communication...trying to force first century societal norms onto modern-day marriages have proven...complicated.”<sup>10</sup>

Such concerns notwithstanding, there are millions of believers—both men and women—who still hold firm to a complementarian framework. For example, a well-known and very popular Christian network called The Gospel Coalition (TGC) has made male headship in church and home one of its central tenets. In an article on TGC’s website called “To My Egalitarian Friends,” Kathleen Nielson writes:

Complementarians find Scripture to speak clearly and cohesively from beginning to end on the subject of human beings as male and female created equally in the image of God and with distinct roles relating to marriage and the church. The prominence and pervasiveness of this strand of Scripture’s teaching...makes this a biblical issue that merits and even requires regular attention and discussion—especially in light of contemporary challenges to centuries-old understandings. The fundamentally crucial issue for all of us in these matters must be to hear and obey the Word of God.<sup>11</sup>

So then, whereas complementarians are saying the issue for them is solely about “hearing and obeying the Word of God,” egalitarians are contending that perhaps we may be missing some teachings and trajectories as derived from the Word of God that could, if we paid more careful attention to them, lead us to some different and, presumably, less complementarian conclusions.

## THE BIBLE AND WOMEN

In response to complementarian assertions about women’s roles in the church, egalitarians appeal to the Bible in several places. Some common examples cited include the following:

### ***Women Speaking to the Gathered Church***

In several instances, the Bible encourages women to exercise their teaching and speaking gifts when the church is gathered. Specifically, women are empowered to exercise the gift of prophesy—or speaking God’s word to the community—in both the Old and New Testaments.

The prophet Joel, speaking of the coming days, God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh: “Your sons *and daughters* shall prophesy...even on the male *and female* servants I will pour out my Spirit,” which we later see fulfilled in the book of Acts.<sup>12</sup> Also in Acts, we are told of how the prophetess, Anna, who lived her whole life in the temple, spoke of God to those waiting for his coming redemption.<sup>13</sup> And in 1 Corinthians, Paul gives detailed instructions about how women are to adorn themselves when they prophesy as the church gathers to worship God.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Women Encouraged to Teach and Lead***

Also, and in several instances, gifted women are encouraged to fully use their gifts in the church to teach and lead. This is where egalitarians have a strong point in contrast to more strict forms of complementarianism. Read within the full context of Scripture, passages like 1 Timothy 2:12-13 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 simply cannot mean women are restricted at all times from speaking in a church setting. Furthermore, to interpret such passages in such a narrow way is to promote an environment in which injustices toward women can easily occur, through the stifling and diminishing of their God-given gifts.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/absurd-legalism-gender-roles-submission-piper>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theGospelcoalition.org/article/to-my-egalitarian-friends/>

<sup>12</sup> Joel 2:28-29; 2:17-18, 21:9.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 2:36-38.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:2ff.

Examples are there in the Bible of women using their teaching gifts to instruct others in the ways of Christ. The more obvious passages include those where older women are encouraged to teach younger women and all women are encouraged to instruct children. The young pastor and protégé of Paul named Timothy, for example, had known the Scriptures from infancy because of the faithful teaching of his mother and grandmother.<sup>15</sup>

The Bible reveals even in ancient times, Christian women exercising their teaching gifts not just with other women and children, but also when men are present and where men become their pupils. Their teaching was done both by example and with speech. The “wife of noble character” of Proverbs gains praise from her husband, her family, and at the city gates for her example of godly living. We might say that her life itself is a sermon that “preaches” to those who know her. While much of her attention is directed toward her family as wife and mother, it is by no means solely directed there. In fact, she is also an industrious, successful businesswoman and salesperson.<sup>16</sup>

There are also examples in Scripture of women giving testimony to the Gospel and exhorting others in public gatherings. The Samaritan woman at the well, after encountering Jesus Christ, goes back to her town and tells everyone—men and women included—about the man who told her everything that she ever did. Similarly, it was women that God chose to be the first eyewitnesses—the “apostles to the apostles”—of the resurrection of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond these examples, Scripture also speaks of women proclaiming and teaching biblical doctrine when men are present. After God rescues the nation of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh and Egypt, Miriam the prophetess and other women declare a song of deliverance over the entire community, leading them all in worship. Likewise, after being told she was carrying God’s Son in her womb, the virgin Mary composed and sang a theologically rich song that not only became part of Scripture, but that is preached from pulpits all over the world during Advent season. There is also Priscilla, who joined her husband, Aquila, in teaching biblical doctrine to Apollos—one of the early church’s greatest preachers—to help him preach the Word of God more accurately.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, according to Scripture, there are many contexts in which women are free to exercise their teaching gifts. This is indisputable. Many women in Scripture are presented as remarkable leaders as well. Deborah served as a judge of Israel, Junia is said to have been “well known to the apostles.”<sup>19</sup>

There are many more similar examples in Scripture that affirm the notion of women teaching and leading. This being undeniably true, if anyone is tempted to accuse egalitarians of playing fast and loose with Scripture, she or he should stop and reconsider.

## STUCK IN THE MIDDLE?

### *Too Egalitarian for Some Complementarians*

As a complementarian who also sympathizes with much of what thoughtful, biblically serious egalitarianism has offered in the realm of scholarship, I have sometimes been accused of holding to a low view of Scripture by some of my complementarian sisters and brothers. The occasional critique has come as a result of my belief that the role of deacon in the church should be open to women. I have personally become convinced of this view—along with scholars and pastors such as John Calvin, Benjamin Warfield, C.E.B. Cranfield, James Montgomery Boice, Philip Ryken, and Tim Keller to name a few—based on Romans 13:1, which identifies a woman named Phoebe as a *diakonon*. In our English Bibles, this Greek word is sometimes translated “servant,” and other times “deacon.”

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<sup>15</sup> Titus 2:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:5.

<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 31:10-31.

<sup>17</sup> John 4:39-42; Luke 24:10.

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 15:19-21; Psalm 68: 24-25; Luke 1:46-55; Acts 18:24-26.

<sup>19</sup> Judges 4; Romans 16:7.

Personally, I have come to embrace the latter translation because diakonon is the same word that Paul uses when he describes the formal role of deacon in the church. Additionally, and whereas the Greek word in the Bible for “elder” or “overseer” is a masculine word, diakonon is a gender-neutral and therefore (in my view) gender-inclusive one. Therefore, it seems to me that even complementarians can support women serving in the role of deacon in the church.<sup>20</sup>

Once, when articulating and explaining my beliefs on the subject, I was accused by a complementarian friend in the crowd for playing fast and loose with the biblical text. “You are completely discounting the fact that all seven of the deacons named in the book of Acts were men,” my friend argued.<sup>21</sup> “What’s more,” he continued, “I’m concerned that you are basing an entire doctrine on just one, single, obscure verse of the Bible that’s tucked away at the end of one of Paul’s letters.”

In what I hope was a respectful tone, I responded with a counterpoint. To me, it seemed odd that someone who claimed to have a high view of Scripture would hold me in suspicion for basing my beliefs on one, single verse of Scripture. For if we hold the Bible in high esteem, it seems that we will therefore treat *all* of Scripture as being “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it seems that we will treat none of Scripture as if it is “obscure” and therefore irrelevant to our beliefs and practices. If Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that Phoebe was a deacon, then I feel compelled—not because of a low view of Scripture but because of a high one—to conclude that Phoebe served as a *deacon* in her church, and therefore other, qualified women should be able to serve as deacons in their churches also.

### ***Too Complementarian for Some Egalitarians***

Similarly, there are others on the egalitarian side of the debate who have expressed dismay over those who lean toward complementarian teaching regarding a husband’s leadership or “headship” in marriage, as well as the belief that preaching and positions of authority in the church—for reasons that only God knows—have been assigned to qualified men.

When Tim Keller was selected by Princeton Theological Seminary to receive the inaugural Kuyper Prize named after the influential twentieth-century theologian, Abraham Kuyper, an uprising occurred among Princeton students who asserted that Keller did not deserve this award. The reasons given by the protesting students were largely centered around Keller’s complementarian belief that God has assigned the roles of preaching, pastoring, and eldering in the church to qualified men. The student protest was so strong and outspoken that it caused the Princeton authorities to rescind the award from Keller, and to instead present it to a more “qualified” candidate—that is, to a candidate that is solidly egalitarian in her or his views. Ironically, had these same standards been applied to Abraham Kuyper himself, then Kuyper, like Keller, would have been disqualified from receiving the award that bears his name.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, these are emotional and sometimes costly concerns for so many of us, regardless of which views we hold!

## **AS COMPLEMENTARIANS SEE IT...**

While unpopular in some circles, especially in a time when conversations around gender have become deeply sensitive and painful, most complementarians would give one, and only one, reason why they hold to the views that they do. Not all complementarians are out to grab or preserve male authority and patriarchy. In fact, most are not.

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Timothy 3:8.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/12/princeton-seminarians-were-outraged-over-tim-keller-heres-kellers-point-i-wanted-my-peers-to-hear/?utm\\_term=.9f552d2d629b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/12/princeton-seminarians-were-outraged-over-tim-keller-heres-kellers-point-i-wanted-my-peers-to-hear/?utm_term=.9f552d2d629b)

Most, like their egalitarian sisters and brothers who hold the Scriptures in high esteem, see themselves as men and women who are under authority. They, too believe, as Luther once said, that on every matter about which the Bible speaks, the conscience must remain at all times captive to the Word of God (and, as the case may be, to one's own well-studied interpretation of the Word of God)—and that to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Most well-studied complementarians, just like their well-studied egalitarian brothers and sisters, are seeking to be faithful to the whole Scripture, the whole time. Specifically, and along these lines, complementarians believe that the following (and sometimes controversial) statements from Paul were not written to apply only to Paul's unique, first-century, and Middle Eastern context, but to every time and context, specifically regarding life in the local church:

Paul wrote, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve,"<sup>24</sup> and, "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law Says."<sup>25</sup>

On the one hand—as most egalitarians would agree—it is a grievous error to dismiss these (or any) biblical texts as mere cultural artifacts. On the other hand—as most complementarians would agree—it is also a grievous error to interpret these passages while turning a blind eye to the broader context of the whole Scripture, and in a fashion that can limit women from pursuing God's gifts and calling fully.

We must allow Scripture to act as its own, chief interpreter. And with this principle in mind, based on the biblical teaching already mentioned that affirms women exercising gifts of teaching and leadership in multiple contexts and in multiple ways, these words that were written by Paul in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians simply *cannot* mean that it is *never* appropriate for women to teach or lead in any way, shape, or form in the local church. Rather, there seems to be a certain type of teaching and leading in the church, which, according to a complementarian understanding, God has assigned specifically to qualified men.

In the beliefs and practices of most complementarians, this means the following:

### ***On Male Leadership in the Church and Home***

Complementarians understand the word "authority" in 1 Timothy 2:12 (from the Greek word, *authentein*) as referring to the roles of formal governing and a more formal teaching that carries the authority of the governing office—namely, formal "eldering" and preaching in the gathered church—as assigned by God only to qualified men. This belief is based not on the norms of Paul's first-century, Middle Eastern culture where women were held in lower esteem than men, but rather for another, more enduring reason given by Paul: "...for Adam was formed first, then Eve."<sup>26</sup>

By appealing to God's original creation as the basis for his argument, complementarians believe that Paul was putting forth this teaching not only for his own time and context, but for every time and context, including our current one. Additionally, complementarians see it as significant that all twelve of Jesus' disciples and all of the biblical apostles and pastors were men, and so were all known authors of the books of Scripture. Church elders who had spouses were to be "the husband of one wife." Biblical passages providing instruction about the office of elder or overseer—the Greek words for which are masculine—always appear to be written with men in view.<sup>27</sup> Secondly—but also significantly in support of the complementarian view—although women served as deacons from the earliest days of church history, there are no known examples of women serving as pastors or elders for the first three centuries of church history.

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12-13.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33-34.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12-13.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Along similar lines, complementarian views regarding husbands and wives are influenced by the account of God creating Eve, where it is said that she will be Adam's "helper" (Hebrew, ezer).<sup>28</sup> Likewise, complementarians look to Paul's teaching about husbands and wives, again appealing to God's creation design for men and women, as presented in these words from Ephesians 5:22-33:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

### ***The Meaning of Biblical Words Like "Helper" and "Submit"***

Based on passages like the ones above, egalitarians and complementarians must contend faithfully with the biblical idea that wives are "helpers" to their husbands. In Genesis, it says, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a *helper* fit for him.'"<sup>29</sup> The meaning of words such as this one can sometimes get lost in translation from age to age and from culture to culture. In the modern West, for example, calling wives "helpers" to their husbands can sound diminishing, if not flat out condescending—that is, until we understand the meaning of the word in its original context. In biblical Hebrew, and especially in the Old Testament, the word ezer or helper is also a word frequently used in reference to God. God is the helper to Israel, the helper to the fatherless, and King David's helper and deliverer.<sup>30</sup> In addition to these, there are eighteen other similar uses of the word in the Old Testament.

If you have ever seen the movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, you may remember the scene where the matriarch of the family says that while the husband may be the head of the household, the wife is the neck, and the neck turns the head. This funny line is actually not far off from the biblical meaning of the term. A wife is a "helper" to her husband in that she complements or adds to and completes him, by bringing into his life a host of strengths that he would otherwise lack apart from her.

Similarly, the statement from Paul that "wives should submit to their husbands in everything" also comes to us from within a context. Wives are also told that wives must submit to their husbands not as if he were the Lord, but as to the Lord. This assumes that Christian husbands, in turn, are loving their wives as Christ loved the church—cherishing her, honoring her, loving her, and deferring to her wants and needs and hopes and dreams regularly. In their book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Tim and Kathy Keller speak of a husband's "headship" in marriage as a sort of "tie-breaking authority"—which should only come into play after a husband and wife have worked tirelessly to come to a consensus together on this or that decision. And on the rare occasions in which this becomes the case, unless a husband's Scripture-informed conscience says otherwise, he should think of his God-given "tie-breaking authority" as a means by which to lay down his life for her, versus asserting his will to get his own way—because as Paul says in the passage above, headship in the home is a form of servant-leadership, and a means of imitating Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>30</sup> Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 10:14, 70:5).

Whether a person is a complementarian or an egalitarian, it is hard to imagine how any wife would object to being “led” by a husband who—as Christ also does for us—is consistently laying down his own preferences, desires, and will, in order to serve *her*. Perhaps this is what Paul envisioned for husbands when he wrote the verse directly preceding this teaching, in which he tells husbands to “submit” to one another out of reverence for Christ.<sup>31</sup>

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Many honest, biblically faithful complementarians and egalitarians will agree that there will be wrestling and tension for anyone who seeks to follow the *whole* Christ and the *whole* Scripture on this particular issue. If we land on the complementarian side of things, we will be thought of by many of our fellow complementarians as compromised by virtue of being too “egalitarian friendly,” and some of our egalitarian friends will think we are either culturally regressive or biblically incorrect in our views. Likewise, if we land on the egalitarian side of things, we will be thought of by many of our fellow egalitarians as compromised by virtue of being too “complementarian friendly,” and some of our complementarian friends will think we are capitulating to culture and therefore compromised.

I would like to humbly submit that in my opinion, this should not be an issue over which brothers and sisters in Christ divide over or pass judgment upon each other about. I would wish to remind the reader and myself that love, according to Scripture, “believes all things.” That is to say, love gives the benefit of the doubt to those on the other side of an issue, especially when valid points can be made from Scripture on either side.

Ideally, a faithful complementarian should be able to worship and serve Jesus alongside a faithful egalitarian, and vice versa. Likewise, a faithful egalitarian should be made to feel at home at a church led by a faithful complementarian leadership, and vice versa.

One recent conversation I part of makes the point, in which the wife of an associate pastor in an egalitarian church said, “Most of the time, my husband and I lean in the complementarian direction. That being said, our egalitarian church and its leadership have welcomed us with open arms. We feel zero shame or pressure or a sense of being regarded as ‘lesser than’ because of our minority views. We feel that our interpretations of Scripture around gender are respected, our right to have them esteemed, and our gifts utilized, and our contribution celebrated.”

Similarly, I can think of no better example to end with than Katherine Leary Alsdorf, an egalitarian Christian woman who served for many years under the leadership of Tim Keller, a complementarian pastor in New York City. Katherine, who was the founding executive director of Redeemer’s Center for Faith and Work, wrote the following about her experience working with Tim, and in reference to the occasion when Princeton rescinded the Kuyper Award from her former pastor and colleague:

“Like some of the women who have objected and instigated the withdrawal of this award by Princeton Theological Seminary, I do not share Tim’s complementarian views. However, I am deeply saddened by the tone of these objections, more so by the final effect.

Tim and many others have come to their position about the roles of women in the church (and marriage) based on Biblical study and deep reflection. I chose to submit to that view during my many years at Redeemer because of the way God was at work in the lives and work of the congregation. I use the term “submit” intentionally. There are many things I have and will “submit” to in order to live out the life to which God has called me.

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<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 5:21.

I have worked at a PCUSA church in which women, even when ordained, were marginalized more than those at Redeemer. I have worked in aerospace and tech (notoriously challenging environments for women), because the work I was called to do was worth it. We ask our fellow Christ-followers to go out into every sphere of this world, regardless of how hard it might be, to do the work that Christ has equipped us to do so that he may be glorified. Tim has lived out for me, and many others, how to live with Biblical integrity, humility, and generosity, even on—especially on—issues where we disagree.”

—Katherine Leary Alsdorf<sup>32</sup>

May God give grace to us all, that we may follow Katherine and Tim’s example of being able to love and serve together, even across our differences. Even more, may God give us a willingness—even an eagerness—to open our hearts to the merits of “the other person’s view” on these important matters.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.nycreligion.info/oped-tim-keller-put-charge-train-men-women-leadership/>

# A BRIEF AND UNTECHNICAL STATEMENT OF THE REFORMED FAITH

**BY B. B. WARFIELD, 1851-1921**

1. I believe that my one aim in life and death should be to glorify God and enjoy him forever; and that God teaches me how to glorify him in his holy Word, that is, the Bible, which he had given by the infallible inspiration of this Holy Spirit in order that I may certainly know what I am to believe concerning him and what duty he requires of me.
2. I believe that God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and incomparable in all that he is; one God but three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, my Creator, my Redeemer, and my Sanctifier; in whose power and wisdom, righteousness, goodness and truth I may safely put my trust.
3. I believe that the heavens and the earth, and all that in them is, are the work of God's hands; and that all that he has made he directs and governs in all their actions; so that they fulfill the end for which they were created, and I who trust in him shall not be put to shame but may rest securely in the protection of his almighty love.
4. I believe that God created man after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and entered into a covenant of life with him upon the sole condition of the obedience that was his due: so that it was by willfully sinning against God that man fell into the sin and misery in which I have been born.
5. I believe, that, being fallen in Adam, my first father, I am by nature a child of wrath, under the condemnation of God and corrupted in body and soul, prone to evil and liable to eternal death; from which dreadful state I cannot be delivered save through the unmerited grace of God my Savior.
6. I believe that God has not left the world to perish in its sin, but out of the great love wherewith he has loved it, has from all eternity graciously chosen unto himself a multitude which no man can number, to deliver them out of their sin and misery, and of them to build up again in the world his kingdom of righteousness: in which kingdom I may be assured I have my part, if I hold fast to Christ the Lord.
7. I believe that God has redeemed his people unto himself through Jesus Christ our Lord; who, though he was and ever continues to be the eternal Son of God, yet was born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that are under the law: I believe that he bore the penalty due to my sins in his own body on the tree, and fulfilled in his own person the obedience I owe to the righteousness of God, and now presents me to his Father as his purchased possession, to the praise of the glory of his grace forever: wherefore renouncing all merit of my own, I put all my trust only in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ my redeemer.
8. I believe that Jesus Christ my redeemer, who died for my offences was raised again for my justification, and ascended into the heavens, where he sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty, continually making intercession for his people, and governing the whole world as head over all things for his Church: so that I need fear no evil and may surely know that nothing can snatch me out of his hands and nothing can separate me from his love.



9. I believe that the redemption wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ is effectually applied to all his people by the Holy Spirit, who works faith in me and thereby unites me to Christ, renews me in the whole man after the image of God, and enables me more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; until, this gracious work having been completed in me, I shall be received into glory: in which great hope abiding, I must ever strive to perfect holiness in the fear of God.
10. I believe that God requires of me, under the Gospel, first of all, that, out of a true sense of my sin and misery and apprehension of his mercy in Christ, I should turn with grief and hatred away from sin and receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation; that, so being united to him, I may receive pardon for my sins and be accepted as righteous in God's sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to me and received by faith alone; and thus and thus only do I believe I may be received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.
11. I believe that, having been pardoned and accepted for Christ's sake, it is further required of me that I walk in the Spirit whom he has purchased for me, and by whom love is shed abroad in my heart; fulfilling the obedience I owe to Christ my King; faithfully performing all the duties laid upon me by the holy law of God my heavenly Father; and ever reflecting in my life and conduct, the perfect example that has been set me by Christ Jesus my Leader, who has died for me and granted to me his Holy Spirit just that I may do the good works which God has afore prepared that I should walk in them.
12. I believe that God has established his Church in the world and endowed it with the ministry of the Word and the holy ordinances of Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Prayer; in order that through these as means, the riches of his grace in the Gospel may be made known to the world, and, by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them, the benefits of redemption may be communicated to his people: wherefore also it is required of me that I attend on these means of grace with diligence, preparation, and prayer, so that through them I may be instructed and strengthened in faith, and in holiness of life and in love; and that I use my best endeavors to carry this Gospel and convey these means of grace to the whole world.
13. I believe that as Jesus Christ has once come in grace, so also is he to come a second time in glory, to judge the world in righteousness and assign to each his eternal award: and I believe that if I die in Christ, my soul shall be at death made perfect in holiness and go home to the Lord; and when he shall return to his majesty I shall be raised in glory and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity: encouraged by which blessed hope it is required of me willingly to take my part in suffering hardship here as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, being assured that if I die with him I shall also live with him, if I endure, I shall also reign with him.

And to him, my Redeemer,  
with the Father,  
and the Holy Spirit,  
Three Persons, one God,  
be glory forever, world without end,  
Amen, and Amen.

# BASIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

BY SCOTT SAULS

Christianity assumes a wholehearted affirmation of those fundamental doctrines expressed in Scripture. These doctrines can be summarized under three basic headings: Catholic, Evangelical, and Reformed.

**Catholic.** “Catholic” is a term that recognizes our fundamental unity with all true Christians, and of expressing our longing to see greater unity within the body of Christ. By “Catholic” we’re not referring to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the original meaning of the term, which is “according to the whole” or “universal.” In other words, we hold to those basic teachings believed by all churches throughout history that have proclaimed historic Christianity. These teachings have been confessed in the ecumenical creeds, particularly the *Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds*. The three basic teachings of the “Catholic” tradition are:

- **Trinity:** there is one God, who eternally exists in a community of three persons —Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Incarnation:** the 2nd person of the Trinity—God the Son— became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both fully God and fully human.
- **Atonement:** Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead for the salvation of sinners.

**Evangelical.** “Evangelical” is a way of describing ourselves as “Gospel people” and “Bible people.” We are committed to the central doctrine of justification by faith alone and to the full inspiration and total truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures. As Gospel people we proclaim and teach that salvation is only by God’s grace alone and is received by faith in Christ alone. As Bible people we reject the downplaying of biblical teaching by some 19th and 20th century “modern” critics. Specifically, we believe the Scriptures are inerrant (without error) and infallible (completely trustworthy) and are the ultimate authority for our beliefs and lives. We believe in the historicity of the biblical miracles and live in joyful expectation of Christ’s Second Coming.

**Reformed.** The Protestant Reformation, which started in the 16th century, emphasized the importance of preaching in worship, the sovereignty of God in creation and redemption, the priesthood of all believers, and the centrality of the Gospel in the life of the church. As a Reformed Church, we believe that the sacraments of baptism and communion not only represent God’s grace, but also seal and apply that grace to our lives. As a Reformed Church, we are committed to a Presbyterian (representative) system of church government. As Reformed Christians, we are committed to living out the implications of God’s mercy and grace in every area of our lives, and believe that all of life, at home, at work, at play, is to be lived to the glory of God. Reformed Churches have a distinct way of talking about God’s grace in salvation. Five distinctives can be made:

**The Human Condition.** Because of the fall, we are more sinful than we could ever imagine (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9). Not only have we been credited with Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12-19), but are responsible for our own sin. In our fallen state, and without God’s saving rescue, we are spiritually unable to choose to love and obey God (Romans 3:9-20, 8:5-8). We are all in this same boat – desperately in need of God’s grace and loving, saving pursuit.

**The Initiative of God, the Father.** Because of our inherent brokenness and sin, we need our God to pursue us, which he certainly does. Why does he do this? Because, while we are more sinful than we could ever imagine, we are also more loved than we have ever dreamed! By his grace, God takes the initiative in establishing relationship with us, reaches down, captures our heart, and invites us into a love relationship with himself (John 6:37-39, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

**The Work of Jesus, the Son.** God didn't just come up with the idea of salvation. He provided *the* way of salvation through Jesus (John 10:14-15, Ephesians 5:25-27). On the cross of Jesus, we see the benediction of God to all who would believe: "My child, I love you and have forgiven you" (1 John 4:10, Romans 5:10, Galatians 3:13). In other words, the cross was not just an act of good will—it was a fully effective saving act.

**The Ministry of the Holy Spirit.** Through the Holy Spirit's ministry God transforms our lives. How? By convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and capturing our hearts with the love and mercy of God (Ezekiel 36:25-27). The Spirit of God opens our eyes to the beauty of Jesus (John 6:44-45, Philippians 2:13).

**The Promise of the Gospel.** He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6). The God who has captured your heart will never leave you or forsake you. Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God has promised his love for you—and he will keep that promise. He will never let you go. How do I know he has embraced me? I have embraced him. (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

**FOR FURTHER READING:**

J.I. Packer, *Basic Theology*, R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, and *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

# CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALS

BY SCOTT SAULS

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

## THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

Reformed Theology is the body of biblical teaching that was rediscovered by those commonly known as the Protestant Reformers, beginning with Martin Luther in 1517 A.D. Throughout church history, the tenets of Reformed Theology have been embraced by people such as St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Matthew Henry, and Jonathan Edwards. More contemporary adherents include Francis Schaeffer, J.I. Packer, John Stott, Eugene Peterson, James Montgomery Boice, and R.C. Sproul. A good summary of Reformed Theology is given in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

## THE FIVE "POINTS" OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

The five "points" of Reformed Theology have to do with how a person comes to faith in Jesus and continues as a follower of Jesus until the end. The five points are a helpful tool to enable us to understand God's part and our part in the process of knowing and following him.

### ***Point 1—Each human being enters life with a fallen heart that is dead to the things of God.***

Unaided by a power outside ourselves, we are "spiritual corpses" incapable of responding to spiritual things (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5, 8). Ephesians tells us, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:1, 4, 8). The major implication here is that in their natural condition, people are powerless on their own to turn from sin and trust in Jesus. As is the case for a physical corpse, a spiritual

corpse is *incapable of raising itself* to life. An outside influence is necessary, or the corpse will remain helplessly dead. So, for spiritual life to begin, *GOD* must first act upon and breathe spiritual life into the human heart. Jesus himself says that “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (lit., “drags” or “compels”), and I will raise him up at the last day. The word translated “draws” was used in ancient times to refer to the drawing of water from a well, which of course depends completely upon the force and strength of the one pulling the water from the well. A summary of the four different views on how a person comes to faith in Christ are as follows:

- ***Works without faith (moralistic religious view).*** This view states that if a person wants to be in relationship with God and secure his favor, the person must do so by living a life of good works. His standing before God is solely determined upon the things he does with his life, whether good or bad.
- ***Faith plus works (Roman Catholic view).*** This view states that if a person wants to be in relationship with God and secure his favor, the person must do so by “doing his part.” It is Jesus’ job to die to secure my forgiveness, but it is my job to add to his work a host of my own meritorious good works, so as to secure his favor.
- ***Faith as a work (Arminian Christian view).*** This view states that if a person wants to be in relationship with God and secure his favor, the person must do so by “exercising his faith muscles.” God has done everything for us. Now all we must do is exercise our free will to trust Jesus and follow him. Then we receive favor from God.
- ***Faith as a gift from God, not by works (Reformational Christian view).*** This view states that no person will ever want to be in relationship with God, or care to secure his favor, unless and until God intervenes. Scripture teaches that we enter our existence spiritually dead, unable to raise ourselves to spiritual life. As such, if we have faith in Christ, we may assume that this is the case solely because God intervened to change our hearts, to “regenerate” us as it were, so that our hearts are now disposed to trust and follow Christ (John 6:37, 44; Ephesians 2; etc.).

Natural humanity, apart from the work of God’s Spirit, possesses a heart that is polluted by his fallen condition (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:9-19, 8:5-8). Apart from God’s intervention, every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil always (Genesis 6:5). Apart from an act of God on the heart, there is no one who seeks God, not even one (Romans 3:11).

**NOTE:** We will only be able to embrace the next four points to the degree that we are able to embrace this one—that we are dead to the things of God unless and until God does a resurrecting work on our hearts.

### ***Point 2—God, motivated by his predetermined saving love, chose some from the human race to be his children, before time began.***

These people the Bible calls his “elect” (Jeremiah 1:5; Romans 9:11; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). (God) chose us in Jesus *b/4* the creation of this world, to be holy & blameless in his sight. *In love he predestined* us to be adopted as his sons, in accordance w/his pleasure & will (Ephesians 1:4-5). Some implications include:

- ***We choose Jesus because Jesus first chose us*** (John 1:12-13; 15:16; Acts 13:48). The implication of this is that one can make a “decision for Jesus” (to trust and follow him) only if Jesus has already made a decision for him/her.
- ***God therefore chose his children not on the basis of a foreseen knowledge*** of who would receive Jesus, but rather on the basis of his unique, targeted, saving love for each of his children.
- ***God chose also, by his own volition, not to save others,*** but rather to “pass them over” to the end that they receive justice for their sin (Romans 9:6ff.):

“It is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel . . . There was Rebekah . . . when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born & had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to his choice

might stand, not because of works, but because of him who calls, it was said to her, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! . . . God has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires." (Romans 9:6ff.)

Some related implications:

- God is just, but he is *not* "fair" in an ultimate sense. If he were, he would save no one. To be fair in the ultimate sense would be to give all people what they deserve. Lord, spare us from fairness!
- God is not to blame for the hardness of a person's heart toward him and toward Jesus (Romans 1:18-24). One of the more difficult statements in Scripture is that God "hardens" the hearts of some (i.e., Pharaoh in the book of Exodus). To be consistent with the rest of Scripture (which is its own best interpreter), we have to conclude that God does not *actively* place evil in people's hearts, but rather *leaves some people in their natural state* of depravity and opposition toward him. When it says in Romans 1:24, for example, that God "hands people over" – it is important to see that he hands people over not to something new and different, but to be their natural, fallen selves. As Martin Luther once said, we are all like caterpillars suspended in the midst of a ring of fire. The only deliverance for us is from above. Unless God rescues us, we are undone.

**Point 3—Jesus died an atoning, substitutionary death specifically on behalf of his children.** (Matthew 22:14; Luke 1:68; John 6:37; 17:9-10, 24). Based on these and other Scriptures, it seems clear that Jesus did die for those who believe in him, but not on behalf of those who reject him. When Jesus died on the cross, it was with a view toward effectively saving *all* the people that he had already determined to save.

- *If Jesus died for those who reject him, there would be no need for those who reject him to be sentenced to eternal punishment.* This would mean that the non-believer's sin has been paid for twice—once by himself, and once by Jesus. This makes sense neither logically nor biblically. God is completely just—and this kind of arrangement (a "double payment" for someone's sin) would not be just (1 Peter 3:18).
- *If Jesus died for those who reject him, then God's plan has failed,* because this would imply that Jesus' blood has been ineffective to save those who do not trust him for salvation. It would mean that God is not sovereign over the hearts of people—which biblically is not an option to be considered.

**An important question—***What about the Scriptures that seem to say that Jesus died with the whole world in view (John 3:16), and that God wants all people to be saved and brought to a knowledge of Jesus (1 Timothy 2:3-4)?*

- In the Bible, "world" does not always mean "world" in an absolute sense, and "all" does not always mean "all" in an absolute sense (Revelation 7:9). In saying that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son... (John 3:16), Scripture expresses that Jesus died for all sorts of people (from every nation, tribe and tongue (Revelation 7:9), not for all people without exception. Think of it in terms of a party – when you say the next morning that "everyone was there at the party," you don't literally mean "everyone" but rather "a large representation of the whole."
- There is a difference between God's will of decree and his will of disposition.
  - God's will of *decree*: God has decreed (predetermined) from before time those who would come to him through faith in Jesus. Not only does he *desire* that these be saved; he actually saves them by applying Jesus' blood to them—giving them the gift of faith (John 6:37, 44).
  - God's will of *disposition*: Mysteriously, Scripture also clearly teaches that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. In that sense, he "desires" for all people to be saved from his wrath. Nonetheless, in his justice he allows some, whose souls he loves, to be left in their sin and perish in it. To us, this is a mystery that cannot be fully comprehended, but we accept it by faith because God has said it to be so (Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11; Matthew 23:37).

**Another important question:** *How do I know I am one of those for whom Jesus died?* Simply put, those who trust in Jesus and who want to obey him can be absolutely certain that they are children of God, for whom Jesus died (Matthew 7:16; 1 John 5:13). As John, the beloved disciple writes, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

**Point 4—The Holy Spirit will absolutely and completely secure the salvation of every person whom God wants to save. Of those God has chosen, not one will he fail to save.**

- *If God has called/chosen a person to be his child, then that person will most certainly respond to the Gospel with faith, because the Holy Spirit always captures the hearts of those God intends to save (John 6:37-39, 17:1-2; Acts 13:48).*
- *God's grace can be resisted by the natural human heart, but it cannot be resisted by the heart that has been awakened to God by the Holy Spirit. A person who has been awakened by God from spiritual death must necessarily respond to the Gospel message with faith and repentance. In this sense, God's grace is "irresistible."*

**Another important question—***What about free will? Doesn't God give us freedom to choose Christ or reject him?*

- Our belief is that the will of God is always stronger than the will of *man*. Therefore, if God pursues a person for salvation, God will always succeed and never fail in his purpose to capture a person's heart, no matter how resistant that person is to him initially (Acts 8:1, 9:1-19). A Scriptural example is that of Saul of Tarsus, who (in Acts 8) is officiating at the unjust execution of Stephen, a devout Christian and deacon of the church! In Acts 9 Saul is then on his way to persecute more Christians in Damascus – and Jesus blinds him on the side of the road and changes his life forever. Those the Lord pursues, the Lord ultimately saves. What grace!
- Our belief is that the will of man is free, in the sense that he is free to choose according to what his heart *desires*. A person will always choose what he/she *wants*—and the heart that has not been awakened by the Spirit is only able to choose, ultimately, *against* the will of God (Romans 6:20-22). When you don't have the Spirit, you do indeed have the capacity to do "good things"—but often for reasons that are self-centered not God-centered. For instance, many people who reject Christ obey the speed limit—but the fundamental reason is not to "do good" as much as it is to avoid the penalty of a traffic ticket. The point is, we are free to "choose Jesus," and free to accept and follow his *will from the heart and not just to avoid a consequence*, precisely because he has given our wills the freedom to do so by resurrecting our dead hearts, giving us spiritual life that is now, because of the Spirit he has given us, inclined to do good for God's sake rather than for our own self-protection (see Ephesians 2).

**Another important question—***If God will save whom he wishes, then why do we need to reach out and tell others about Jesus? Can't God save people without us?* The response is that God not only ordains the *end*, but also the means to accomplish it. In Romans 10:1-15 (which immediately follows a full chapter of Paul's teaching on the doctrine of election!) Paul writes, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

**Point 5—The Holy Spirit will absolutely and completely preserve the true Christian believer until the end.**

In other words, *once a Christian, always a Christian*. It is categorically impossible to lose your relationship with Jesus once you have truly possessed it. The basis of our preservation is the promise and power of a sovereign God, who pledges without fail to keep us as his own (John 6:37-40, 10:27-29, 17:10; Romans 8:35-39; Philippians 1:6).

**An important question**—What about those who “fall away” from the Christian faith and return to a life of sin? What about those who renounce the faith in Jesus that they once had?

- It is possible for a true Christian to fall a way for a season of time, but because he/she belongs to God, God will ultimately bring him/her back to himself (Luke 15:11-32, 22:31-34). A great example of this is the parable of the lost son in Luke 15. Another is Peter’s thrice-denial of Jesus (see Luke 22:31-34). Peter, after boldly denying three times that he ever knew Jesus, was restored beautifully by Jesus. The point is, although it may appear that a Christian has “shipwrecked his faith,” only God can ultimately judge the heart. Peter never became a non-Christian during his time of betrayal, even though for a time it appeared as if he had.
- It is possible for a non-Christian to appear to be an authentic believer, when in actuality he/she is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” (John 17:12; 1 John 2:19). For example Judas, one of Jesus’ primary followers, looked the part but was never authentic in his love for Jesus. He kept the money bag. He was a disciple for 3 years like the rest. He seemed so real that at the last supper, none of the disciples knew who the betrayer was. As 1 John 2:19 says, They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained w/us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us

## THE FIVE FOUNDATIONS OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

The following five “foundations” are what Reformed Theology regards as “essentials,” or, said differently, the major teachings of Scripture that are adhered to by every Christian throughout the ages. The foundations are:

### **Foundation 1—Reformed Theology teaches a patently God-centered approach to faith and life.**

All of reality sits under the influence and direction of God’s supremacy. This means several things:

*First, we can know our true selves only to the degree that we understand who God is.* When confronted with the perfect character and nature of a holy God (as he is revealed in Scripture), only then can we understand our own sinfulness and consequent alienation from God and need for his grace. And only then can we understand how intensely valuable we are as those created in God’s image (Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:6-8).

*Second, God is the sovereign creator and sustainer of all things, including human life.* Humanity did not evolve from other life forms (macroevolution). God created human beings with dignity as the only creatures bearing his image. The ultimate purpose for which he created us is to glorify and enjoy him (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:5, 139:14; Colossians 3:17).

*Third, restoration, or “salvation,” is the work of God from start to finish.* Because we were born spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins, we had no initial capacity in ourselves to come unaided to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It is only by his first pursuing us that we could then pursue him (Ephesians 2:1, 5; John 3:3, 15:16).

*Fourth, the whole of life, both personal and public, is to be committed to God.* As far as the life of the Christian is concerned, there is no distinction between the “sacred” and the “secular,” because the understood purpose of all of life for the Christian is to bring glory to God, whether through our work, play, rest, relationships or worship (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23-24).

### **Foundation 2—Reformed Theology derives its affirmations/beliefs from the Bible alone.**

Reformed Theology teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is without error in its original manuscripts, and contains everything we need to know about having a right relationship with him and our fellow human beings. As such, the Bible is the basis for *all* Christian beliefs (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Rather than determine truth by our own opinions and personal feelings (which can be very inconsistent and self-serving), we seek truth from God, the Author and Giver of all truth. To deviate from any of the clear teachings of Scripture in what we believe, say or



do is to exchange the truth of God for a lie—and, in the words of Martin Luther, “is neither right nor safe.” The Bible alone (concerning all issues about which it speaks), therefore, must be the ultimate determining factor of both what we believe and how we live (John 14:6; Romans 1:25).

### **Foundation 3—Reformed Theology affirms that we are saved by faith alone.**

This means several things:

*First, our acceptance in the sight of God is contingent upon faith, and faith alone* (Romans 3:21-24; Ephesians 2:8-9).

*Second, it is impossible for us as sinful people to earn favor from God by doing good things.* While there are many noble and praiseworthy things that people do, none of them is good enough to gain merit with God, because God’s only acceptable standard is absolute, sinless perfection (Matthew 5:48; Romans 3:23).

*Third, this standard of perfection has been met by one Person, the God-Man Jesus.* By personally trusting in his substitutionary life and death, his record is credited to us by God—as if it were us, not Jesus, who lived the perfect and acceptable life that he lived. Through the life and death of Jesus we are made by God to be acceptable in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

*Fourth, the consequent fruit of faith in Christ is a life of love or “good works,” which God has prepared for us to do.* Our being justified (declared not guilty by God) through faith in Jesus will gradually and necessarily lead to personal character that seeks to love God and do what he commands (Ephesians 2:8-10; John 14:15; Philippians 2:13). As Martin Luther once said, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” Jesus stated clearly that the evidence of true conversion is that our lives begin, over a period of time, to reflect his beautiful character (Luke 6:46; Ephesians 2:10). The common teaching of “Carnal Christianity” (the idea that a person can have Jesus as Savior without following him) is inconsistent with biblical teaching.

### **Foundation 4—Reformed Theology is Christ-centered.**

In other words, Jesus is the one and only head of the church and as such is the sole governor of the Christian believer’s conscience. Thus, we look to Jesus as God’s ultimate and final prophet, priest, and king:

*As prophet, Jesus is the final “Word” of God to the world.* Anyone who has seen Jesus has seen God himself, because Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (John 1:1, 14, 14:9; Hebrews 1:3). Some implications of Jesus as prophet include:

- Jesus’ words are given to be received, embraced and followed as the very words of God (John 6:29; Luke 6:46; John 14:23).
- As prophet, Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and his people (1 Timothy 2:5), and, therefore, is the one and only way to a right relationship with him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

*As priest, Jesus serves us in two capacities:*

- He stands as our substitute, in that he lived the perfect life in our place (to satisfy for us God’s demand for perfect righteousness) and died a shameful death in our place (to satisfy for us God’s justice toward our sin).
- He stands as our intercessor. Without ceasing, he prays for us to the Father (John 17:20-26; Hebrews 7:25).

*As King, Jesus has assumed authority over not only us as the members of God’s Kingdom, but also over the entire universe.* Currently, he rules the lives of all his people in that we submit to him by obeying his commands, but the day will soon come when “every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (King), to the glory of God the Father” (Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 28:18; John 14:15; Philippians 2:10-11).

## **Foundation 5—Reformed Theology affirms three biblical covenants.**

These three covenants are what make up the basis of God's relationship with those who trust in Jesus:

*First, there is the covenant of redemption, which is the only covenant that does not directly include human beings. It consists of God's plan to redeem (purchase back both for himself and from himself) his cherished people. From eternity past, the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have been unified in purpose to apply the gift of salvation freely to each one of God's chosen people (Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:4-5). So precious are we in his sight, that God regards us as his special gift to his Son (John 17:6). Aspects of the redemption covenant include:*

- God the Father chose or predestined who would be his elect (Ephesians 1:4-5).
- God the Son (Jesus) accomplished the work necessary to purchase our pardon and give us right standing before God as Judge (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- God the Spirit applies the work of the Son to our hearts and lives, thus making the Father's call effective (John 3:3-10; Ephesians 2:4-5).

*Second, there is the covenant of works, which was the first covenant initiated by God with the human race. In this covenant, "life was promised to Adam; and in him to his descendants (the human race), upon condition of perfect obedience" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Genesis 2:16-17).*

- The penalty for violating this covenant (through sin) was and is death. All people who are not under the protection of the covenant of grace (see below) are bound by the covenant of works and its ultimate penalty. Because Adam, and, consequently, the entire human race, has failed to keep this covenant, we all enter the world under the sentence of death (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 3:23).
- Even Christians will be judged by this covenant on the last day. The difference, however, is that they will be judged by the works of Jesus rather than by their own (because of the covenant of grace, as described below).

### **The final covenant**

The third and final biblical covenant is *the covenant of grace*. This covenant will be covered in the next lesson's reading.

# WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF GRACE?

**BY DANIEL HYDE FROM LIGONIER.ORG**

Reformed Christians speak of Scripture as the unfolding drama of God's covenant of grace. We do this because the apostle Paul speaks of the Israelites, saying, "To them belong . . . the covenants" (Romans 9:5). The Bible is a covenantal story, and one that Paul, again, describes as "the covenants of promise" (Ephesians. 2:12).

The essence of the covenant of grace is the same throughout the Old and New Testaments—God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But its historical administration has varied by time and place. For example, the covenant of grace widened from the Old Testament to the New Testament, as it was administered first with small families (e.g., the families of Noah and Abram), then with the nation of Israel, but now with the church, which is made up of people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Also, it was administered in the Old Testament through what the New Testament authors describe as "types" and "shadows" (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1), such as sacrifices, the priesthood, and the temple, all of which pointed to their reality, Jesus Christ (e.g., Colossians 2:17).

The Reformed creeds and confessions express the continuity of God's covenant of grace despite its many historical variations. For instance, the Heidelberg Catechism says: "... God himself first revealed [it] in Paradise, [and] afterwards [it was] proclaimed by the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law, and finally fulfilled in his well-beloved Son" (Q&A 19). This means the Bible is one story of the Gospel, which God has spoken "in many times and in many ways" (Hebrews 1:1), whether in Paradise to Adam; during the days of the patriarchs, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses; through the ministry of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Joel; or through the ceremonies of the Levitical sacrifices. All of this came to fruition in Jesus Christ.

Likewise, while recognizing the variations in the administration of the covenant of grace between the Old and New Testaments, the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms the continuity of the covenant in the promise of Christ and his fulfillment of it:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

Under the Gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations. (7.5-6)

When our Lord Jesus Christ was born, lived, died, and was raised from the grave, the covenant of grace reached its zenith in what the Bible calls "the new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24). Under the covenant of grace, Christ accomplished what Adam failed to do in the covenant of works, so we receive grace:

Man's work faileth, Christ's availeth;

He is all our righteousness;

He, our Savior, has forever

Set us free from dire distress.

Through his merit we inherit

Light and peace and happiness.

# WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT BAPTISM?

**BY CPC STAFF**

Baptism is a sacrament—a practice instituted by Jesus—for the New Testament Church. When we administer baptism to someone, the church officially and solemnly admits them into the church body as a member. Baptism is the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace to his people in the church—his promise to us that he saves and is faithful to them. We believe baptism is a continuation of circumcision—the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace in the Old Testament.

Baptism is also a sign of the believer's engrafting into Christ, that is, their rebirth, which is an acknowledgment of the remission of sins, and their yielding to God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life.

As Jesus directed in Matthew 28:19-20, we should practice baptism until he comes back and makes all things new again.

The minister administers baptism by sprinkling or pouring water over the individual, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is not only for those who profess faith in and obedience to Christ but is also for the infants and children of one or both believing parents. Because it is a declaration of God's faithfulness to his church, we believe baptism should never be neglected or put off. However, we also believe baptism is not inseparably connected with God's grace and salvation. One can be saved without baptism; on the other hand, everyone who is baptized is not automatically saved.

Finally, baptism's effectiveness is not dependent upon the moment it occurs. But when we practice baptism, we tangibly experience the grace promised, embodied, and conferred by the Holy Spirit to everyone to whom that grace is given, according to the purpose of God's own will and in his appointed time, whenever that may occur in their lifetime. Therefore, we believe if a Christian church has already baptized you, Christ Presbyterian Church (or any other church!) does not need to baptize you again. Baptism signifies God's faithfulness and promises to you, even if you were unaware of them at the time of your baptism.