

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Christian Consensus & Evangelical Essentials

Now that we have seen the importance of church membership, how should we go about deciding which church to join? There are two main areas to consider about a church.

- Confession of Faith: What a church _____.
- Church Covenant: What a church _____.

In lessons 2-3 we will review Crosstown's Confession of Faith. The Church Covenant will be the basis for our discussion during lessons 4-6.

CHRISTIAN CONSENSUS

- A Creed pertains to the _____ Christian church. A _____ includes specific beliefs and emphases relating to a particular church or denomination.
- The Apostles' Creed developed from about A.D. 200 to A.D. 750.
- The Nicene Creed (A.D. 381) resulted from the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, which affirmed the _____ of Jesus.
- The structure of the Creeds points to the Christian belief in the _____ God, and centers on the person and work of Jesus, which gets to the heart of the gospel.

EVANGELICAL ESSENTIALS

- The word *evangelical* comes from the Greek word meaning _____.
- In the 16th century a group of men began to protest the false _____ and wayward _____ of the Roman Catholic Church.
- Their purpose wasn't to start new denominations but to _____ the Catholic Church from corruption.
- The Five Solas of the Reformation summarize five fundamental beliefs in which the Reformers' felt the Catholic Church had strayed from the gospel.

The Latin word *sola* means "alone" or "only."

1. Sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone")

Not Scripture plus _____.

- The Bible alone contains everything that is necessary for _____ (salvation) and _____ (holiness).
- *Interpretation*: The church's _____ is subject to correction by the Scriptures.
- *Clarity*: Scripture is clear on the _____ it addresses (e.g. the gospel).
- *Sufficiency*: We do not need anything else to guide us in our pursuit of God, though we must follow the Holy Spirit's lead as He reveals to us what Scripture says.

2. Solus Christus (“Christ alone”)

Not Christ plus _____.

- Mankind needs a _____. We cannot find God; he must find us.
- Only Jesus Christ can be that mediator. Salvation is found in Christ alone (John 14:6)

To the degree that people think they are good enough to pass divine inspection, and are oblivious to the holiness of God, to that extent they will not see Christ as necessary. –R. C. Sproul

3. Sola Gratia (“Grace alone”)

Not grace plus _____.

- We are saved by God’s _____, his unmerited _____, alone. We contribute nothing to our salvation.
- The Catholic Church teaches that for our salvation we must _____ with God’s grace.

“God helps those who help themselves.”

Over half of evangelicals think this is a direct quote from the Bible, and 84% think it is a biblical idea.

4. Sola Fide (“Faith alone”)

Not faith plus _____.

- The Catholic Church teaches that God’s grace _____ a person righteous, transforming every sinner into a saint.
- The Bible teaches justification by faith, whereby the sinner is _____ righteous.

Martin Luther proclaimed that those who have been justified by faith are *simul iustus et peccator* (“simultaneously just and sinner”).

- God justly declares the sinner righteous because of double _____. Christ not only bears our sins, but by faith he also _____ us with his righteousness.
- Faith does not _____ us. Faith is merely our _____ of God’s gift, and is itself part of that gift.

5. Soli Deo Gloria (“Glory to God alone”)

Not God’s glory plus _____.

- Because our salvation is accomplished solely through God’s _____ and _____, all glory for that salvation belongs to God alone.
- The Protestant Reformation produced significant impacts on _____ as the Reformers continued to emphasize the gospel and God’s glory above everything else.

Confession of Faith

Crosstown is a Christian evangelical church. We are committed to following Jesus Christ, and we believe the Bible is the primary source for knowing Jesus and following his lead. We are aware, however, that not all who make that claim agree on what the Bible teaches. So we feel it is necessary to make it clear what we believe about some of the major teachings of the Bible and the Christian faith.

While the following Confession of Faith is rather specific, we also want to make it clear that not everything we believe and proclaim at Crosstown is equally important. Those beliefs that unite us to the one body of Christ are in the end much more important than those which distinguish us from other traditions within the Christian faith. In an effort to differentiate between what we believe are the primary doctrines and what may be considered matters of secondary importance, we have arranged our Confession into three categories called (1) Christian Consensus; (2) Evangelical Essentials; and (3) Denominational Distinctives. A fourth category, Congregational Commitments is what makes up our Church Covenant.¹

We understand that not all followers of Jesus arrive at the same conclusions on every theological issue at the same time. We do not want to withhold baptism or membership from those who have been genuinely converted to Christ but are still sincerely considering issues of secondary importance. Therefore, while all pastors at Crosstown are required to affirm the following Confession without reservation, we do not require our members to do so. Members sign our Church Covenant whereby they affirm the most basic tenants of the Christian faith and covenant to unite around this Confession of Faith by not being divisive to its teaching.

¹ This four-fold designation is suggested by J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett in their book *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 150.

CHRISTIAN CONSENSUS

We affirm the statements of two ancient creeds which have historically united all Christians in the basics of the Christian faith.

*The Apostles' Creed*²

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried;³ the third day he rose 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 living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; 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

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

² We have updated some of the archaic wording in both of the creeds.

³ We have omitted the phrase "he descended into hell" because it does not appear in the earliest versions of the Creed and because its meaning is unclear. For a discussion about this phrase see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 586-94.

EVANGELICAL ESSENTIALS

The Five *solas* (the Latin word *sola* means “alone”) are five theological summaries that emerged from the Protestant Reformation distinguishing the Reformers’ basic theological beliefs from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church of that day. Together they constitute five pillars that unite all evangelical Christians to this day.

Sola Scriptura (“Scripture alone”)

We believe that Holy Scripture, consisting of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, is the verbally inspired Word of God. Scripture alone is completely authoritative and infallible in all that it teaches, being without error in the original writings. Scripture alone clearly teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin, is sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

Solus Christus (“Christ alone”)

We believe that the only mediator between God and men is the historical Jesus Christ. In Christ alone can we be saved from our sin and the wrath of God. Christ alone lived a sinless life, and his substitutionary death on a cross is the only remedy that can atone for our sins and bring us into a relationship with God as father rather than judge. There is no other means of salvation available but Christ alone. Where Christ’s substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and his work is not solicited the gospel has not been preached.

Sola Gratia (“Grace alone”)

We believe that salvation from sin and the wrath of God is made possible by God’s free grace alone. None of us can contribute anything to our salvation. Apart from the kindness, goodness, mercy, and compassion of God we will never seek after him. Apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit we will remain in bondage to our sin and rebellion against God.

Sola Fide (“Faith alone”)

We believe that we are justified before God through faith alone, without any mixture of or need for good works. Through faith alone God declares us righteous not because we actually *are* righteous but because Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. This faith is not our own human response but a supernatural work of regeneration that God does in us by the Holy Spirit and through grace.

Soli Deo Gloria (“Glory to God alone”)

We believe that because salvation is entirely accomplished by God, all glory and honor belongs to him alone. Not even the good works done by human hands can make mankind worthy of glory and worship since it is God alone who redeems fallen sinners and sanctifies their good works. The greatest joy available to man is when our lives are centered on and submitted to God and lived for his glory alone.