

# CPC 101

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THE "WHO ARE WE?" COURSE OF  
CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
NASHVILLE, TN

*(REVISED MAY 2025)*



CHRIST  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## **PURPOSE OF CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 101**

CPC101 aims to provide information about Christ Presbyterian Church and how to become part of the story God is writing in, around, and through the shared life of our growing church family. It also addresses common questions about what it means to be a Christian in general and a member of Christ Pres in particular.

In CPC101, you will learn about (and hopefully connect with) our vision, mission, core beliefs, and ministry philosophy. You will likely also have some questions along the way. When this is the case, please ask or contact any church staff member to find the answers.

We hope that CPC101 will be a positive experience for you. We're delighted you are here!

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## SECTION 1: OUR CORE BELIEFS

At Christ Presbyterian Church, we embrace biblical and historical Christianity as expressed in the Old and New Testaments and summarized in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Additionally, we affirm the five tenets of the Protestant Reformation: Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and to God alone be the glory. Our Constitution comprises the Westminster Standards (the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*) and the Presbyterian Church in America's (PCA) *Book of Church Order*.

**1. The Bible** is the inspired Word of God. It is without error in its original manuscripts and contains everything we need to know about having a right relationship with God and our fellow human beings. The Bible is the basis for all of our essential beliefs (2 Timothy 3: 16–17).

**2. God** is one (Mark 12:29), yet mysteriously exists in three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who are to be equally loved, honored, and adored (Matthew 28:19).

**3. Jesus Christ** is fully God and fully human. He is the sole Mediator able to restore the broken relationship and the resulting alienation between God and people (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

**4. The Holy Spirit** is God, the third Person of the Trinity. He is alive and active. He indwells followers of Christ, working in unison with the Word of God to guide them in all truth. He is the power that enables Christians to live as new creations in Christ and empowers believers for service (John 16:7–14; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 6:17).

**5. People** are created by God and in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). On this basis, all people must be treated with dignity, honor, love, and respect (James 3:9–10). At the same time, in their quest for independence and the centrality of self, all people begin their lives alienated from God, and in this condition, are without hope and under judgment, a condition that can only be cured through God's loving, gracious, and saving intervention through Christ (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1). As the image of God, we are most alive when our trust, affections, and allegiances center on him.

**6. Salvation** (a restored relationship with God and newness of life) is activated when the Holy Spirit gives people a new heart, leading and enabling them to trust in Jesus alone for salvation (John 1:12–13). Because God loves his creation, he will restore the entire universe to a condition of beauty, rest, joy, perfection, and freedom (Romans 8:18–30). God's world, which began as a promising garden (Genesis 1:27–31), will find its fulfillment in a perfected, life-giving city in which there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21: 1–8).

**7. Good works** do not and cannot make us acceptable to God (Ephesians 2:8–9), but are the natural outcome of authentic faith in Jesus (James 2:17). We become more fully human—the very best and most healthy version of ourselves—to the degree that we follow God’s loving commands. His commands, properly understood, are neither limiting nor oppressive but life-giving. Obedience to God’s commands is an essential prerequisite for true human flourishing.

**8. The Church** is the family of God and consists of those who place their personal trust (faith) in Jesus. God wants all members of his worldwide Church, together with their children, to be active in a local church that gathers weekly to worship God, serve each other, and be a life-giving presence in their local community and world (Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:24–25).

## WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN, AND WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

A Christian believes the gospel or “good news” of Jesus Christ. At its core, the gospel is about who Jesus is, what Jesus has done, what Jesus is doing, and what Jesus will do.

The gospel is the core message of biblical Christianity—it is good news that it is not just a first step in a “staircase” of truths. It is better likened to the hub of a wheel, the central reality around which everything else orbits. It is not a fundamental truth from which we move on to deeper truths but is the foundational truth on which all other truths rest. Whether you are just starting to investigate Christianity or are a life-long follower of Christ, the gospel is the single thing that must be grasped, internalized, and embraced to move forward with Jesus. Without the gospel, life becomes unhealthy and disoriented in more ways than one can count. With the gospel, we are reconciled with God and at peace with him.

### THE GOSPEL DEFINED

From the very opening pages of the Bible, we learn that even though God created man “very good” (Genesis 1:31), Adam, humanity’s representative, did what God explicitly told him not to do. In his action, man attempted to unseat God as the Sovereign One and place himself in a spot that only God can justly occupy. Adam’s disobedience is “sin,” which is any lack of conformity to God’s law. With Adam’s actions, sin entered the world, and man was set at enmity with God, and thus, he—and we, together with him—became dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1–3).

But God is not content to leave his people in sin. In the same account where we read about the fall of man, we also read about the redemption of man (Genesis 3). Despite our sin which is worthy of judgment, God would take it upon himself to save his people through the offspring of the woman—one who would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). So the story of the Bible—and thus the gospel, or the “good news” of the Bible—is that God would send his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the promised offspring of the woman, to do what the first Adam

couldn't do: Be completely obedient and righteous with respect to God's law, and pay for all the sins of God's people through his suffering and death on the cross (Romans 5:12–21).

The good news is that though it was Jesus' work that satisfied God's justice, he applies that work to all who believe in him; we get the credit (2 Corinthians 5:21)! Those who have faith in the work that Jesus did on their behalf are reconciled with God (John 3:16), are being made to be more and more like Jesus day-by-day (Ephesians 4:22–24), and will one day be glorified in Christ, and live with him forever (1 Corinthians 13:13).

## THE FIVE SOLAS

### *A Summary by James Montgomery Boice*

**Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):** When the Reformers used the words Sola Scriptura, they were expressing their concern for the Bible's authority, and what they meant is that the Bible alone is our ultimate authority, not the pope, not the Church, not the traditions of the church or church councils, still less personal intimations or subjective feelings, but Scripture only. Other sources of authority may have an important role to play. Some are even established by God, such as the authority of church elders, the authority of the state, or the authority of parents over children. But Scripture alone is truly ultimate. Therefore, if any of these other authorities depart from Bible teaching, they are to be judged by the Bible and rejected.

**Solus Christus (Christ Alone):** The Church of the Middle Ages spoke about Christ. A church that failed to do that could hardly claim to be Christian. But the medieval Church had added many human achievements to Christ's work, so that it was no longer possible to say that salvation was entirely by Christ and his atonement. This was the most basic of all heresies, as the Reformers rightly perceived. It was the work of God plus our own righteousness. The Reformation motto, Solus Christus, was formed to repudiate this error. It affirmed that salvation has been accomplished once for all by the mediatorial work of the historical Jesus Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification, and any "gospel" that fails to acknowledge that or denies it is a false gospel that will save no one.

**Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):** The words Sola Gratia mean that human beings have no claim upon God. That is, God owes us nothing except just punishment for our many and very willful sins. Therefore, if he does save sinners, which he does in the case of some but not all, it is only because it pleases him to do it. Indeed, apart from this grace and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that flows from it, no one would be saved, since in our lost condition, human beings are not capable of winning, seeking out, or even cooperating with God's grace. By insisting on "grace alone" the Reformers were denying that human methods, techniques, or strategies in themselves could ever bring anyone to faith. It is grace alone expressed through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ, releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from death to spiritual life.

**Sola Fide (Faith alone):** The Reformers never tired of saying that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. When put into theological shorthand, the doctrine was expressed as justification by faith alone, the article by which the Church stands or falls, according to Martin Luther. The Reformers called justification by faith Christianity's material principle because it involves the very matter or substance of what a person must understand and believe to be saved. Justification is a declaration of God based on the work of Christ. It flows from God's grace, and it comes to the individual not by anything he or she might do but by "faith alone" (*sola fide*). We may state the full doctrine as: Justification is the act of God by which he declares sinners to be righteous because of Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

**Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone):** Each of the great solas is summed up in the fifth Reformation motto: *Soli Deo Gloria*, meaning to God alone be the glory. It is what the apostle Paul expressed in Romans 11:36 when he wrote, "to Him be the glory forever! Amen." These words follow naturally from the preceding words, "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (v. 36), since it is because all things really are from God, and to God, that we say, "to God alone be the glory."

## THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM (THE T.U.L.I.P.)

By John H. Gerstner

### Total Depravity

When man first sinned, he "died" (Genesis 2:17). Now man is spiritually dead—not well, not sick, not even terminally ill, but "dead" in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). His *depravity*, pertaining to all aspects of his personality, is *total*. This is not to be confused with utter depravity, for there is room for deprovement. Consequently, this slave of sin (John 8:34) exploits every opportunity to sin in every area of his being: in thought, word, and deed, by commission and omission, and even his "good works" are bad (Genesis 6:5). *Total Depravity* is our one original contribution to T.U.L.I.P.; we are the dirty soil in which God plants his flower and from our filth produces a thing of divine beauty.

### Unconditional Election

If man is as depraved as the Bible says he is, his divine *election* to salvation would have to be as *unconditional* as the Bible says it is (Romans 9:15). How could totally depraved persons exercise faith in a God they hate or behave virtuously while averse to virtue? If it were a matter of foreseeing, what would God foresee but sin and unbelief unless he elected to rescue some of the deservedly perishing? The *election* to salvation is *absolutely unconditional*, but the *salvation* is not, faith being its prerequisite and good works its postrequisite.

### Limited Atonement

The *atonement* is the means by which God brings totally depraved but unconditionally elect persons to himself without violence to his own inexorable holiness. His mercy constrains him to save, and his holiness restrains him from

saving unjustly. So God became man in Christ that he could pay the price of sin and remained God (he did not “empty” himself of deity when he became incarnate!) so that the purchase was infinite in value. Thus, the atonement was *unlimited* in its sufficiency as in its *offer* and *limited* only in its specific design for those who believe (John 3:16). Those who believe are the elect (Romans 8:30). “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” at once explains the unconditional character of election and the limitedness of the atonement.

### **Irresistible Grace**

The infinitely precious atonement would be of no value (because totally depraved persons, even though elect, are utterly hostile to God) unless something was done to them in grace that corresponded to what was done for them in the atonement. Saving grace need not only be provided but applied by means of union with Christ and regeneration. This divine *grace* is *irresistible* or efficacious because it mercifully changes the depraved soul. When a person is born again from above by the Spirit, he, as a new creature, finds it as natural (irresistible) to come to Christ as in his depravity, he finds it natural (irresistible) to flee from him (John 3:3-8). Grace is irresistible not by being against man’s will but by recreating his will.

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

The purpose of God would fail if the last one of Christ’s sheep were not brought and kept within his fold (John 17:20, 21; 2 Peter 3:9). So the saints must be persevering, and this could only be possible or certain by God’s preserving. Having put his hand to the plow, God never turns back (Philippians 1:6). Because he does not, neither do his saints (Philippians 2:11, 12). The perseverance by the saints is the consequence of the *preservation of the saints*.

# SECTION 2: OUR STORY AND MINISTRY MODEL

## OUR ABBREVIATED STORY

Christ Presbyterian Church was born on January 4, 1981, when we held our first worship service at Hillsboro High School in Green Hills.

We have had several wonderful pastors who have led us through many chapters and, frankly, through a handful of ups and downs along the way. The “up” seasons have been a demonstration of God’s kindness, and the “down” seasons a demonstration of God’s sustaining love for his Church—as evidenced by the fact that we are still here and, by the grace of God, are still stewards of a very visible, broadly reaching, ministry to and beyond the metropolitan Nashville region.

Those who have led us as senior pastors include:

- Dr. Cortez Cooper (1981–1985)
- Dr. Peter Doyle (1985–1988)
- Dr. Charles McGowan (1988–2004)
- Dr. Ray Ortlund (2004–2007)
- Dr. Wilson Benton (2007–2012)
- Rev. Scott Sauls (2012–2023)

Christ Presbyterian Church began searching for our next senior pastor as we assembled a pastor search committee in May of 2024, and we prayerfully and eagerly await to see who the Lord will bring to CPC.

Christ Presbyterian Church became a multi-site church in recent years and has three congregations around the metro area (Nashville, Music Row, and Cool Springs), each with its own dedicated pastoral leadership. For information about each site, you can visit our website at [christpres.org](http://christpres.org).

We also celebrate what Jesus has done through Christ Pres in that many of the Nashville-based PCA churches have been formed out of CPC, and our prayer is that the Lord would continue to use us as a launch pad for growing his Church.

## OUR DENOMINATION

Christ Presbyterian Church is part of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination. The Presbyterian Church in America was formed in 1973 as a denomination “Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission.”

The PCA is an Evangelical denomination in that we proclaim the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The word “evangelical” comes from the

Greek word meaning “good news,” We desire all people to trust in the saving work of Jesus and enjoy eternal life in him.

The PCA is a *Reformed* denomination in that we believe in the biblical truth proclaimed during the Protestant Reformation. The Word of God, rather than tradition, is the only guide for the Church. God alone saves through his immeasurable mercy and according to his sovereign plan.

The PCA is a *confessional* denomination. This means that we have a written “confession of faith,” which we believe to be a good and accurate summary of the teaching of the whole Bible. The PCA has committed firmly to the doctrinal standards significant in Presbyterianism since 1645, namely the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms*.

The PCA is a *Presbyterian* denomination in that we have a representative form of church government. A local church is governed by a *Session* composed of elders (i.e., *presbyters*) elected by the members of the congregation. Pastors and representatives of local churches in a region form a *Presbytery*. Representatives of Presbyteries and local churches meet annually at a *General Assembly*.

The General Assembly Committees and Agencies help local churches combine their efforts and resources to advance God’s Kingdom more effectively.

## OUR MISSION, VISION, AND CULTURE

In November of 2024, the Session of Christ Presbyterian Church formed new vision and mission statements to reflect what Jesus instructed the Church to do—to make disciples all over the world (Matthew 28:18–20).

### **Our Vision:**

Christ Presbyterian Church is a Bible-centered, prayer-driven church committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ.

### **Our Mission:**

Christ Presbyterian Church is prayerfully committed to making followers of Jesus by teaching them to **worship** God in spirit and in truth, **encourage** one another to love and good works, and **serve** others as faithful stewards of God’s grace until the Lord comes again.

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

### **Worship**

“Worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). We regularly worship God, both privately and corporately, guided by Word and Sacrament, in adoring and repentant faith, to acknowledge the beauty and worthiness of the Triune God—to serve the Lord and be served by the Lord.

**Encourage**

“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). We regularly gather with each other in smaller groups to encourage one another by “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

**Serve**

Each of us has “received a gift,” and the Bible instructs us to “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10). We can both serve and give *inside* the church (Galatians 6:10) and outside the church as we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) until every nation, tribe, and tongue stands before the throne of Jesus (Revelation 3:9–12).

## SECTION 3: APPLYING OUR VISION AND MISSION THROUGH OUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

*By Lee Eric Fesko*

There's a lot of talk about identity these days. We often hang our identities on things like our occupation. We'll say, "I am a teacher; I am a certified public accountant; I am an actor." Or, we'll hang our identities on what we can do, "I am a runner; I am a football player; I am a cross-stitcher."

And while all those things are very good, almost anything you name to fill that blank is temporary. They are things that can, and will one day, go away, sometimes without notice. And once they go away, then what?

Many of you have lived through this sort of personal crisis. Once the thing you are known for disappears, it leaves a vacuum. Then the search begins—it starts over with questions like, "Who am I?"

Who are you?

To say the words, "I am a Christian . . ." speaks to something eternal. Moreover, it's something that won't go away, ever. It's the only identity investment worth pursuing; it's something eternal and doesn't go away.

Some time ago, when the pastors here at CPC got together to start talking about the vision for our church—the direction in which we wanted to take the church—we started asking questions about identity.

Who are we?

And much like it works on an individual basis, there are many things to which we as a church could hitch our wagons. And then we could go and tell our friends, "Christ Presbyterian Church is a church that is . . ."

What?

We could steer the church in many different directions, but it would be a mistake if we didn't steer it in an eternal direction—towards something that doesn't go away.

In one sense, we, as the Church, shouldn't be looking for something new and flashy—a new way to attract people. Because if you think about it, if we stumble across a new way to make the church thrive, that's a pretty audacious statement. We're saying we figured something out that two thousand years of Church history couldn't.

In the 1930s, a company sold a cleaner that could remove coal residue from wallpaper, as many of the fireplaces and stoves were fueled by coal back then. However, as oil and gas furnaces became more popular in the 1950s, demand fell for the product, and the makers of it considered abandoning the business altogether. But they heard about a teacher in their hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, who was using their product in her classroom for arts and crafts, and just like that, they reinvented themselves by adding a little color to their product and then began marketing their cleaning product as a toy for children called Play-Doh. Since then, some 3 billion cans of the product have been sold.

Companies always have to figure out ways to reinvent themselves because people change. People's needs change—culture changes. So they adapt.

Shouldn't the Church? Indeed, we can make minor adaptations and adjustments, but when talking about vision—what we're here to do and be—how much adjusting is warranted? Isn't there something that binds the Church together despite the societal norms, despite its location, or regardless of what's going on in the cultural moment?

God is infinite, eternal, and *unchanging*. And what he has supplied for the brokenness of humanity has not changed since the fall of Adam. It's the same solution—the only solution for man's brokenness. And that solution was clearly revealed in Jesus Christ, who condescended to us from heaven, lived a perfectly righteous life on our behalf, and died to make payment for our sins.

And we are saved.

And before he ascended to heaven to take his rightful place at the Father's right hand, he gave us specific, explicit instruction. Jesus plainly told us, "Here's what I want you to do now . . . Go make disciples. Go do that."

The Christian Church—just think about that—the Christian Church has existed for some two thousand years, and it started with a group of some 500 people who were witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and it's never died—it's never come close to dying. The Church has flourished for two thousand years, not because it reinvented itself every few decades to stay relevant. It's flourished because at its center is something eternal—something that doesn't go away—at its center is Jesus. And he promised he would fill us with his Spirit to do what he told us to do—to go make disciples.

So what's our vision for this church—what should be the vision for Christ Presbyterian Church? Do we need to develop something new to try and stay relevant? Or maybe we shouldn't overthink it. Perhaps we should just do what he told us to do.

Here's our Vision Statement for this church:

**Our vision is to be a Bible-centered, prayer-driven church committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ.**

That's our Vision Statement—this is who we want to be as a church. We want to do the very thing that Jesus commanded us to do, and our only hope of accomplishing what he commanded us to do of making disciples is to show people Jesus—and the clearest revelation of Jesus that you and I have access to is found in the Word of God. The Word is the means God has given us to know, understand, and believe in Jesus. So, we must be Bible-centered to communicate who Jesus is accurately.

Many of us have memorized 2 Timothy 3:16, which tells us that “all Scripture is breathed out by God,” but we shouldn't forget verses 14 and 15 right before it. Listen to what Paul is telling young Timothy:

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What do we want Christ Pres to be? It has to be a Bible-centered church.

And if we want to do the very thing that Jesus commanded us to do of making disciples, then we have to be driven by prayer because, quite frankly, we don't really know how to do the very thing that Jesus told us to do. Our only hope is asking him, by the power of his Holy Spirit, guided by his Word, to help us do what he asked us to do. Romans 8:26 tells us:

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Prayer is our only hope of doing as the Lord commanded.

Who are we? What do we dream that Christ Presbyterian Church will be? Plainly stated, a church that relies on the Bible and prayer to make disciples—as he told us.

Bible and prayer.

Martin Luther once said, “A Christian congregation should never gather together [in worship] without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly.”

Do you know why? Because it's our only hope of doing what he told us to do.

So that's our Vision Statement. That's what we aspire to be—always.

Now, we also have a Mission Statement. A mission statement provides more specific details on how you will pursue your Vision Statement. The Vision Statement tells us who we want to be, and the Mission Statement tells us how we will do it. So this is our Mission Statement:

**Christ Presbyterian Church is prayerfully committed to making followers of Jesus by teaching them to worship God in spirit and in truth, encourage one another to love and good works, and serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace until the Lord comes again.**

There are three words to which I want to draw your attention.

How are we going to make followers of Jesus? How are we going to make disciples? Here are the three words I want you to notice:

**Worship, Encourage, Serve.**

We call this our *Discipleship Pathway*.

What's a Discipleship Pathway?

Our Discipleship Pathway provides yet one more level of specificity on how we go about doing what Jesus told us to do. So, with each statement, you're getting one more level of detail. Our Vision Statement tells us what we want to be. Our Mission Statement tells us how we will pursue it, and our Discipleship Pathway provides additional definition to the Mission Statement.

How do we make disciples? By doing these three things. We're saying that every disciple of Jesus engages in these three disciplines (that's a form of the word disciple). Every follower of Jesus will **worship** Jesus:

## **WORSHIP**

**Worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). We regularly worship God, both privately and corporately, guided by Word and Sacrament, in adoring and repentant faith, to acknowledge the beauty and worthiness of the Triune God—to serve the Lord and be served by the Lord.**

Worship is a dialog—it's a dialog between God and his people, and it's a dialog that he initiated. Worship was his idea. He commands us to worship, and we are the beneficiaries—the Lord ministers to us through private and corporate worship. To be a follower of Jesus, we must engage in worship.

Next, how do we make disciples? Every disciple of Jesus must worship, but every disciple of Jesus must also *encourage*. The apostle Paul told the church in Colossae:

## **ENCOURAGE**

**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). We regularly gather with each other in smaller groups to encourage one another by "teaching and admonishing one another in all**

**wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).**

How do we encourage one another? Yes, we connect with each other. But the ultimate objective of connecting is to do what the Bible tells us to do—encourage one another in our faith. So yes, it’s one thing to come and gather together for worship one day a week, but how do we get through the rest of the week? We have to gather in smaller groups to build one another up. How do you do this? It takes effort, and it’s not always easy. But we have to do it because it’s what the Bible tells us to do. We have to push each other along in our faith.

And finally, how do we make disciples? Every disciple of Jesus must worship, every disciple of Jesus must encourage, and yes, every disciple of Jesus must serve—somehow, we all have to serve. This is what disciples of Jesus do.

## **SERVE**

**Each of us has “received a gift,” and the Bible instructs us to “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10). We can both serve and give *inside* the church (Galatians 6:10) and *outside* the church as we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) until every nation, tribe, and tongue stands before the throne of Jesus (Revelation 3:9–12).**

If you are a disciple of Jesus, you serve the kingdom of Jesus.

So, as pastors, staff, elders, deacons, deaconesses, lay leaders, Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, Special Needs volunteers, and missionaries—when we engage with anyone on behalf of Christ Presbyterian Church, our primary directive is to make disciples because that’s what Jesus told us to do. Plain and simple. And how do we do that? We teach people to worship, encourage, and serve—but not only teach them, but to be models of what it means to worship, encourage, and serve.

Ok, here’s your bottom line. Who are we?

We’re a church committed to making disciples.

How do we do it?

We . . .

**Worship**  
**Encourage**  
**Serve**

# SECTION 4: JOINING THE CHRIST PRES FAMILY

## 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 6:00 am 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 role of a local church appears to be one of these things. Why do churches like ours 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.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

<sup>24</sup>Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup>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.

**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. This includes 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 (Philippians 4:3)—the membership role 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 (Isaiah 43:1), the number of our days (Psalm 139:16), even the hairs on our heads (Matthew 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, the 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 leads you to connect and commit to a local congregation sooner rather than later.

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 (Hebrews 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, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and

**each member belongs to all the others.** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor each other above yourselves" (Romans 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" (Matthew 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 Peter 5:2; 1 Timothy 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" (Hebrews 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.

# HOW TO JOIN CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

There are several steps to becoming a member of Christ Presbyterian Church. You are about to finish the most significant and time-committed step. Way to go!

## **Step 1: Completion of the CPC101 course**

Your first step is to attend CPC101. Attending this course does not obligate you in any way toward membership—you may simply find out more about Christ Presbyterian Church's vision, mission, values, and doctrine if you wish.

## **Step 2: The membership interview**

When you have decided you want to belong to the Christ Presbyterian Church family and have completed CPC101, contact your congregation's CPC101 leader, who will set up your meeting with an elder and, if you wish, an elder's wife. Generally, this meeting lasts about 45 minutes and takes place at a time that is convenient for you.

## **Step 3: Elder approval**

After the interviews, the elders meet to enter the new members into our body officially. This is technically the official point of member reception—after that date, you may be considered a full-voting member. All that remains is your public acknowledgment before the congregation.

## **Step 4: Public vows**

After the elder meeting, your congregation's CPC101 leader will contact you to confirm the date and service you will attend to make your public promises. When the time is called, you will go forward and affirm the promises read by the pastor.

## **Step 5: Baptism**

If you have never been baptized and are making your first public profession of faith, you will be baptized during the worship service. Let the elder know during your interview, and we will schedule your baptism (or for parents, a child baptism). On the date of baptism, please arrive 30 minutes before the service to meet with a pastor. The baptism will take place after you have affirmed the promises of membership.





**CHRIST**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH